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**NATIONAL IDENTITY OF THE CHECHEN REPUBLIC AND THE
REPUBLIC OF BURYATIA**

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Abstract

The paper analyzes historic facts and events influencing the religious situation in national territorial entities of the Russian Federation – the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Buryatia. Special attention is paid to aspects of geopolitical space. The Republic of Buryatia is the multinational region of the Russian Federation with the representatives of all world religions living in its territory. Considering the features of modern religious situation in Buryatia as the center of the Buddhism in Russia, Orthodoxy, Ancient Orthodoxy and Shamanism still remain the translators of traditional belief of its inhabitants. The migrants from CIS countries that arrived from eastern countries are the followers of Islam. The problem of interethnic and religious relations in Buryatia is not acute, however globalization challenges threaten the conflict of identity in the course of the dialogue of cultures. The Chechen Republic draws attention by the fact that Islam does not only have the function of religion but is a way of life and thinking covering all forms of human activity, influencing and forming functions of the state and interstate relations and society. The authors come to a conclusion that religion is part of sociocultural landscape of the Russian society and the religious identity is closely connected with ethnic identity. The century-old culture of coexistence and dialogue of various ethnic groups and confessions may be considered as a unique civilization potential.

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Keywords: Identity, globalization, Chechen Republic, Republic of Buryatia, transboundedness.



1. Introduction

The North Caucasus and Buryatia are unique multiethnic and multi-religious regions, which people were actively developing and strengthening the Russian multinational state. This rich historic experience is eagerly required as a valuable resource of interethnic and interfaith concord at the present stage of historical development.

The main religion of the Chechen Republic is Islam, which is presented as Sufism having deep historical roots and influencing spiritual and cultural life of the Moslems. Complex religious and political situation in modern Chechnya is in many respects determined by difficult post-war economic, socio-political atmosphere. One of the key forces negatively influencing religious situation in Chechnya and in the North Caucasus is the so-called Wahhabism movement.

Both republics are located in a special geopolitical space and border with different states, which, in many respects, defines their religious situation. The Chechen Republic is in close proximity to Georgia and other countries such as Turkey, Iran, Iraq. Buryatia is the Russian segment of Innermost Asia bordering with Mongolia, China, Korea.

2. Problem Statement

Today the culture of century-old coexistence and dialogue of various ethnic groups and faiths in our country can be considered as a unique civilization potential. But the historical experience of toleration requires new and efficient forms of its embodiment. Our chances to return to the ranks of modern leaders, where the processes of globalization are not erased but highlight the spiritual identity in a new way, depend on the maturity of the approach to problems of confessional policy.

One of the key moments here is mutual recognition. It is especially important if we consider that after the decades of the total atheistic propaganda the majority of Russians have quite vague ideas on religions shared by their compatriots. The “spiritual map of Russia” in the consciousness of the majority of has many “blank pages”. The understanding of some confessions is maliciously mythologized. The objective lack of information, shortage of professional religious staff, journalistic dishonesty, ideological prejudices – all this creates the basis for virtual monsters having little in common with the true image of any faith. In this regard it is ever more important these days to appeal to works of scientists relying on reasoned views. The research is aimed at complex study of the entire diversity of modern religious potential of the national republics – Chechnya and Buryatia. In regions, where the Muslims make the minority, there are conflicts of Islamic symbols in the public space (wearing hijab at public schools, construction of new mosques). Other rules of conduct than in the rest of Russia are valid de facto in regions with the majority of the Muslim population. Until recently the Islamic component of post-Soviet migrations was not a subject of public debate. The Central Asian migrants were perceived rather in ethnic than in confessional terms (Malakhov & Letnyakov, 2018).

3. Research Questions

The main tasks of the study: to define internal and external factors of the religious model in the republics; to analyze the religious situation not only in terms of regional features, but also taking into

account the geopolitical interests of Russia; to identify specific features of state religious regulation in the studied territories.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to describe modern religious situation in the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Buryatia taking into account geopolitical interests, to identify specific features of intra-confessional self-determination and legal regulation of religious sphere.

5. Research Methods

The comparative and historical method will give the chance to compare the religious situation during various periods of their existence in the republics, to reveal features of their distribution and functioning against general Russian and global trends.

The problem and historical method will allow understanding that the activity of religious organizations in the territory of modern Buryatia and the Chechen Republic is the result of certain relations among people during the post-Soviet period.

The study of religious situation on the basis of cross-disciplinary approach at the intersection of humanities (history) and social sciences (religious studies) will require various methods of theoretical religious studies – the method of social facts, typological, phenomenological and system methods.

6. Findings

Modern studies allowed highlighting features of religious life in the considered territories. The specifics of Islamic revival in today's Chechnya is connected with intensification of Muslims and distribution of nonconventional religious trends, as well as with some political and cultural factors influencing the sociocultural image of the Chechen society. It shall be noted that Islamic movements, which showed them up on the threshold of the collapse of the USSR, triggered spiritual and religious-political situation not only in the republic, but in the entire Russia. Religious revival in Chechnya during the pre-Soviet period was accompanied by the increasing interest in Islamic values and the strive of the Muslims to improve public religious practices. The negative aspects of Islamic revival appeared later with Islamic parties and movements promoting integralism, rejecting public authorities, appealing for theocratic state and full Islamization of the society. The followers of these ideas adhering to Wahhabism (Wahhabites) became more active after the collapse of the USSR: they created organizational structures, print media, lobbied their interests in power structures and had access to television. Wahhabites believed that their major task is to achieve spiritual and political domination in the society. Such attempts strengthened religious contradictions in the Muslim society and engendered the conflict between secular and religious values (Akaev, 2011).

Buryatia, in turn, is distinguished from many national regions of the country by the rapid growth of religious organizations, first of all Protestant denominations, and the strive towards institutionalization of the ancient belief – Shamanism. However, according to sociological study of international and religious relations in Buryatia conducted by the Expert-Analytical Center of Presidential Administration and the

Government of the Republic of Buryatia, despite their growth the number of believers looks not so significant: nearly 20% of respondents said that they are atheists; 28% consider themselves as non-believers but sometimes participating in religious practices; and about 50% – believers (Akhmadullina, 2014).

According to the study, the level of education, material wealth, age and social status of respondents do not have a great impact on the attitude to religion. Gender differences have the same tendency as in the previous years: women more often identify themselves with adherents of any religion and less often – with those rejecting the religion.

The confessional list of respondents looks ambiguous. The inherent understanding of ethnicity transferred to religion also dominates in the consciousness of the Buryats. According to them, Buryats shall be Buddhists, and Russians – Orthodox Christians, etc. Orthodoxy is professed by people referring themselves to Armenians, Poles, Hungarians, Ukrainians, Evenks, Tatars, Koreans; Old Belief is professed by the descendants of Old Believers residing in the Trans-Baikal region and declaring themselves as non-Russians; Catholicism – by Poles and Lithuanians; Buddhism – by Evenks, Soyots, Kalmyks, Chinese; Islam – by Azerbaijanis, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Tatars, Dagestanis; Shamanism – by Evenks, Soyots, metises; paganism – by Evenks. Orthodox Christians and Buddhists are the most numerous groups in terms of their confession (Vasilyeva, 2018).

According to Eidos, the observance of the basics of belief and commandments in everyday life is mostly typical for Muslims (data may be statistically unreliable due to their insufficient quantity). Daily prayer requires certain efforts, knowledge, self-discipline and hence may demonstrate the respondent's churching. Only 1% of Buddhists and 3.5% of Orthodox Christians pray every day in the morning and in the evening. According to Muslims, there are 18.2% of such believers and another 9.1% of Islam respondents pray daily fivefold Namaz. From among Muslims 27.3% do not address the highest beings with a prayer, Orthodox Christians – 68.4%, about the same number of Buddhists (67%) do not pray daily.

The observance of the fast also requires a serious approach to religious practices. Practicing believers need regularly renewable self-restriction in some products, observance of mealtime, certain psychological and spiritual approach. Most of our respondents does not keep the fast: 73.1% – Orthodox Christians; 89.7% – Buddhists; 91.8% – Shamanists; 27.3% – Muslims.

Reading religious literature is necessary for deep understanding of the essence of religious doctrine, for reflection, analysis, application in life, strong spirit, getting an answer to burning questions. Ideally a churching person shall read texts every day. The answers of respondents were distributed as follows: 77.2% of Orthodox Christians, as well as 69.1% of Buddhists and 45.5% of Muslims answered negatively. The others read sometimes (several times a year), only 1.2% of Orthodox Christians and 1% of Buddhists find time for daily reading.

As for pilgrimage, even people denying their belonging to any faith can do it. But pilgrimage has a special meaning for a churching person, and in some cases it is necessary to strengthen the belief and honor sacred places. According to the study, 90.6% of Orthodox Christians, 48.5% of Buddhists, 90.9% of Muslims, 54.5% of Shamanists do not pilgrimize.

Confession and communion are very important for Orthodox Christians. According to respondents, 72.5% of Orthodox citizens do not confess or take communion.

For Buddhists such important elements of religious practice include meditation (including, analytical), making vows (for example, Mahayana), relationships with the spiritual mentor, the Teacher. But 95.9% of Buddhists of our city do not meditate, 93.8% of Buddhists of Ulan-Ude do not make vows, 81.4% of Buddhist citizens do not communicate with the Teacher (perhaps, because of his absence) (Tsyrempilov, 2015).

The frequency of visiting a church also demonstrates the churching of a person, but considering the rush of city life it is necessary to distinguish between visiting a church and being present on service. Regarding the presence on service, then, according to respondents, 12.3% of Orthodox Christians, 13.8% of Buddhists, 27.3% of Muslims do this “once a month or often”. However, 25.1% of Orthodox Christians, 6.2% of Buddhists, 45.5% of Muslims do not attend religious service at all. People more often visit the church than are present on service. Sometimes they come to church to seek advice, for medicine (to lama), etc. The frequency of visiting a church demonstrates the attitude of Orthodox Christians to canons, to Russian Orthodox Church, to religious community in general. In Buddhism it is also important to be in hurals, to read symbols of the Body, Speech and Mind of Buddha in a Lamaist temple. 13.8% of Buddhists visit the Lamaist temple once a month or more often. The majority of Buddhist respondents visit the Lamaist temple several times a year (71.3%) (Amogolonova, 2017).

In certain cases, a priest may be invited home for necessary ceremonies. But the majority of Orthodox Christians (81.3%), less than a half of Buddhists (40.2%), slightly more than a third of Shamanists (36.4%), slightly more than a half of Muslims (54.5%) do not invite the priest home.

The criterion of self-identification can indicate the degree of religiousness since, in our opinion, deep religious belief means the understanding of your belonging to faith. In this case the entire worldview and behavior of a person is dictated by religious belief. Positive self-identification is considered as a routine understanding of your belonging to a social group, approving attitude to your identification with the members of the group. Negative self-identification is defined as the denial of the belonging to any social group. Situational self-identification is changeable and latent. Among Orthodox Christians positive self-identification is typical for slightly over a third of respondents (35.7%), situational – 47.4%, negative – 9.9%, some found it difficult to answer. Among Buddhists 46.4% of respondents pointed to positive self-identification, 47.4% – to situational and 3.1% – to negative, the others found it difficult to answer. Positive self-identification is mostly typical for Muslims (90.9%), at the same time situational was only typical for 9.1% and negative was not present. According to the survey, positive self-identification of Shamanists makes 27.3% and situational – 54.5%, negative – zero, the others found it difficult to answer.

Regarding the readiness to take active measures to protect group interests only 13.8% of Orthodox Christians, 15% of Buddhists and a third of Muslims chose religious group among three possible options. Thus, we may conclude that the religiousness of Ulan-Ude citizens is connected with syncretism of beliefs almost identical for believers and atheists. The level of churching of Orthodox Christians and Buddhists is quite low, which is confirmed by their behavior in everyday life and difficult situations. Obviously, the Muslims are more churching than the above groups.

In general, the religious situation in Buryatia in the late 20th – early 21st century is characterized by changes typical for religious life of many Russian regions. Against the background of increasing number of parishioners and adherents of historically developed ethnoconfessional communities, it is possible to

note the appearance and gradual distribution of earlier neglected confessional organizations in the republic – Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Krishnaites, Bahais, etc. (Akhmadullina, 2014).

Fundamental changes of state and church relationship are reflected in the new legislative base and standard legal support of religious associations. The constitution of the Russian Federation fixed various civilized norms, such as the secularism of the state, equality of citizens regardless of their religion and equality of religious organizations as the legal basis of the state policy. In 1997 the law of the Russian Federation “On freedom of worship and religious organizations” specified the general principles and provisions of the Constitution of the Russian Federation.

The law of the Republic of Buryatia “On religious activity in the territory of the Republic of Buryatia” was adopted on 23 December 1997 on the basis of the federal law. According to it, the expert advisory board for religion of the Government of the Republic of Buryatia was created. Executive authorities play a special role in the sphere of state and confessional relations.

In 1997 the parliament introduced some changes to the Constitution of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria proclaiming Islam as the state religion. The declaration of Islam the state religion of Chechnya did not only emphasized its independence from Russia, but somehow declared its affiliation with the Muslim community. The presidential elections in 1997 where all candidates spoke about a special role of Islam also contributed to Islamization (Osmaev, 2008).

Today Chechnya represents traditional Islam and Wahhabism thus defining a religious situation in the region. In Buryatia the multi-religious factor is determined by features, proximity of borders with Mongolia, China, Korea, as well as by the fact that new religious movements of Buryatia form the peculiarity of its religious landscape in the conditions of transboundedness.

The national and confessional structure of the republic does not cause problems with ethnoconfessional relations. It is the result of efforts of the republican authorities and interaction of authorities with religious faiths. At present, the main task is to ensure stability in society, consent in interfaith and intra-confessional relations. The political force of the country shall consider a religious factor in domestic and foreign policy since religion forms part of a sociocultural landscape of the Russian society and the religious identity is closely connected with ethnic identity (Osmaev, 2008).

7. Conclusion

Nevertheless, it shall be noted that unlike the all-Russian, federal level the regional projection of an ideological factor of ethnoreligious priorities already gains strength and has its positive outcomes. Political, social and economic transformations in our country over the last 20 years made a considerable impact on the spiritual life of the society. The prestige of confessional organizations was increased, religious political parties and movements were formed. Religious organizations play more noticeable role in the sociocultural life of national regions – Buryatia and Chechnya. The religious organizations are becoming ever more active not only in the distribution of their beliefs, but also in charity, economic and cultural sphere.

However, there are some negative aspects: interfaith rivalry, often inconsiderate invasion into spiritual life of citizens, political entanglement, ethnic contradictions and conflicts.

Today the problem of interethnic and religious relations in Buryatia is not that acute, however globalization challenges threaten the conflict of identity in the course of the dialogue of cultures.

Considering the modern religious situation of Buryatia as a center of Buddhism of Russia, the institutionalization of Shamanism, remoteness from traditional spiritual orthodox centers, mass distribution of nonconventional religions cause problems directly infringing the state interests. Especially reflecting the part that the universalist claims of the West are even more often accompanied by conflicts with Islam and China (Akaev, 2009). In this context such national regions as the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Buryatia shall call closer and thorough attention.

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