

## SCTMG 2020

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

## RELIGION IN SPACE OF THE KALMYK REPUBLIC INTERCULTURAL INTERACTION IN POST-SOVIET TIME

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### *Abstract*

One of the most important components of the ethnocultural development of peoples in post-Soviet Russia was the revival of the national confessions. In Kalmykia, this process began at the turn of the last decade of the XXth century, when the first Buddhist community was founded on the Kalmyk territory after many years of oblivion. The revival of the Buddhist tradition in the Republic contributed to religious buildings construction. Since the 1990s, everywhere, in almost all districts and villages, the construction of Buddhist khuruls (temples) got started but in the settlements of the Russian residences - there were built the churches. From 1993 to 1995, the religion in Kalmykia was declared a part of the State policy, which gave the church great opportunities to intensify its activities to revive and strengthen its position in the society. Giving the special status to the religious associations enabled the leadership of the Republic and the local authorities to provide all possible support and assistance to the revival movement, both of the national religion and religion as a whole as part of human culture. At the present stage, the regulation of legal relations between the State and the church is carried out on the basis of the Constitution of the Russian Federation (1993) and the Federal Law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religion" (September 26, 1997). The regional regulations adopted in the 1990s were recognized as invalid.

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**Keywords:** Republic of Kalmykia, traditional denominations, ethno-cultural development.



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## **1. Introduction**

Recent Russian history is characterized by dramatic changes in State-church relations. Russia is a multinational State where people professing the world religions live – Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and other confessions. Over 100 religious associations are registered in the country. Religion return to the sociocultural practices of post-Soviet Russia is an object of close attention to national and foreign researchers. However, many scholars are interested in the issues related to the rapid rebirth of the religion's position after many years of atheistic propaganda and the oppression of the church in the Soviet time. Another part of questions is the religion social functions in the context of a situation, specific to our country, when we observe the transition from the official ideology of atheism to desecularization practices, being by nature close to an ideological campaign.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The special role of the religion in modern Russian culture is determined, primarily, by the fact that in post-Soviet Russia a radical transformation of attitude towards religion has occurred. The characteristics of the post-Soviet rebirth of churches include modernization in line with the current state of population consciousness. Implicit and explicit transformations are becoming of great research interest. All these factors underline the relevance of the issue considered in the paper. Various works of foreign scholars Braudel (1986), Toynbee (2002), Hopkins (2009), Berger (2008) are devoted to various aspects of church-state and interfaith relations, religious politics). These issues are considered in the works of national researchers, such as Krasikov (2007), Denisova et al. (2015) Mukhametshin, (2001), Kuznetsov (2008), Dyakieva (2014), Ryzhova (2006). The history of traditional confessions, the revival and rebirth processes and the activities initiated by the religious associations of Kalmykia are reflected in the works of Badmaev (1968), Bormandzinov (1997), Bakaeva (2008), Belousov (2012), Ochirova (2010), Gunaev (2010) and others.

## **3. Research Questions**

The first decade after the USSR collapse for religious people became the time of organizational and legal registration of their religious structures, including the creation of the centralized authority. On January 1, 2001, there were 70 registered religious organizations in the Republic of Kalmykia, the vast majority of which was created in the last decade of the XXth century. These included Buddhist, Orthodox, Islamic, Protestant, and Catholic religious associations.

With the support of the Republican authorities, 16 premises were handed over to the Buddhist organizations, 8 khuruls (temples) were built, because, during the period of “militant atheism” and illegal exile of the Kalmyk people, all the Buddhist temples in the Republic were destroyed. There were no churchmen (deacons) in the Republic, therefore, to conduct some church services, resolve issues on the revival of Buddhism, and work with believers, the lamas from Buryatia, Tibetan monks from India and Mongolia came. The leadership of Kalmykia provided substantial financial support for churchmen education in – Buryatia, India, and Mongolia.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

In the early 1990s, the regulation of the religious sphere was carried out on the basis of the legislative framework shaped in the years of Soviet power. The main role was played by the Law of the RSFSR, adopted in 1990. "On freedom of religion" (Law of the RSFSR, 1990). This Law secured the right to freedom of religion, authorized the establishment of religious organizations freely and voluntarily, their right to possess material property, exempted from taxes, and equalized the church people in rights with other citizens. At the same time, this normative act determined the criteria that religious communities should meet: the existence of a charter (regulation), their registration in the State bodies. The modern period of relations between confessions and State bodies (from 1993 to present) is characterized, on the one hand, by the preservation of the continuity of existing legislation with legal acts of the Soviet period (Law of the RSFSR "On Freedom of Religion" dated on October 25, 1990), and, on the other hand, by the further development of secular State institutions in connection with the adoption of the Constitution of the Russian Federation (1993) and the Federal Law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" (September 26, 1997). The preamble to this law states that it was adopted as confirmation of everyone's right to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, as well as equality to freedom before the law, regardless of religion or confession, "based on the fact that the Russian Federation is a secular State, accepting the special role of Orthodoxy in the history of Russia, in the development of its spirituality and culture, respecting Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism and other religions, which are an integral part of the historical heritage of the peoples of Russia. The Law emphasizes the importance to contribute to mutual understanding, tolerance and respect in matters relating to freedom of conscience and religion" (FL, 1997).

In the Republic of Kalmykia, the Law of the Kalmyk SSR, dated February 19, 1992, was adopted and acted on. No 320 - IX "On freedom of conscience and religion". As a result of the Law adoption "On Amendment of Article 46 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kalmykia – Halmg Tangch, dated July 6, 1993, Part 32-IX from Article 46 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kalmykia (1978) was excluded Part 2 "Religious associations in the Republic of Kalmykia – Halmg Tangch are separated from the State." At the same time in part 1 of article 46, there was the statement that citizens were guaranteed freedom of conscience. On October 31, 1995, the Law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religion" was adopted in the Republic of Kalmykia, which enshrined the principle of a secular State and guaranteed that "All religions and religious institutions are equal before the law".

#### **5. Research Methods**

The methodology of this scientific research is to use the records from the works of modern national and foreign historiography, and to conduct the systematic analysis of the scientific works of representatives of the studied hypotheses. The use of systematization and typification method allows 1) to generalize the existing spectrum of opinions and trends in the study of religion from the position of intercultural interaction, 2) to identify the main areas of research, and also 3) to determine the specifics of the analysis of the subject under study in relation to the dynamics of the issue.

## 6. Findings

Kalmykia is the poly-ethnic Republic, in which the representatives of more than 90 nationalities live and this place is characterized by the predominance of two ethnic groups: the Kalmyk and Russians (57.4 and 30.2 %, respectively). In the ethnic composition, the representatives of the peoples of the North Caucasus are very pronounced. The ethnic-confessional situation in Kalmykia is determined by the traditions of the peaceful coexistence of representatives of all the peoples inhabiting the Republic. In order to ensure and maintain inter-confession and interethnic peace, to prevent conflicts on interfaith grounds, to establish traditional spiritual values in society at the initiative of the first President of the Republic of Kalmykia K. N. Ilyumzhinov, with the support of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill, the Inter-Religious Council of the Republic of Kalmykia was established, the founders of which are public religious institutions: “Association of Buddhists of Kalmykia”, “Elistin (Elista city) and Kalmyk diocese”, “Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kalmykia”. The Inter-Religious Council included the Shajin Lama of Kalmykia Telo Tulku Rinpoche, the Archbishop of Elistino and Kalmyk Juvenal, and the Mufti Sultan Ahmed Karalaev. Over the years of its activity, the Interreligious Council of the Republic of Kalmykia has made a significant contribution to the development of inter-confession relations not only at the national level but also contributed to strengthening cooperation with traditional religions in the Southern Federal District and the North Caucasus.

Of great importance for strengthening the authority of traditional confessions and inter-confessions cooperation were visits to Kalmykia of His Holiness the Dalai Lama XIV, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Alexy II, and the meeting of K.N. Ilyumzhinov with the Head of the Roman Catholic Church, John Paul II. Religious organizations of traditional confessions play an important role in preserving and promoting the spiritual and cultural values of the peoples living in Kalmykia. National religious holidays are widely celebrated in the Republic – Zul and Tsagan Sar, Christmas and Easter, Uraza – Bairam, Novruz, etc. The Days of Slavic Writing and Culture are annually held, within the framework of which the Cyril and Methodius Readings are held. Religious associations, together with the State authorities, hold educational and cultural institutions events aimed at strengthening the spiritual and moral foundations in society, preserving and popularizing the common values of the Kalmyks. The large scale of socially useful activities carried out by the religious institutions has initiated a new tendency to consolidation of the religious institutions’ classification at the formal level. The State policy to delimit the religious space of the Republic on the basis of traditions ultimately aims to give it greater controllability and manageability in the context of the existence of various faiths and an increase in the number of religious organizations. The Republican authorities impose a specific mission on traditional religious organizations: from strengthening interethnic harmony and fostering tolerance to social protection of the most vulnerable categories of the population, which requires the provision of State support to the religious organizations. In the public consciousness of the Republic’s population, the spiritual and cultural space is determined, first of all, by traditional religions, despite the activity of new (non-traditional) churches.

## 7. Conclusion

In the Republic, there has been an increase in institutions of Protestant, Catholic, and other confessions, except for Baptists and Lutherans, which existed in Kalmykia even in pre-Soviet time. Most Protestant and other non-traditional religious institutions and communities in the region arose as a result of the vigorous activity of visiting missionaries, mainly from the near and distant countries. Protestants have no significant conflicts with the authorities, either with Orthodox or Buddhist people.

Thus, 88 religious institutions are registered and work in the Republic, including: Buddhist religious associations – 44, Orthodox – 15, Islamic – 11, Evangelical Christians – 9, Christians of the Gospel faith – 3, Roman Catholic Church – 3, Evangelical Christians of the Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Salvation Army – 1 per each.

It should be noted a number of positive processes in the modern history of religion in Kalmykia: the growth of the authority of traditional religions, their influence on the preservation of historical and cultural heritage, the development of the modern culture of the region, the active participation of representatives of the religious associations in society.

## Acknowledgments

The paper was prepared as part of the State Task of South Scientific Center of RAS, No. Project AAAA - A 19-119011190182-8.

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