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## Contemporary Problems of Ethnoconfessional Syncretism in Tuva

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*In the present article we supposed to show the peculiarities of ethnoconfessional processes in Tuva, the influence of religious traditions on the spiritual culture of the Tuvan people, the evolution of ideological orientations based on the data of the sociological research which has been carried out by the authoress for a number of years and also the theoretical generalization of the obtained empiric material.*

*Keywords: ethnoconfessional processes, national culture, religious world view, Buddhism, shamanism, ethnoconfessional syncretism in Tuva.*

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At present the process of restoration of traditional forms of the national culture is taking place. The connection of the religious traditions with the ethnos is a historically conditioned phenomena. That's why the main methodological reference-point in studying problems on the confessional-ethnic level is the analysis of the correlation of religion and culture as today most of the confessions have got an ethnically expressed character – a result of a longterm interaction of the confessional specificity with the ethnic specific character of the people with whom they turned to be historically connected. Religions traditions of the Tuvans were formed on the basis of ancient beliefs which had existed before shamanism and lamaism came into existence. Those were ancient cults such a totemism, fetishism, cults of local masters etc.

Buddhism (in the form of lamaism) started percolating in Tuva by XIII century, Buddhist monuments dating from that time were revealed by archeologists. But later Buddhism lost its initial influence and a new wave of its dissemination took place in XVII century. Thus, in Tuva there was established a certain religious syncretic system which included a complex of religious views, traditions and institutions.

These religious elements, first of all traditions and customs, appeared as a result of a certain vital activity of the people, an expression of their inner requirements as well as a way of consolidating and passing ethnocultural information to following generations, they existed independently enough at the same time forming a single social cultural system.

The Republic of Tuva occupies a special place among other regions of Russia due to its

specific historical development – it became a part of the USSR much later than the others (in 1921-1944 it was an independent state – the Tuva People’s Republic – TPR). It was reflected in a number of legislative documents describing the dynamics of the state-religious relations in Tuva.

The constitutions of the Tuva People’s Republic (for the period of its existence there were adopted 5 constitutions) as legal acts of the highest order settled the basic principles of social-economic and political system, determined trends of its development. It equally applies to directions in the field of liberty of conscience and religion. But even the first legal papers testified the duplicity of relations between religious organizations and the state. On the one hand there was declaration of rights and liberties, on the other there existed a possibility of their polysemantic interpretation, therefore a deviation from them. Besides as the latest investigations of the problem proved a lot of the legislative directions had no social guarantees. So the law adopted by Malyi Khural of TPR in 1928 “About Separation of Religion from State” confirmed the liberty of religion established by the TPR Constitution (Article 1), the performance of religious rites. The annotation to the article determined the responsibility to the law for “public worship violation” as a result of some ruffianly actions. At the same time in the present legislative statement the activities of religious organizations were already regulated rather hard: “The Government, permitting to learn Buddhist texts, demands of people in every separate case to solicit a special permission for it, to report on the reasons influencing the wish” (Central State...).

If in 1929, there were officially 25 Buddhist Temples in Tuva with a total of 4813 practicing Lamas as well as 487 Shamans, by 1937 there were only 5 temples left with a total of 67 Lamas. Furthermore, the number of Shamans had decreased to all but 30. By the beginning

of the 40s all Buddhist monasteries in Tuva had been completely destroyed. A type of religious awakening could be recognized in 1957-1958 in the city of Chadan with the opening of a “prayer yurt”, where for a time served the well-known Tuvan Lama Khomushku Kenden. In 1959 by decision of the party, the prayer yurt was closed.

The entry of Tuva into the USSR in 1944 fixed legislative norms, adjusting relations between religious organizations and the state on the basis of the corresponding Soviet legal documents. In reality it applied mainly to the only operating Russian Orthodox Church in Kyzyl, not numerous Protestant communities and settlements of old believers as the shamanist-lamaist institution of ministers of religion undergone repressions in the thirties was practically absent.

The unification of Tuva with the Soviet Union in 1944 identified the confession of the various religious groups within the Republic. Informational records regarding the activities of the religious organizations helped to categorize them as members of one of the following religious movements: Orthodox Christianity, The Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists, Old Believers, Buddhism and Shamanism.

In 1981, 12 Lamas and 24 Shamans carried out religious services. By 1984 these numbers had changed to 11 Lamas and 38 Shamans.

The democratic reorganization of the country starting in the 1990s, enabled the renaissance of earlier existing spiritual institutions. In 1990, the Ministry of Justice registered the first Buddhist community.

Statistics from the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 2011 show that religious organizations registered by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Tuva (further known as “administration”) number 44. These religious organizations adhere to the following religious confessions:

Buddhism	18 organizations
Shamanism	8 organizations
Evangelical Christians (Pentecostals)	5 organizations
Russian Orthodox Church	4 organizations
Evangelical Christian-Baptists	3 organizations
Evangelical Christians	2 organizations
Church of the whole Gospel	1 organization
Seventh Day Adventists	1 organization
Jehovah's Witnesses	1 organization
Old Believers	1 organization

Historically the Gelukpen school of Tibetan Lamaism was widely spread in Tuva. Although we need to make a reservation here as the traditional Gelukpa school presupposes a rather ramified system monastic ethics including side by side with other requirements the vow of celibacy. For the Tuvan people whose number is less than three hundred thousand people (according to the information of the Statistical Board of 2009 the population in Tuva was 313 940 people), it creates certain problems because it may lead to the reduction of the population. That's why in Tuva a peculiar form of the Gelukpa school traditions is being formed which provides for a presence of married lamas (and the vow "Don't fornicate" is understood as the vow of loyalty to the companion).

Today in Tuva preference is also given to the Gelukpa traditions with regard for all the national peculiarities of the region. Here we can note two mutually complementary tendencies of the development of Buddhism in Tuva: 1. spreading of the outward ritual sphere of Buddhism (reading of sutras, healing ceremonies, fixing of favourable and unfavourable days, ceremonies of family and every day life cycle etc), 2. is more connected with missionary activities of Tibetan lamas (there are practicing and teaching lamas from Tibet in Tuva) as well as with the activity of the spiritual representative of Dalay-Lama in Russia – geshe Dzhampa Tinley, whose lectures always gather

a numerous audients (about 30 % of the people present is Russian speaking).

Cristianity is represented in Tuva by the following confessions:

- Russian Orthodox Church which has its rather long history. The first Orthodox church in Tuva was built in 1910 in Turan and the second one in 1914 in Kyzyl. The Turan church was pulled down in 1961 and it was restored only in 1996. The Kyzyl church remained and is still functioning today (led by Father Superior Vyacheslav).

The number of those who attend the Russian Orthodox Church is more or less stable based upon family spiritual traditions. An important event for Orthodox believers was the visit by His Holiness the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Kirill, who visited the republic on the first ever Patriarchal visit on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 2011 and blessed the new Resurrection Cathedral. During his visit, the Patriarch visited with the head of the Tuvan Buddhists, the Kamby-Lama of the Republic of Tuva Tenzin Tsumtim and proposed the creation of a Buddhist – Orthodox interreligious council.

- The community of old believers in Kyzyl was registered in 1991 though the old believers spreading areas are more extensive and have got their own history, there were kept entire settlements of old believers. Here the cult activity is limited mainly to ceremonial and every day life sphere.
- Religious organizations of Protestant orientation, in 1997 there were registered 9 such groups by the Ministry of Justice of the republic.

The problem of unfluence of Protestant missionaries (Russian and foreign) remains very critical. Here the contingent of believers is remaned not only among Russian speaking

people but also among the Tuvans. Thus, the Tuvan Christian Church of evangelic religion “Sum-Bok-Ym” organized in May, 1995 conducts regular devine services which are regularly attended by more than 100 people, among them 99 % is Tuvans, about 70 % is young and middle-aged people.

The present day religious situation in Tuva is determined by polyconfessionalism characterized by 2 tendencies: as revival and development of the traditional religions (in Tuva these are shamanism, Buddhism and Russian Orthodox, popular mainly among Russian inhabitants); by growing influence of Protestant groups. The reasons for the second tendency lie, first of all, in the policy of previous years when Buddhist cult structures were practically all destroyed, the system of Buddhist teaching was not conducted for a long time; secondly, financial problems acquire especial significance when a low level of well-being of finansial support. At the same time many Protestant groups can be finaced from foreign religious organizations, can get humanitarian aid, different gifts, money for educating their followers etc. Although we may notice the first steps done inthis direction, thus representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, Dkharma Centre and Ministry of Health of Tuva jointly reached an agreement about possibilities to invite ministers of religion to medical-preventive institutions and hospitals (by requests of sick people) observing the Low “About the Liberty of Conscience” of the Tuva Republic (Article 16, point 3).

While researching the modern state of religious believes of the Tuvans, characteristics of the religious evolution it’s necessary to consider a series of aims: firstly, reseaching of modern believers – shamanists, Buddhists and degree of conservation of traditional confessional propositions in their ideological purposes, of activities of ministers of religion, their ideology

and its evolution under modern condition; secondly, clearing up of factors of regious complex rendering, especially the specificity of the Tuvan people’s every day life which gives a certain originality to all the confessional directions.

While investigating the contemporary state of religiousness of the population in Tuva we used different sources: first of all, materials from the Manuscript Fund of the Tuvan Research Institute of Langage, Literature and History; secondly, the results of field research work, carried out in different years (1985-2006). Only the whole complex of the mutually complementary materials gives us an opportunity to ansiver more or less objectively and fully the question about the character of modern religiousness.

As materials we used the data of a number of sociological research work carried out in a few regions of Tuva, the objects of the research were representatives of different sections of the population – schoolchildren, office, professional, industrial and agricultural workes ets.

We’d like to make a reservation at once – the estimation of validity of the present reseach turns difficult by the fact that each research work got an independent character although in all the researches we used a common, specially worked out questionnaire and methodics of conducting. At the same time they have got not only an illustrative meaning but not being representative for a general totality they let us give rather rightful and well-founded descriptions and estimation of the religious phenomenon formed in Tuva today.

In all the researches we undertook the following tasks:

- revealing of examined people’s attitude to religion, orientations to concrete confessional directions;
- determining of the degree of showing religiousness among the examined people;

- establishing of objective and subjective factors that influence the attitude to religion by different group of people.

The aim of our research work was to study the degree of religiousness and peculiarities of forming ideological orientations of the examined people.

The common indication of religious consciousness is religious belief. The latter includes the knowledge and acceptance of certain ideas, notions as veritable and of confidence in objective existence of creatures, qualities, connections that compose an objective meaning of religions images. But in reality existing religions consciousness as a rule, wanders away from the model. That's why it becomes impotent to characterize religiousness as "quality of an individual or a group which shows in believing and worshiping the supernatural on the level of consciousness as well as in activities (characteristic feature – religions belief, knowledge and acceptance as true religions ideals, notions and dogmas" (Rytkevich, 1994).

The observations conducted among the Tuvan population of the republic show that the idea of the supernatural, sacred, divine origin has got a rather diffused, non-shaped character. Apparently there are some reasons that affected it. First of all, early shamanistic and ancient notions of the early times got mixed up with later features of lamaist ideas (especially at present). It's not coincidence that the term "Tuvan Buddhism" is more often used to characterize the contemporary religious complex in Tuva.

Today we can say that the image of the supernatural is rather obscure and discrepant. Thus, according to one of the informants "for every Tuvan there always exists the idol, some kind of a Supreme ruler". According to our observations the image of the supernatural of modern Tuvan contains shamanist and lamaist features, and what is more, depending on the age in

the consciousness of a Tuvan there fixes aspiration for creating the image from anthropomorphic features adding some other characteristics – eternity, ubiquitousness. It's inherent in elderly Tuvans of about fifty-sixty years old. The age gradation in forming the image of the supernatural is seemingly connected with the fact that the generation (people of fifty-sixty) was brought up (that is, the time of their becoming a personality, the formation of their world outlook) at the time when the state policy towards religion and church was especially tough – the thirties when khuree were closed and destroyed, ministers of religion were subject to repressions. A younger generation – at the age of thirty-forty grew up, under more loyal conditions when there was already no such a universal interdiction, that's why there increased a possibility of their learning some traditional religious ideas.

Besides modern Tuvan kept in their consciousness the image of the female idol – "dariygi". Though the term is of a lamaist origin, it descended from the cult of Mother – Goddess, subsequently personified through its separate features into an independent divine image. As we have already noted earlier in the religious consciousness of the Tuvan a big place is also occupied by a notion about human soul. Today the majority of the Tuvans hasn't got an accurate notion about soul, in their consciousness (in great bulk) there is no differentiation between the ideas of "tyn", "sagysh", "sunezin" – different designations of the state of soul. People of the elder generation – elder than sixty can give a rather exact characteristic of these ideas whereas putting the rest has mainly got a notion about "sunezin", putting the meaning of the human spiritual substance into it.

Thus we can say that the ideas of the supernatural in ordinary consciousness of the Tuvan have gradually evolved. At first it happened under the influence of lamaistic views,

later on due to official ideological interdictions, impossibility to render religious views openly. Notions about the supernatural were washed away, only the most common ideas remained and image of the supernatural was supplemented with some features of the Christian dogma.

Thus a considerable part of the inquired incline to the fact that "God is the Supreme spiritual source" although the distribution of the answers fluctuates depending on the national affiliation. Besides, in different confessions it has also got different modifications, thus in Buddhism the emphasis is laid mostly on the idea of moral purification, a better or a worse regeneration depending on the person's deeds in this life. None the less ideas about supernatural powers, supreme origin (Buddha, Boddkhisattva etc) are present in Buddhism, although in the religious views of the Tuvans the idea of God as a central figure hasn't been developed despite the fact that in the Tuvan language there is a world that in modern ordinary consciousness coincides with the Russian term of God – "burkhan". But it's rather the idol whose qualities are the hypostization of natural forces than a personified being.

It's interesting that 10,34 % of Russian considers that, "God is an enlightened being which gives a way to salvation". This is absolutely nontypical for the ideological orientation of Orthodoxy (58 % of the inquired Russian reckon themselves in it). It sooner tells about the influence of the Tuvan ethnoconfessional culture.

In order to get sociological characteristics of the evolutionary process of religious ideas taking place in ordinary consciousness it's necessary to have estimating criteria by which it's possible to judge the level of religious (or nonreligious) conviction of an individual, of social groups and of the population as a whole.

It's impossible to analyse the modern state of religiousness in Tuva and try to follow the evolution of religious images, ideas in the whole

system of religious complex without taking into account all the changes that have happened lately. Peculiarities of the way of living, peripeteias of the historical fortune of the nation tell on the character of religiousness. The lack of special cult structures, absence of ministers of religious worship (with the exception of those who had some other status, that is, who performed some religious ceremonies mainly connects), the whole atmosphere of biased treatment of everything that was somehow connected with any display of religiousness couldn't but influenced the picture of the religious complex as a whole.

Thus modern religious consciousness on the whole, especially its ordinary level, is gradually evolving. If earlier any person's whole life was practically penetrated by certain religious ideas (including the picture of the universe and different rituals, ceremonies), strictly speaking, religion always appeared as means of regulating, reserving appropriate dispositions, traditions, customs in which lies its cultural and historical role, today we can see a tendency to include into the present system secular elements. And the interlacing of sacred and secular in religious consciousness gives a complex systems of views and notions.

That's why it's one of the main tasks to analyse all the changes which were provoked by modern social transformation (transition to settled way of life, industrialization, urbanization), as well as the main tendencies of evolution of modern religious consciousness, especially on the ordinary level.

The research carried out in 1996 revealed a certain dynamics in the state of religiousness. To compare the data we made use of the same typology as in the previous research work. And if earlier only 10 % of the inquired people attributed themselves to believers, in the research of 1996 more than a half of the inquired

(urban population) considered themselves to be believers.

Such a self-appraisal should also be corrected by a number of other indices which will let us analyse more strictly the degree of religiousness of the people. These can be quantitative (attendance of cult places, performance of rituals) as well as qualitative indices (ideological aims and orientations). Thus we asked the question: "What in your opinion influences a person (choose out of the listed below, it's possible to give several variants of answers)?"

It's interesting that the confessional belonging didn't exert much influence on the distribution of the answers. Only 27,91 % of the Buddhists note the influence of karma (25,40 % of the Christians think the same way), at the same time the Christians marked such factors as spoiling and bewitching whereas the shamanists accentuated biofield and magic. It's possible that all these things testify to new religious searchings. It's not accidental that 44,44 % of the Christians answered the question "Can soul move into a new body after man's death?" affirmatively (the Buddhists – 48,84 %).

Thus summing up everything aforesaid we can make certain conclusions. As a result of the evolution of the religious complex in Tuva one can observe certain changes in the

religious consciousness of believers which are determined by the new social, economic and political conditions. Some elements of the religious complex (especially behaviour) are actively interacting with different secular elements and forms of the culture. Therefore, one can understand peculiarities of the transformation of this or that irrational education only in the context of the present culture. Secular elements extend the spectrum of influence of religious and magic ideas on the people's consciousness. Thanks to them there rises the activity of ideological, social, political and other functions of the religious system. One can also notice some efforts to put not a mystic but rational content into the major religious ideas and notions, to interpret them from the point of view of common sense, personal life experience. Thus, at present we can talk about a many-variant picture of the religious state in Tuva though it's rather complicated to forecast further prospects as the processes are mainly of unpredictable character. We can mark out as an example of some tendencies of the religious evolution in Tuva: washing away the traditional religiousness, we can talk about some elements of modernization in confessional directions because today animation of religious activities involves modifications in dogma and cult according to the modern life conditions.

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## **Современные проблемы этноконфессионального синкретизма в Тыве**

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*В данной статье мы предлагаем рассмотреть особенности этноконфессиональных процессов в Тыве, влияние религиозных традиций на духовную культуру тувинцев, эволюцию идеологических ориентаций, основанных на данных социологических исследований, которые проводились автором в течение нескольких лет, а также теоретическую генерализацию полученных эмпирических данных.*

*Ключевые слова: этноконфессиональные процессы, национальная культура, религиозное мировоззрение, буддизм, шаманизм, этноконфессиональный синкретизм в республике Тыва.*

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