



3rd World Conference on Psychology and Sociology, WCPS- 2014

Ethnic and Religious Processes in Western Mongolia

(based on social research)

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Abstract

Since I millennium BC. a significant influence of the Iranian complex of beliefs on the worldview of nomadic peoples could be noted. Due to the function of the Silk Road and the formation of nomadic empires in the beginning of a new era and the following centuries, Buddhist, Manichaeon, Nestorian, Taoist missionaries have been intensified. From the period of the late Middle Ages the position of Islam in the region became stronger, although the penetration of this denomination in the region have noted in the previous period. The presentday period in the history of both Russia and Mongolia marked with significant transformations in various fields, including national and state-confessional policy. Under the slogan of the revival of the national culture, some ethnic groups entered into the conflict zone and the religious denominations have been actively involved in the process of transformation, of not only spiritual, but also socio-economic and political character. In the developing conditions of religious variety of Central Asia the ethnoconfessional monitoring which research and analyse the religious practice of the population, the relations of society and the state to questions of religion, the reasons and forms of interconfessional tensity, appearance of religious intolerance and influence of religion on the international relations and etc. The article is devoted to the present-day ethnic and religious situation in Western Mongolia. The paper presents the results of opinion polls of people of Bayan-Ulgii and Hovd aimags of Mongolia, aimed at the study of the relationship of religious and ethnic factors in the condition of modernization of Mongolian society. The study showed that despite the realization of freedom of conscience and modern state-confessional policy in Western Mongolia, the dominant religions are Buddhism (Hovd aimag) and Islam (Bayan-Ulgii aimag), providing the important influence on the culture and education of the population. In addition, last years, a penetration of Protestant missionaries is noted. The similar tendency of strengthening of the Protestant factor marked in other places of Central Asia and Southern Siberia – in Altai, Tuva, Khakassia and Buryatia.

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Peer-review under responsibility of Academic World Education and Research Center

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Keywords: ethnic, religion, beliefs, Western Mongolia;

1. Introduction

Here introduce the paper, and put a nomenclature if necessary, in a box with the same font size as the rest of the paper. The paragraphs continue from here and are only separated by headings, subheadings, images and formulae. The section headings are arranged by numbers, bold and 10 pt. Here follows further instructions for authors. Central Asia, which includes Mongolia, is the multiethnic and multireligious region for many centuries. Researches consider that the formation of the shamanic complex of beliefs in Central Asia belongs at the least to Neolithic period (Mikhailov, 1980).

Since I millennium BC a significant influence of the Iranian complex of beliefs on the worldview of nomadic people has been noted. Since the beginning of the new era and during the following centuries because of the functioning of the Silk Road and the formation of nomadic empires Buddhist, Manichaean, Nestorian, Taoist missionaries have been activated (Klyashorniy, 2006; Litvinskiy, 1997, Nikitin, 1984; Sukhatar, 1978; Dashkovskiy, 2011). Since the period of the late Middle Ages the position of Islam in the region became stronger, although the Islamic infiltration in the region have been noted in the previous period (Nurtazina, 2000; Yarkov, 2010).

The modern period in the history of Mongolia is marked with significant changes in various fields, including the field of national and state-religious policy. Some ethnic groups under the slogan of the national culture revival entered the conflict zone, and religious denominations have become actively involved in the process of spiritual, social, economic and political changes. In the forming conditions of religious variety in Central Asia the holding of the ethnical confessional monitoring plays an important role. The task of this monitoring is to study and analyze the religious practices of the population, the relation of society and the state to religion, reasons and forms of interconfessional tensivity, the emergence of religious intolerance and the influence of religion on international relations and etc. (Tishkov, 2004).

It is necessary to emphasize that democratic reforms in Mongolia and declaration of the Freedom of conscience and religion in the end of the XX – beginning of the XXI centuries opened the possibilities of revival of not only traditional religions for this region (shamanism, Buddhism and Islam), but also created favorable conditions for infiltration of new religious movements into the country. As a result the new religious situation began to form in Mongolia. Now in this country there are following faiths: Buddhism, Christianity (Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism), Islam, Shamanism, Bahai Faith. 215 religious congregations manage the activity, including 163 Buddhist, 28 Christian, 22 Muslim congregations (Skorodumova, 2008).

This publication is devoted to a comparative analysis of religious processes in Khovd and Bayan-Ulgii Aimag (Mongolia). Sociological research were aimed at identifying the religious composition of the population in the region, the problem of relation between the confessions, the influence of religion on the political situation in the region. Of the 251 respondents questioned in Khovd and Bayan-Ulgii aimag, 76% (192 people) believe that a person must be a believer, only 12% (30 people) of the respondents do not consider a faith as a compulsory component of every person's life, and 12% of respondents found difficult to determine the role of religion in human life. In Khovd aimag 78% of respondents believe that religion takes an important place in human life. At the same time, people aged 16 to 21 years feature a great importance of religion in human life only in 61% of cases, while those aged 22 years and over in more than 80% of cases believe that religion is very important in human life. The situation in Bayan-Ulgii aimag is different, 80% of respondents between the ages of 16 and 21 think that religion is very important in human life, the same opinion is shared by respondents aged 46 years and older. The respondents aged 46 to 60 years in 75% of cases, and 84% of respondents aged 61 and older believe that religion is very important in everyone's life. The lowest percentage of religion in human life observed among 44 % of respondents aged 36 to 45 years, while 34% of respondents in this age believe that being religious is absolutely unnecessary, and 22% could not determine the role of religion in human life.

Distribution of population by religious belonging in these regions is well reflected in the figures 1 and 2.

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