

The significance of the religious identity of the Uigurs in their ethnocultural conflict with the Han Chinese (using the example of the XUAR of the People's Republic of China)

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of the religious identity of the Uyghurs as a central component of their ethnocultural identity, which is realized in an ethnocultural conflict with the Han Chinese. This goal determines the legitimacy of the principle of historicism. It allows us to trace the development of the ethnocultural Uyghur-Han conflict in historical retrospect. The dialectical approach is used to analyze the interdependence of the religious identity of the Uyghurs and the ethnocultural conflict. The ethnopsychological paradigm allows us to analyze transformational processes at the level of individual consciousness, mediating the emergence of radical ideas in Uyghur society. The study revealed that the religious identity of the Uyghurs has a pronounced consolidating force. This allows her to act as a central element of their ethnocultural identity. The following is noted in the article. The ethnocultural conflict is mediated by the assimilation ethnocultural policy of the official authorities of China and the reaction of the Uyghur ethnic minority to it. It contributes to the transformation of religious identity. It acquires destructive features, which are manifested in the form of the spread of the ideas of radical Islam, religious extremism among the Uyghur population, and the struggle against the "infidels" in the person of representatives of the Han ethnic group.

Keywords: *Uyghur ethnos, radical Islam, Han, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. ethnocultural conflict.*

Introduction. A study of the religious identity of the Uyghurs revealed the following. The significance of the definition of religious identity of Uyghurs is due to the fact that it is a central component of their ethnocultural identity, which, in turn, mediates the existence of an ethnocultural conflict in the region. This assumption is confirmed by the history of the formation of Islam in Xinjiang, which over time has become the main factor that determines relations in Uyghur society, which determines, in particular, attitude to Hans.

The factor that strengthened the influence of the Islamic religion in this region was the annexation of the once free lands of the Xinjiang of the Chinese Empire, which led to the uprisings of the local Uyghur population. The sharp and uncompromising attitude of China towards the indigenous peoples of Xinjiang had a relative resolution of the conflict, as well as short-term stabilization of the region. But then the rebellious moods in the provinces begin to erupt with renewed vigor.

The study showed that the religious identity of the Uyghurs was the basis for the formation of their ethnocultural identity. This was especially pronounced in the ethnocultural conflict. He was born as a result of the ethnocultural policy of the official authorities of the People's Republic of China and the reaction of the Uyghur ethnic minority to it. The study showed the following. The ethnocultural

conflict with the Han people transformed the religious identity of the Uyghurs. He formed destructive traits among the Uyghurs. The result of this process was the following: the spread of the ideas of radical Islam, religious extremism. The population of the Uyghurs declared a fight against the “infidels” in the person of representatives of the Han ethnic group.

As noted by the famous Chinese Islamic scholar, public figure Wu Yun Gui, the Islamic religion actually becomes a cover for extremist and terrorist activities, which negatively affects the cohesion of various ethnic groups of the XUAR and the stability of the region as a whole. [9, p.15-19]. The study showed the following. The use of religious contradictions in the interests of achieving separatist goals is a characteristic feature of Islamic extremism in Xinjiang. Under loud slogans and calls for the revival of Islam, very specific political and social goals are being pursued, and the main key points of Islam are actively deformed in order to increase the effectiveness of this activity.

The study showed the following. The transformation of Uighur identity begins already at school. Educational institutions have long been the objects of propaganda of religious extremism. One of the forms of disseminating the ideas of religious extremism in the XUAR schools is various seminars and classes organized under the pretext of increasing students' knowledge about the key points of Islam. This is done by specially trained "teachers" who simultaneously distribute free propaganda materials of extremist content (the Koran and other books, brochures, tapes, CDs), and social networks are actively used under the pretext of the spiritual development of students. There is also the practice of amending the content of the sermon. This suggests the following. Deviation from traditional forms becomes the basis of religious extremism. And religious extremism is becoming the basic foundation in the new identity of the Uighurs.

Methods

In the process of preparing the article, the authors used the following methodology. The principle of historicism made it possible to trace the development of the ethnocultural Uyghur-Han conflict in historical retrospective. The dialectical approach made it possible to reveal the interdependence of the religious identity of the Uyghurs and the ethnocultural conflict. The authors' appeal to the ethnopsychological paradigm was determined by the analysis of transformation processes in the individual consciousness. This allowed us to trace the emergence of radical ideas in Uyghur society. The study of the phenomenon of identity was carried out thanks to the polyparadigm approach. He gave the opportunity to explain the nature of identity as substantial and constructivist.

Results

It is also worth mentioning that most of the rebellions that erupted in the XUAR, flared up under the religious slogans of “Gazavat” (Holy war), and their main goal was the creation of a Muslim state. This ability of Islam to serve as the most powerful resource for mobilizing the local population during the 19th and 20th centuries was used the various internal and external forces that stood for independent East Turkestan [8, p. 29]. However, speaking of a revival of Islam process, it was connected mostly with the strengthening of identity based on culture and religion than with the introduction of Islamist ideology, but nevertheless this created favorable conditions for the spread of radical ideology here [2, p. 417].

The main emphasis in the activities of religious separatists and extremists is placed precisely on propaganda activities aimed on spreading radical ideology among the youth. The development of information technologies and the expansion of Internet coverage in Xinjiang [11, p.2-3] contributed significantly to this process. This form of work is carried out both in open and in latent forms, Internet cafes are actively used, which allows to keep the identity of the communicators in secret, eliminates the possibility of their identification.

The use of e-mail provides the speed and reliability of information transfer; however, with all its advantages, this method cannot be used to promote extremist ideas actively, unlike traditional preaching. According to Chinese media, the investigation into the terrorist attacks showed that before taking part in the attacks, most of the participants in the recent terrorist attacks in China were watching videos that called for violence. But the main cause of all the above offenses is the illegal construction of places for religious activities and religious propaganda in schools, and precisely these activities that pose the greatest threat to social stability.

The illegal construction of mosques in XUAR has actually gone out of control and almost all of them are used for carrying out illegal religious activities, first of all - propaganda of the ideas of extremism and separatism. Some of them are real base points of separatists and extremists, and their facilities were used to prepare for terrorist attacks.

The number of secret private schools is also growing. Their spread began since early 80s in the southern regions of Xinjiang, and since then the network of such “educational institutions” has only expanded, despite the fact that since 1990 the activity of more than 1,000 of them have been stopped. A sufficiently large number of students in such “schools” deserve special attention, and therefore, there is reason to say that the extremist and separatist groups of Xinjiang have created an alternative educational system that competes with the state in order to achieve their goals. Naturally, the “curriculum” of such institutions includes, above all, the propaganda of the ideas of separatism and religious extremism. In 2011 The Islamic Party of Turkestan has spread a written request by the head of the IPT, A. Shakur, where he talks about the system of universal compulsory education, which, in his words, “leads to Muslim apostasy” [3, p.16].

The above examples show that illegal religious activity in XUAR displays itself in a variety of forms: the obstacles to the realization of the right to freedom of religion are created, there’s illegal involvement and forcing individuals to participate in religious activities, distortion of religious principles and regulations, violation of the rules for collective religious activities, including their organization outside places of religious activity, the creation of illegal study groups and schools, illegal private teaching activities for individual students, the illegal qualification certificates expiry which give the right to practice teaching in the field of religion, the illegal conduct interregional missionary events, the use of religion in the interest of exploitation of people, unauthorized manufacture, distribution and selling of religious printed and audiovisual products; organization of unauthorized religious processions and other activities.

Concerning this, the Chinese leadership is actively pursuing a policy of “fighting against three evils: international terrorism, national separatism and religious extremism.” Certainly, this gives certain results; however, it is not yet possible to speak about the complete elimination of the “Uyghur problem” as the main destabilizing factor in the North-West of the PRC. PRC Chairman Xi Jinping made a statement on May 1, 2014, in which he noted that “the fight against terrorism does not allow us to stop even for a minute, and determined actions should be taken in order to suppress the impulse of terrorist activity” [6]. Following the statement of the PRC leader, in May 2014 China launched the next round of the “Severe Strike” campaign [严打, Yanda] [10]. In mid-June 2014, a large-scale military campaign of the Pakistani army began in the northwestern territories of the country aimed to eliminate 29 radical Islamist associations there. On June 20th, Xinhua news agency spread a message about the launch of the campaign “to clean up the Chinese Internet segment from video and audio materials, containing propaganda for terrorism and the use of violence.” [6].

It is necessary to take into account that illegal religious activity is one of the main tools for religious extremists and terrorists, and its effectiveness is due to gross distortions of the basic principles of Islam. Islam in this situation, acting in the role of a symbolic stronghold against the “external enemy”, attracts a powerful protest resource. This is what the radicals outside of China use, recruiting into their ranks the Uyghur youth who are “overboard” of dynamic economic development, and receptive to calls to build a just Islamic state.

It should also be mentioned that the transformation of the religious identity of the Uigurs in the form of its orientation to religious radicalism is, among other factors, due to the fact that in the process of ethno cultural conflict with the Han, accompanied by attempts to be assimilated by the title ethnos, the Uigurs had to develop a “counteraction system” designed to preserve their ethno cultural identity. Such a “system of counteraction” became the radical Islamic ideology. At the same time, separatist and extremist activities continue to take place in Xinjiang, and in this regard, the lack of adequate response measures will cause a further complication of the situation.

The current religious situation in XUAR is showing a tendency for increasing number of followers of the radical Islam movement, whose activities are anti-government in nature, aimed at stirring up the ethnic separatism. Instigation against the country's Han leadership is justified by the fact that Muslims can obey only the will of Allah, and since the policy of the PRC leadership is directed “against Allah”, it must be opposed in every way and not obey the established laws and

government decisions. In some cases, there have been calls to boycott marriage certificates, identity cards, driver's licenses and other documents. This also includes calls for "overthrowing the regime established by the Han in Xinjiang," further popularizing of radical Islam and complete liberation from the "infidels." To achieve these goals, religious radicals introduced a "jihad", carried out by suicide bombers. With the help of a radical interpretation of Islam, "jihad" is imputed to all Muslims. A necessity for the complete extermination of "infidels", atheists and renegades, regardless of time, place and method (explosions, murders, arson, poisoning, etc.) is declared. At the same time, those who committed "jihad" during the execution of the "sacred duty" are promised a direct path to the Kingdom of Allah.

In this regard, the Chinese government is introducing unprecedented security measures to counteract the activities of Islamic radicals. According to Islam News, the Chinese authorities are restricting the religious activities of the Muslim community in the autonomy. For example, it is forbidden to enter the mosque to citizens who are under 18 years old and those who work in state budgetary institutions. The government provides for imprisonment for illegal religious activities. Uigurs wearing a beard or women in hijab are not allowed to enter a number of state institutions and organizations [5].

Besides that, the anti-terrorism legislation adopted by the Permanent Committee of All-China Congress of People's Deputies in 2015 "obliges Internet service providers and telephone operators to transfer information encryption codes to the authorities and to provide the relevant authorities with user passwords upon special services requests. Also, according to the innovation, foreign companies operating in the field of telecommunications must place servers and other equipment that contains personal information of users in the territory of the People's Republic of China ", reports the news publication The Sight.

Thus, the anti-terrorism legislation adopted by the government of the People's Republic of China causes dissatisfaction among the XUAR's population and serves as a breeding ground for new unrest and clashes. At the same time, the Chinese government considers the adoption of this law to be exclusively a temporary security measure, through which it is intending to get rid Xinjiang from terrorist elements and by this to stabilize the region.

Conclusion

It seems that the process of radicalization (in this case, religious) is always associated with the closure of society on itself, which inevitably leads to its disintegration. In this regard, the integration of culture is the key to its viability, because only by interacting cultures can enrich themselves and receive an impulse for further development. Islamic radicalism, in this case, focuses on religion, toughening and dogmatizing the main points of the Quran. In this case, it is artificially slowing down the natural course of the ethnic culture evolution, throwing it back to the times of the idealized "golden age" of the Prophet's rule. Under such conditions, ethnic culture is a "hostage" of religion, and the insignificance of personality compared to God becomes the dominant ontological representation in society [4, p. 3]. At the same time, this process is accompanied by ossification and stagnation in the fields of science and art, as a result of the spread of religion to literally all spheres of society. Partly, similar processes of monopolizing religion as an ideological basis are taking place in the modern Middle East, as well as in the territory of Chinese Xinjiang[6].

As mentioned above, the spread of radical Islam in Xinjiang has an inevitable and rather strong influence on young people - the main subject of the influence of religious radicalism, which can display itself in the following aspects:

1. Conducting prayers directly in the dormitory premises;
2. Participation in the work of secret religious societies, propaganda of Islamism among students, stimulation of religious fanaticism, sabotage of the educational process;
3. Attempts to oppose the Han ethnic groups to other ethnic groups, inciting ethnic hatred;
4. Excessive religiosity and godliness in everyday life;
5. Illegal participation in the activities of terrorist organizations.

From the above it should be concluded that today Islam in Xinjiang performs a wide range of diverse functions. At the same time, in the situation of ethno cultural conflict, their negative side is actualized mostly. Thus, for example, such a function of Islam as group creating sets the limits for the

community, and it draws the line separating the “we-group” (Uygurs) from the “they-group” (Han people). Maintaining these boundaries allows to prevent the process of unification, thereby helping the Uighur community to maintain their identity. In a situation of ethno cultural conflict, this function has destructive features, which shows itself in the form of ethnic intolerance, open demonstration of hostility, terror, armed clashes.

Islam also serves as “storage” of the value-ideological foundations for the culture of the Uyghur ethnoses. In this regard, religious identity appears here as an extremely concentrated expression of a person’s worldview, the quintessence of the most significant issues of his “life world” [7]. However, ethno cultural conflict actualizes the other side of this function. Islam, with its characteristic desire to regulate, streamline social relations, in the case of ethno cultural conflict, actualizes dogmatism, inert thinking, denies pluralism, and at the most extreme manifestation it acquires the status of an ideology that serves as a justification for illegal activities.

In this regard, the religious identity of the Uighur in an ethno cultural conflict conditions can be characterized by the following specific features:

1. The belief of these individuals is blind and unconscious, as it has been implanted since childhood under the influence of others. For them, religious rites are not purposeful activities, but rather a sign of belonging to their ethnic group, an undeniable duty, not supported by knowledge;
2. In their religious life they consciously reduce the cultural and sensual component of Islam, preferring to follow dogmas;
3. The above category has extremely poor knowledge of Islam. Taking into account the fact that Islam was instilled in them from childhood and, mainly, under the influence of those around them, these individuals very weakly imagine the true meaning of Islam. They regularly take part in all religious events, orderly attend prayers and read the Quran, but they do not perceive the information in their entirety, and sometimes they are guided by the one that was “pulled out of context”. Other religions are not accepted in principle, but there is also no understanding of the significance of Islam, and of the functions that it is intended to perform [11, p.2-3].

The transformation of Islam into radical forms is explained by the influence made by the ethno cultural conflict. The release of conflict energy in such a destructive way indicates the presence of strong frustration experienced by ethnophores, and therefore, the significance of religion in the process of the formation of their ethno cultural identity. The perspective of losing the ethno cultural identity by the Uighurs makes the defense mechanism work - the radicalization of religion as its central element.

The Uygurs maintain the difference of their identity from the Han by translation and deliberate emphasis on their own uniqueness. The focus of attention of many Uighurs lies on the dual division of cultural characteristics, while their group is certainly viewed from the position of cultural superiority over the Han. Also, as a reinforcement of the idea of segregation, there is an argument based on the strong connection of the Uygurs to the land inhabited by them, their autonomy in these territories, which makes it possible to draw not only a cultural line between two ethnic groups, but also a geographical one, along the line separating XUAR from mainland China. However, the attempt of the Uygurs to “lock themselves up in their ethnic apartment” has the opposite effect associated with the degradation of ethnic culture, the exhaustion of the ontological meanings of its existence, except the eternal struggle with the “Han invaders”.

It should also be noted that neither culture nor religion by itself is a source of ethno cultural conflict. As A.J. Toynbee believed, the development of culture is carried out as a series of “Answers” given by the creative human spirit to those “Challenges” that nature throws to it, society, and its own inner world. At the same time, different variants of development are always possible, because different “Answers” to the same “Challenge” are possible [12].

Considering that the main subject of culture, as well as religion, is the person himself, then both a regressive and progressive movement of culture depends on his conscious choice, his focusing on both the positive functions of religion and the negative ones. Man, in this sense, is not a passive subject, experiencing the influence of religious dogmas and stereotypes, but an independent author capable freely create his life.

Thus, on the basis of the analysis performed, it should be concluded that the ethno cultural conflict facilitates the transformation of religious identity, the acquisition the destructive features by

the latest. In the context of the Uigur-Han ethnocultural conflict, the religious identity of the Uigurs represents a kind of “demarcation line” that establishes a hard barrier between two ethnic groups. In this regard, the religious identity of the Uygurs in a situation of ethno cultural conflict seems to be an “unfading source” of ethno cultural differences, which in one or another form serve the idea of locking Uigur society in itself, minimizing social contacts with the Hans.

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