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**DE-SECULARIZATION AND TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS IN  
RUSSIA**

Dari Sh. Tsyrendorzhieva (a), Kseniya A. Bagaeva (b)\*, Oyuna B. Balchindorzhieva (c)

\* Corresponding author

(a) Buryat state university, 670000, Smolin str. a 24, Ulan-Ude, Russia, [dari145@mail.ru](mailto:dari145@mail.ru), +79243521709

(b) Buryat state university, 670000, Smolin str. a 24, Ulan-Ude, Russia, [ksyusha.81@mail.ru](mailto:ksyusha.81@mail.ru), +79246561570

(c) Buryat state university, 670000, Smolin str. a 24, Ulan-Ude, Russia, [dari145@mail.ru](mailto:dari145@mail.ru), +79294729650

**Abstract**

The beginning of the XXI century was marked by the strengthening of religion in all spheres of human life. We can see the increasing presence of religion in culture, politics, and economy. The Russian society is involved in the process of de-secularization. The authors study the inner mechanisms of the process of de-secularization of the contemporary Russian society. The authors argue that for the modern world including the Russian society, secularization is a passed stage. It is a stage of a socio-cultural cycle that passed through secularization and came to de-secularization. Nowadays, the society is involved into the process of de-secularization that is connected with a rise of the religion. The paper analyses a contradictory nature of the phenomenon of religious revival that complicates the process of the state policy building towards traditional religious confessions. Traditional religions acquire political significance. That is because they played a traditionally important consolidating and integrating function in the society which is relevant to the Russian society today.

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## 1. Introduction

Since the end of the twentieth century, there have been fundamental changes in the Russian society including the religious sphere. Today, we can observe the growth of the religion's influence on society, in particular the Russian Orthodox Church. Of course, one cannot but note the growing influence on the regional level such religions like Buddhism and Islam defining national identity. We believe that the increase of the religion's influence on the public consciousness is manifested in the fact that the religion often takes an active civil position beginning to penetrate all social spheres. Due to the religion's



institutionalization, its implementation takes place in the state structures, education, and army. As a result, this leads to a commercialization and politicization of the religion. And since the religion has structural and functional connections with the society, this leads to the process of clericalism.

Today, the question of what happens to the religion in the Russian society is very relevant. The religion is spreading an increasing influence on the society. Then, there is a negation of secular, that is, in essence, a de-secularization.

The paper will examine a relationship formation between the state and traditional religions. We argue that de-secularization's tendencies have led to the formation of a new type of the state-religion relations.

This paper will identify essential characteristics of secularization and de-secularization in order to understand the peculiarity of these processes in Russia. In our opinion, that will allow us to study the relationship formation between the state and traditional religions as part of these processes.

## **2. Methods**

The paper will analyze concepts of secularization given by P. Berger, J. Habermas, and T. Parsons because nowadays, there is a need to revise secular approaches. That is due to an increase of the role and presence of the religion in all social spheres. That serves as an evidence of the beginning of the process of de-secularization. That will be analyzed in this paper from the point of V. Karpov who notes a diversity of de-secularization affecting all aspects of human life.

In the following section, we will discuss the nature of secularization and de-secularization. We will find out possible future scenarios of this process and to what that led in the Russian society.

## **3. Results**

### **3.1. Conceptual basis of de secularization**

Well-known sociologist of the religion P. Berger writes that 'by the secularization we mean a process of liberation of certain sectors of the society and culture from the domination of the religious institutions and symbols' (Berger, 1997). The Church is separated from the state. There is an expropriation of the Church's lands. Education becomes exempt from the power of the Church's authorities. Further, Berger states that if talking about the culture and symbols then secularization means something more than a socio-cultural process. Secularization has an impact on the entire cultural life and ideas. It may be observed by a decrease of the role of religious themes in art, philosophy, and literature.

In essence, secularization is an important process for the society after which the religion that formerly provided a sacral meaning to everything loses its absoluteness and becomes a private matter.

The Western scholars see the secularization as a process of liberation of all sectors of the society from the influence of the religion. The religion is no more a regulator of social behavior.

Among the Russian religious scholars such as D.M. Ugrinovich, I.N. Yablokov, and V.I. Garadzha, we see the main role of secularization in the liberation of social spheres from the religious influence. Using an example of the Islam's secularization, G.V. Miloslavskiy identifies two levels of secularization. The

first level means the loss of the religion of its institutional meaning. The second level leads to a replacement of the religious worldview by a secular one (Miloslavskij, 1993).

Yu.Yu. Selina provides the following definition of secularization, 'A paradigm of secularization in modern form views the secularization as a complex social process that goes at different social levels: differentiation of secular institutions, privatization of the religion, decline of religious beliefs in modern societies, religious changes in religious institutions' (Sinolina, 2009).

So, the secularization is a secularization of the society as a whole as well as its separate subsystems. Therefore, the secularization is a liberation of the society from the religious influence, a process that took place in a historical development of the society and influenced socio-cultural situation. The secularization as a social process arises as a result of struggle between the Church and secular authorities.

Does that mean that all these changes will lead to disappearance of the religion, however? Of course, the process of secularization has been started long time ago. But it goes differently in different regions. We see that the secularization in its classical understanding is characteristic only for modern Europe while the rest of the world including Russia is characterized by an increase in religiosity. That allows the usage of the term 'de-secularization'. In our opinion, de-secularization being essentially the opposite process to secularization is a penetration of the religion into secular institutions, schools, army, and the media.

In other words, the society comes into the post-secular world. The authorship of this term belongs to J. Habermas who viewed 'the post-secular society' as the society that accepts the existence of the religion under condition of the secularization. That is, it is kind of a continuation of secular (Habermas, 2008). The concept of the post-secular society arises when religious organizations may participate in socio-political discourse. (Habermas, 2008).

The P. Berger's idea that de-secularization is counter-process to secularization was complemented by V. Karpov. He views de-secularization as a process that includes the following tendencies: a) convergence between previously secularized institutions and norms, formal and informal; b) revival of religious practices and beliefs; c) return of the religion into public space (de-privatization); d) return of the religion into various cultural subsystems, including art, philosophy, and literature, and also a decrease of the science' status toward a reviving role of the religion in questions of world-building and world-support; e) changes associated with the religion in a substrate of society (Karpov, 2012). This scheme is provided with a clear understanding of de-secularization, therefore, we will use that view as initial in our study.

In the next section, we will analyze inner mechanisms of the process of secularization that occurred in Russia after the events of the 1990s that may be only interpreted in terms of national peculiarities.

### **3.2. De-Secularization In Russia**

In the Russian society, secularization has a completely different genesis that in Europe or the USA. Therefore, de-secularization has got a different nature. A. Shishkov rightly speaks of these types of secularization as European, American and 'Soviet' (Shishkov, 2012). We will consider how secularization and then de-secularization did go in Russia and how to interpret today's realities.

The Soviet type of secularization is characterized by suppression of the religion and religiosity. That was manifested in destruction of churches and convents, persecution of believers, repression of clergy. A displacement of the religion occurred also at the level of culture and education. In our opinion, the meaning of these activities was also in a goal to totally subjugate the Church and in the long term its eradication.

For instance, A. Shishkov notes 'hyper-privatization of the religion' when its displacement occurred not only from the social sphere but also from private. That led to the fact that religiosity became hidden, being religious became not only shameful, but also dangerous. Whereas, individual religiosity was not completely eliminated as a result of European secularization. The religion then served as an element of everyday life in traditions and customs and as a socio-cultural identification for Russian ethnic groups together with language, territory, and common history. At that time religious life became atomic since there was a sharp decrease in a number of priests and disappearance of tradition of their reproduction. As a result, people emerged that claimed to be a bearer of everyday religiosity.

Since the 1990s, the secularizing social vector changed into de-secularization. That was facilitated by, firstly, return of the religion into the public sphere. The priests became a part of the media space and started to participate in work of social institutions. Secondly, the state ceased to pressure the society allowing people to openly manifest their religion.

According to S.A. Korolev, the Soviet authorities continued to lead anti-religious campaign in the last years of their leadership. Therefore, when the Soviet rule collapsed, religious confessions supported the new rule. In other words, religious forces arose that were deeply hidden during the years of persecution and that led to its recovery. S.A. Korolev states that 'in the 1980-1990s in Russia, there was no de-secularization but an approval of a euromorphous model of secular society when the religion is only one of its subsystems' (Korolev, 2015).

Indeed, European secularization led to a liberation of the religion, and the religion in the Russian society became free because of the de-secularization. So, the religion returns into public and private spheres and that leads to a number of questions: the right to worship in the army and prisons, the Church's property and lands, and, finally, one of the most important questions concerning education. It should be noted that an increase of the religion in the public sphere leads to the secularization of the Church.

Karel Dobbaeler proposed such scheme (Dobbelaere, 1981) that presents secularization in the following levels. The first level is secularization at a level of the society – a macro level. The second level is a meso level when religious organizations are subjected to the secularization. Secularization of individual consciousness happens at a micro level. Using that scheme we can analyze de-secularization. Using Dobbaeler's scheme to analyze the process of de-secularization in Russia, we can see that there is a growing presence of the religion at all three levels. The religion tends to become a part of the society, its subsystem.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, atheists become believers. Even younger generation started to position themselves as believers, their numbers being higher than before. Although, it is difficult to say that there was an increase of religiosity. So de-secularization at the micro level cannot be considered accomplished. In our opinion, completely churching people should be differentiated from those who see the religion as a way of cultural identification.

Regarding meso level, there is an increase of religious monopoly in Russia. It is appropriate to note a four-level structure of the religion with the Russian Orthodox Church being on top of that pyramid. Then at the lower level, there are such traditional religions as Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism. At the next level, there are religions that were active in Russia for more than fifteen years (i.e. Mormons, Adventists, and Evangelicals). Finally, at the bottom level, there are various destructive cults and sects that cannot be officially registered as a religious association. It is possible to reduce the number of levels to two, however. In this case, we will have all traditional confessions on a top level and all the rest at the bottom. These levels do not exist by independently. They directly affect each other. That means that de-secularization at the macro level stimulates de-secularization at the micro level.

Thus, we can see that the de-secularization became a reality in Russia in the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Yu.Yu. Sinelina rightly noted that the main feature of secularization in Russia is its cyclical nature. She points out a recurring pattern of changes of religious outlook in the Russian society. 'The process of Europeanization served as a push to it. That is a repeated model of changes of religious worldview that allows one to talk about cyclical process of secularization in Russia' (Sinelina, 2009).

In other words, there is a change in religious outlook. The cycle comes to an end. And the society returns to a traditional form of the religion.

### **3.3. Traditional Confessions At The Process Of De-Secularization**

The role of traditional confessions changes in modern conditions of de-secularization. They were liberated since the end of the twentieth century. Now, traditional religions need to compete in the pluralistic religious field. Traditional religions adapt to new realities of the de-secular society by building favorable relations with the state.

The paper analyzes the relations between the state and traditional religions (Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism) that are defined by the Constitution as traditional confessions.

Traditional religious organizations have always performed an important consolidating and integrating function in the multi-confessional society. They have got thousands of years of experience and rich arsenal of influence on people. They create a certain level of religiosity. Since in the relations between the state and religion the state is a determining force, it forms the nature of interactions with religious organization. M.P. Mchedlov rightly noted that 'state interests may determine differentiated approach to different confessions' (Mchedlov, 2004). In modern Russia, the relation between the state and confessions do not fit into existing models of state-religion relationship. The Russian Orthodox Church seeks to build a 'symphonic' relationship with the state. The idea of «symphony» implied mutual freedom of the state and the Russian Orthodox Church. That did not mean their separation, but rather the Church became a part of the state. Other confessions were in a quite straitened position (Tsyrendorzhieva, & Bagaeva, 2016). Social Concept's Basis of the Russian Orthodox Church contains the idea where 'symphony' is a mutual cooperation between the state and the Church, mutual support and responsibility (Social Concept's Basis of the Russian Orthodox Church).

In our opinion, however, such model is impossible in Russia as the practice shows. The state has always had and continues having a dominating position in these relations. In Russia, Islam is a traditional

religion that has the second largest number of followers. Nowadays, the state-Islamic relations are diverse in nature. For instance, Islamic scholar A. Malashenko argues that ‘So, secular authorities in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan manipulate Islam freely and control the religious situation relying on administrative resources. But in Dagestan and Ingushetia, the authorities need Islam as an ally, not to mention that its total submission is simply impossible (Malashenko, 2007). In this connection, there is a difficulty in building a holistic conception of relations with Islam in Russia.

We see that the leadership of Islamic organizations becomes a part of power vertical willingly. In addition, politicization of Islam is increasing. Nowadays, it is clear that the relations between the state and Islam are moving towards a convergence of their positions. However, there is polarization of powers within the religion itself. Especially in terms of promotion of global radical Islam, there is a possibility that it could overcome the resistance from traditional Islam. Besides, in the conditions of a de-secularization «islamic countries are highly malleable and exhibit a potential for faster democratic development compared with non-Islamic countries» (Naiwei Chen & Tsai-Chen Yang, 2016).

In that case, the state’s attitude towards Islam as of total control becomes clear. The previous approach towards Islam that was based on an example of the relations with the Russian Orthodox Church is not applicable nowadays since the tradition of Orthodoxy is very different from that of Islam. Particular faith, diversity represented by fundamentalism and modernism, lack of strict hierarchy are the main feature of Islam. The Russian Orthodox Church is historically characterized by an idea of spiritual domination and closeness to the authorities. In addition, opportunistic feature of Orthodoxy is absolutely different from modernistic trends of Islam that lead to its politicization.

A completely different picture emerges in regards to the relations between the state and Judaism. Unlike other religions, the connectedness to the state is not very characteristic for Judaism. In Russia, Judaism has connections with foreign Jewish organizations and, thus, receives funding. In addition, a relationship with Israel that is a center of Judaism solves a problem with human resources, which is not so noticeable as in the case with Orthodoxy.

The Judaism’s special position in the world and in Russia, in particular, led to that for Judaism relations with the authorities are important mainly locally.

In turn, the state entering a relationship with Judaism shows adherence to democratic principles because the Western society is tolerant in all respects to Jewish communities. Acting in such a way, the state also supports the legal basis of its existence and a dialogue with the world political elite.

The main difference between Judaism and Orthodoxy is that Judaism does not seek to play a decisive role in social life or influence worldview. However, due to the Jews’ activity, their organization becomes significant in the state’s political live. We see it as a tendency to the de-secularization.

In our opinion, it is very difficult to predict Judaism’s manageability because Jewish organizations are very closed. Their issues are solved mostly behind the scenes rarely reaching a public view. On the other hand, there is an opinion on their political significance.

In regards to Buddhism, the state clearly shows its desire to have a managed Buddhism, which is similar with the case of Orthodoxy. The state provides a support to the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia headed by the Hambo-Lama Damba Ayusheev.

The state pays a great attention to that organization because its position correlates with an official understanding of the state-religion relations. According to D. Ayusheev, there is a special phenomenon

that he called ‘traditional Russian Buddhism’ which appeared in 1741. The idea of Buryat Buddhism as a traditional Russian Buddhism promoted by D. Ayusheev finds the state’s understanding (Ostrovskaya, 2009).

In general, we would like to point out that a low number of Buddhist followers and low fragmentation of their living areas often leads to that fact that the state cannot pay attention to Buddhism. Apparently, Buddhism presents not much of the interest for the state in term of the internal policy, but it is very important for foreign relations. Therefore, Russia’s position in regards to the states of Asia-Pacific region does not allow for the state to lose its sight on Buddhism. That position is related primarily to friendly relations between Russia and China.

It should be noted that historically Buddhism that came to Russia from Mongolia and Tibet had its own features. Namely, it filled all spheres of social life. That idea meant relationship between secular and spiritual authorities in the form of ‘two laws’ on how to govern the state. The main aspect of this relationship was the primacy of the secular authorities over Buddhism. Accordingly, such an understanding of secular and spiritual was transferred to the Russian soil. Therefore, we argue that such position having historical and cultural reasons determine modern relation between Buddhism and the state.

That explains why the state-religion relations with Buddhism are built by a type of relationship with Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy also historically adhered to a ‘symphonic’ model of the state-religion relations. The only difference is that there were short periods of elevation of the Russian Orthodox Church in the history of the Orthodox-state relations. In the case of Buddhism, the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia plays a role of the Russian Orthodox Church. Anyway, we see a Buddhism desire to enter the public space through organization of sports events, mass religious celebrations, and scientific conferences. The only difference is that being apolitical Buddhism does not become an obvious tool in the hands of the state. Although the state recognizes Buddhism as a traditional religion, it yet allocates it a secondary position in relation to Islam, and especially to Orthodoxy.

#### **4. Conclusions**

De-secularization is not only embedding of the religion and the Church into all social spheres, replacement of secular by religious in various spheres. De-secularization is manifested in the religion’s penetration into education, army, and governmental agencies. In addition, it leads to a change in public consciousness. It is possible to argue that, in the first place, de-secularization affected traditional religions. Nowadays, confessions are in an unequal position that is determined by historical and cultural status of Orthodoxy in Russia. The Russian Orthodox Church actively implements its influence in secular culture with an explicit support from the state. Islam, being a diverse religion, on the one hand, poses a possibility of a conflict and rapprochement with Islamic countries, which leads to Islamophobic sentiments in the society. On the other hand, the Russian state is a non-Muslim state; therefore, Islam would not become a dominant confession. Relations with Buddhism and Judaism are on a periphery of religious policy. It may be explained by tolerance and global nature of Buddhism whose followers become a loyal part of the state structures. Judaism was always characterized by its secrecy. Therefore, it is considered as a special religion that is somewhat foreign to the Russian socio-cultural integrity.

In the Russian case, we can see that the state's religious policy is built in accordance with a religious factor using an ethno-cultural approach. The modern Russian state learned that traditional religions have the capacity to legitimize political actions. Therefore, the religious tradition that is represented by the Russian Orthodoxy, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism is very functional. That is why traditional confessions have a number of preferences from the state in political, social, economic, and cultural spheres. In essence, traditional religions are now culture-constituent and state-constituent religious traditions in Russia. Also, traditional confessions having initially an integrating capability might enhance collective identity thus contributing to a stability of the Russian society.

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