

## **Ethno-Confessional Neotraditionalism in a Globalized World: Search for Basis of Identification**

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**Abstract:** The study focuses on Tengrism as one of worldview and religious bases for the development of Eurasian peoples. It deals with historical, ontological and gnoseological aspects of Tengrist worldview in relation to current scientific and humanitarian conceptions.

**Key words:** Buddhism, christianity, ethnic identification, ethno-confessional neotraditionalism, shamanism, tengrism, turkic and mongolic peoples, worldview

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Globalization has created new semantic fields of development of communities of various localization, including ethnic groups. It has heightened interest in tradition as both a mechanism for preservation of ethnic identity and developmental resource. Tendencies resurrecting ethnic traditionalism as a “response” to the challenge of globalization have appeared. In our opinion, ethnic traditionalism is an orientation of individual, group or social consciousness towards traditional, i.e. stable, historically proven values, activities and social relationships. The most prominent examples of ethnic traditionalism are shown by religious fundamentalists.

At the same time, it is ethnic neotraditionalism that can be considered one of the dominant tendencies in the development of ethnic groups in a globalized world. It can be represented as pursuit by ethnic consciousness of inclusion of traditional values, activities and social relationships of an ethnos in modernization processes to make an ethnos whole and complete in time and space. Ethnic neotraditionalism manifests itself in various forms and spheres of social life: political, economic, sociocultural and, at last, religious.

The problem of defining a traditional religion of an ethnos is one of the most widely discussed. Naturally, the deeper historical excursion is, the more different the positions of researchers in defining areal of distribution, basics of faith and religious practice are.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Historical aspect of the problem of identification principles of Turkic and Mongolic peoples lies in defining the role and place of various religions in developing the

worldview. It is important to consider ratio and interaction of various confessions in historical development of ethnic groups, including clashes with the Orthodox Christian world.

It is known that pre-revolutionary Russia, according to its principles of religious policy did not recognize a person's rights to religious self-determination. There was a legal hierarchy of confessions; secular power interfered in Church activity; the Church was transformed into a key weapon of secular power to address the issues of internal policy. There was a hierarchy of confessions in Russia: the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) occupied a dominant position, non-Orthodox Christian Catholic and Protestant Churches and non-Christian religions (Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, paganism) were admitted. Catholicism and Lutheranism were deeply rooted in Russian society. Religious messianism expressed in the imperial or isolationist pursuit by each of three branches of Christianity of establishing its exceptionalism and closed confessional egoism acquired the most odious traits since it had suffered the interference and impact of mighty state power (Mavlutova, 2001).

From the viewpoint of civilizational contacts in the process of the Russian conquest of Siberia, Islam and Buddhism were the most serious rivals for Orthodoxy. In the middle of the 19th century, general situation of development for Turkic and Mongolic peoples was characterized by the strengthening of hold of Buddhism in Eastern Siberia and that of Islam in Western Siberia. Two religions were spread in these regions in addition to Christianity: Lamaism and shamanism; shamanism was the only religion in Yakutia and on the territory of the modern Khakassia. Lamaism was also developed significantly among the Tungus. Buddhism was spread in the south, on the territories neighboring Soyotia (Tyva). It came

there from Mongolia. The traces of Buddhism in Tyva date back to the 11th the beginning of the 12th century.

It is known that the peoples professing Buddhism made stouter resistance to Christian mission than shamanists and pagans. For example, the indigenous peoples of the Volga-Kama region (the Mari, Udmurts and Chuvashes) formally were almost all baptized; however, they kept their traditional beliefs. Their Orthodoxy was an amalgamation of pagan beliefs and Christianity. The situation was different in Kalmykia where the Orthodox mission faced not the tribal beliefs but a well-organized Buddhist church. The ideology of this church met the demands of already established feudal relationships in the nomad Kalmyk society (Dorzheva, 1995).

Buddhism was a strong and experienced rival for the ROC; it had a centuries-old experience of contacts with other religious systems and had developed a way of interaction with them. In Transbaikalia, during the baptizing of the Buryats, Orthodoxy was strongly resisted by the Buddhist Church, a developed social institute. Some peoples, like the Khakas did not practice either Buddhism or Islam; non-Orthodox confessions (Catholics, Protestants, Old Believers, sectarians) were poorly represented. Formally, the baptism of non-Russian peoples of the Russian Empire was completed by the end of the 19th century.

Religious systems of indigenous Siberian peoples had an idea of two supernatural principles. The good principle sustained the well-being of people (through a successful hunting) while an evil one hindered a person in doing his work. A shaman was a central figure who performed the role of a mediator between a person and a world of spirits.

A spiritual monopolist in the 18th-19th centuries, the ROC quite often was intolerant to other faiths and hasty in carrying out missionary tasks which led to antagonism between Orthodoxy and other religions. Some believers became firmer in their old pagan faith under the pressure of the Orthodox Church to eradicate their confession; others (Lamaists and Muslims) more actively strived to their spiritual metropolises outside the region. Orthodoxy did not deny evil spirits (shaitans) and thus pulled the carpet away from under the Christianity = s feet in the eyes of indigenous population. V. Verbitskiy, a missionary of the Altai spiritual mission, wrote that "there was a shaman among listeners who in general did not object but did not accept that a shaitan couldn = t harm a person without God = s permission" and claimed that God was not more powerful than Erlik-khan. The Khakas had a proverb, "He who is not to die won = t be taken by Kamy. He who is to die of starvation won = t be saved by a God" (RSHA). Khakass shamanism is not only religion, it is a

faith and a way of life; it performed ontological (existence of the world and man), compensatory (explanation of justice, compensation law), communicative, aesthetic and other functions. It was a part of traditional worldview that solved tasks of maintaining and identifying an ethnos, connected a person with nature and protected "ethnos and landscape that fed it".

Due to the emergence of dual faith, traditional beliefs of the Khakas have exerted a meaningful influence on the development of culture and worldview of the Khakas nation for the whole period and so far. N.F. Katanov stated that faith in Kudai and Erlik-khan emerged under the influence of Christianity as their names never appear in shamanistic prayers and rituals. This is understandable since the Khakas worshipped the Great Blue Sky (Khan-Tigir) and Motherland (Chir-Suu) almost from time immemorial. They were Tengrians and performed sacrifices to the Sky up to the first third of the 20th century (tigir-taih). It is reflected in prayers, epos and stone epitaphs. "Forced baptizing both caused a strong psychological stress in people and destroyed a whole system of the traditional worldview approved by millennia." Mental predisposition to the weakness of their own gods and spirits unable to resist Christian saints resulted in the feeling of inferiority and created the prerequisites for alienation and distrust in the Russians and Orthodoxy in general (Sherstova, 2005).

The adoption of Orthodoxy did not result in the change of ethnic self-awareness and ethnic identity. It is important to note another aspect in the Christianization of Turkic and Mongolic peoples. In some cases (for example, among the Khakas), an official super-task to russify indigenous population (staying tolerant) had an opposite effect and the process of ethnic consolidation and self-identification of the Khakas nation accelerated.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In recent years, there is an increasing talk among the peoples of Turkic and Mongol world about Tengrism as a basis for ethno-confessional identification which deep-rooted in their history. Moreover, the results of some studies allow assuming that Tengrism can be considered a religious core of the development of Eurasian civilization in the past (Fedorova, 2012; Tengristady and Epic Heritage of the Peoples of Eurasia).

The Tengrianist worldview is surprisingly consonant to contemporary perceptions based on the latest achievements of science and a humanitarian thought. The world in Tengrism is open to the Cosmos C the Great Blue Sky, a transcendent source of existence which directly relates to the emergence (creation) of the world. The world

is eternal, though it is created in every important moment be it acts of first creation of Universe, beginning of a year or a day or the birth of a human being. The moment of the birth of the world, day or man is crucial; it is this moment that determines their further development. There is no concept of emptiness, non-being or non-existence as ontological characteristic of the world in Tengrism. Our world was created by the Sky on the basis of four eternal elements: earth, water, fire and air.

Striving for heaven harmony, order and balance are original qualities of the world. The order is understood not as a statism of the mechanic ordering but rather as a state of the world as a living organism for which birth, growth, development and at last, death as a transition to a new state are natural. A dominant idea of the priority of the world of order, harmony and balance facilitated entrenching of the positive worldview in Tengrism.

Chaos is a secondary though necessary element in the development of the world, a form of transition from one state of order into another. The chaos are the moments of world creation, death and travel. They are productive and rich in new possibilities, though they bring disturbance and war and destroy the old order. Tengrism developed a complicated and severe system of norms, traditions and rituals as mechanism of person = s adaptation to natural and social environment in these changing times.

The World, Cosmos is united in the traditional worldview, there is no strict division into ideal and material. One life forms pass into another. Consciousness, soul and spirits permeate the world and all its components. American physicist Capra F. also claims that "according to the ideas of modern physics, the Universe is a dynamic whole which includes an observer as well. Here, traditional concepts of space and time of isolated objects, cause and consequence lose their sense" (Kapra, 1994). In this statement, "traditional" means the idea of the necessity to distinguish space from time and cause from consequence, etc., inherent to classic European science. In Tengrism, the space is both multiple and single, i.e. Tengrism postulates that both ministers of religion and ordinary mortals can travel in all other worlds and at all their levels. However, we should note that such travels are performed only in the consciousness, body is too inert for this.

Time is rhythmical and eternal, it goes in a circle which has neither the beginning nor the end. At the same time, it is so elastic that it can have various dimensions in our world and other worlds. Time can be turned back; past, present and future can be brought together in a point in altered state of mind during Tengrist rites or meditations of eastern wise men. In these cases, "our

"Ego" fully dissolves and the limit between body and mind, subject and object disappears... each thing is linked to other things... not only in space but in time as well" (Kapra, 1994).

In the traditional worldview, like in the Eastern worldview in general, movement itself and process as a change of rhythms were more significant than specific results. Remember the eternal alternation of Yin and Yang in Taoism, death-life rhythms in the traditional worldview of many nations. Here, the movement is eternal just like a living, developing organism is: birth-growth-death-birth... World rhythms are established by original objective division of the world: mutual transition of chaos and order, good and the evil, life and death, beginning and end... Therefore, the source of movement is situated inside the world, not outside it; it exists in the world as a principle of existence and development of the world of opposites that pass into each other.

In Tengrism, man and the world is a constantly disintegrating and self-restoring wholeness. Ancient man understood it quite early and reflected it in his myths and legends. In fact, any myth about the world creation either postulates the integrity of man and the world or strives to acquire the integrity that was lost and then acquired as a salvation.

Life is the most important characteristic of the world in general and its every particular part which makes them integral, penetrates everything and is a main value and goal of a person = s activities in Tengrism. The concept of life supposes some spirit or consciousness that exist in the world and in everything and in the opinion of a traditional person, make them alive.

Life also implies a mechanism for change as an inherent property of all living beings. In Tengrism, it is an axiom that everything in this world gets energy from other living creatures and gives it back when the time comes. This is the basis for sacrifices to the Sky and other forms of relationship between man and nature, society and himself.

In Tengrism, man is not a "trembling creature" as he is responsible for maintaining harmony in the world. Neither is he a top of evolutionary pyramid as it is often believed now. Man is only one of equal forms of life which has its niche to exist in this world; he is vulnerable (deprived of many efficient adaptive properties) though quite powerful.

Ethnos that lives in peace and harmony with the world and does not violate the proportion determined by the Sky can quietly enjoy natural, cyclic and rhythmic tide of life. It is this sense of proportion that M. Fuko speaks about, "Proportion is a way to establish or restore order (a fair order) in collisions between people as well as

between physical elements; besides, it is a matrix of mathematical and physical knowledge" (Vizgin, 1995).

Ethnos is an open and complicated system which implies its ability to construct itself up to the emerging whole. This principle works at every level. Thus, insufficient knowledge of the world at the early stages of ontogenesis was compensated by the development of a mythological worldview which grasped its main attributive qualities intuitively. Among these qualities, we can identify the penetration of consciousness into all the levels and parts of the world. This consciousness has such an energy that enables to instantly move in time and space. It is this substance in the form of spirits and gods that is responsible for world harmony. Human consciousness is of the same nature; that is why special states of mind are possible. Traditional man thinks that the power of a thought and feeling exceeds any material force.

This world view possibly correlates with the ideas of modern physics which "attributes an independent physical nature to quantum field-a nature of extended medium which penetrates space and feels it". Thus, "we should look for order and harmony at the level of the field underpinning all things" (Kapra, 1994).

It is because of this substance that the law of synchronization works in other words, of resonant interaction of things of the same kind due to their possessing one essence-the existence in the Single Great Blue Sky. This is the basis for the entire system of the Tengrist beliefs and practice, where every fact or event can be an answer to the question asked by man. Here we have a principle of general concordance inherent to a living organism. Therefore, the principle "like calls to like" works in Tengrism as well. It is a basis for the entire Tengrian ethic system. Evil forces are attracted by evil criminal thoughts which in the end, upset ontological balance and world harmony. Man bears ethical responsibility not only at the level of personality, group and society but also on a universal scale in both space and time as it always has consequences. Therefore, the ontologization of ethics is a peculiarity of Tengrism.

In our opinion, P.E.Tulviste's approach in analyzing gnoseological foundations of Tengrism is just, "Type of thinking typical for traditional cultures is a result of the long development in these very conditions. Therefore, it corresponds to the activities common in this culture better than scientific thinking" (Tulviste, 1986).

It is known that various stages of human development and various cultures have different goals of development (control over nature or harmony with nature), various technologies to solve problems of cognition (analysis or synthesis, experiment or

understanding, opposition or analogy with natural processes). To deal Tengrism from the position of European rationality means to miss a lot in another mentality.

Eastern worldview in turn is not monolithic. In the opinion of famous orientalist T.P. Grigoryeva, "traditional Eastern doctrines focus on man: Taoism-on man-nature relationship, Confucianism-on person-person relationship, Buddhism-on psyche and consciousness" (Grigoryeva, 1992). To be fair, we should specify that all these Eastern doctrines have all the types of man = s attitude toward the world and himself, though in each doctrine, only one type prevails. We think that in Tengrism, the relationship "Great Blue Sky-Man" is dominant. However, all these basic propensities are characteristic of it:

- Nature is a main object of cognition as adaptation to it is prerequisite for the survival
- Strict regulating of social relationships in Tengrism through customs and traditions is undoubted
- Finally, Tengrist tradition shows the knowledge of a human inner world that becomes the subject of a study for science (philosophy, psychology, anthropology) in the 21st century

An integrated world is cognized by integrated man with integrated consciousness and not with the sole thinking. Our ancestors were properly adapted to living conditions. This means that they knew both general laws of world development and particular and private laws determined by changing living conditions. It is known that traditional man, unlike modern people, "read nature as a book". After a thorough analysis no tradition and no custom of a particular nation will seem illogical or absurd but will strictly correspond to specific natural, climatic, historic and psychological peculiarities of the ethnos and its habitat. This is the reflection of its rationality which is also manifested when man managed to identify such regularity as polarity and duality of the world and managed not only to use them but also to find mechanisms to cope with this dangerous splitting of the world in his consciousness. Modern person is so deeply mired in "either-or" contradictions that all the spheres of his activity are conflicting, starting from the negation of his own integrity. A tradition to imagine one = s body (and nature in general) as a prison for mind dating back to the ancient Hebrews and Greeks made us forget to trust a cognizing body. Recent psychological "discoveries" turn to be secondary to the knowledge of traditional person, according to which a body (with numerous cognizing souls-voices) is represented by the "school of spirit" which enables to cognize the world. In Tengrism, rational

knowledge and form of cognizing the world are hidden in the emotional and imagery symbols which makes it difficult to adequately distinguish it within gnoseological analysis. On the other hand, this is where its advantage lies as symbol is the best way to cognize what is yet unknown (K.G. Jung).

“The content of a symbol relates to the idea of the world entirety and completeness of cosmic and human universum through indirect semantic coupling” (Bakhtin, 1979). Therefore, it is the irrational methods (understanding, intuition, interpretation, meditation, ritual) that became adequate methods of cognizing this entirety. It is these methods that enable to cognize the world, where everything is mutually dependent; everything is significant, nothing emerges without necessity; any phenomenon of the world contains all basic components and obeys objective laws, therefore, it can be cognized according to the analogy principle.

Analogy principle allowed early man to formulate basic ideas which enabled him to survive and develop during thousand years. From the social point of view, it manifested in the launching of self-regulation mechanism which involved search for “precedents” in the actions of mythical creatures. The imitation of these actions would make a current action efficient and establish a participation between it and its pattern. So, it would become as successful as the action of a mythical hero (Bruhl, 1937). In general, this is quite a rational act of psychological self-programming which gave real and empirical results.

It is these results that are the only criterion of veracity of a particular cognizing act and define its characteristics (pragmatism and teleologicity). In Tengrism, knowledge does not exist in itself; it always depends directly on a particular need of a person and society for acquiring subjective sense and subjective interpretation, interpreting and understanding of both real and sacral reality.

K.G. Jung distinguished archetypes as developed systems of images expressed in the emotional form which in his opinion, are inherited as a part of brain structure. This determines continuity of the cognitive process of the ethnos as archetypes are the most powerful and most effective ways of instinctive adaptation.

Archetypes reside in both the collective and individual unconscious. Traditional man discovered enormous opportunities of use of the subconscious long before psychoanalysis, Gestalt psychology, transpersonal and processual psychology, etc., since he believed that a person received real information or answers to the questions that disturbed him travelling in dreams or leaving for distant worlds during rituals. Irrational layers

of consciousness frightened our ancestors less than us as shamans rather effectively corrected and treated them.

In recent years, the human subconscious is very actively studied. It is known that “the topic of altered state of mind is a fundamental problem in the psychology of consciousness. At the same time, it has an interdisciplinary character and represents a scientific area where the interests of general psychology, clinical psychology, psychiatry, artificial intelligence, social psychology, etc., most closely intersect” (Kucherenko *et al.*, 1998).

## CONCLUSION

Thus, the analysis of ontological and gnoseological foundations of Tengrism enables to conclude that this religion is surprisingly modern. Therefore, some intellectuals of Turkic and Mongolic world try to adapt its dogmas and ritual practice to the processes of ethnic modernization and thus show the example of ethno-confessional neotraditionalism.

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