



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

Ethnic and Religious Processes in Western Mongolia

(based on social research)

Dashkovskiy Petr^{a*}

^a*Altai State University, Russian Federation*

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.

© 2015 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

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

* Dashkovskiy Petr Tel.: +0-921-287-7098.
E-mail address: dashkovskiy@fpn.asu.ru

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.

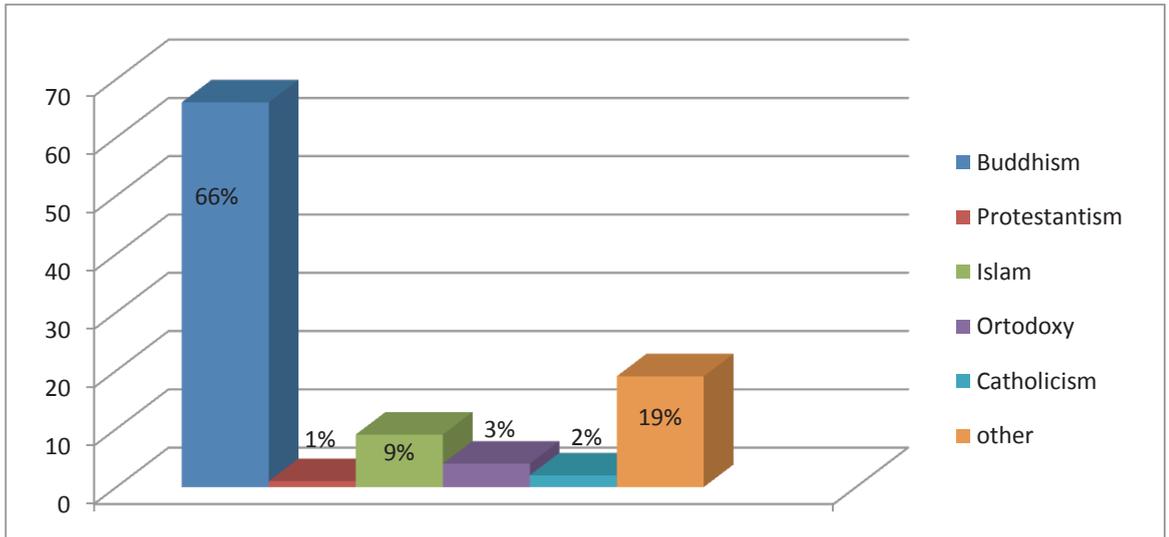


Fig.1. Religious belonging in Khovd aimag

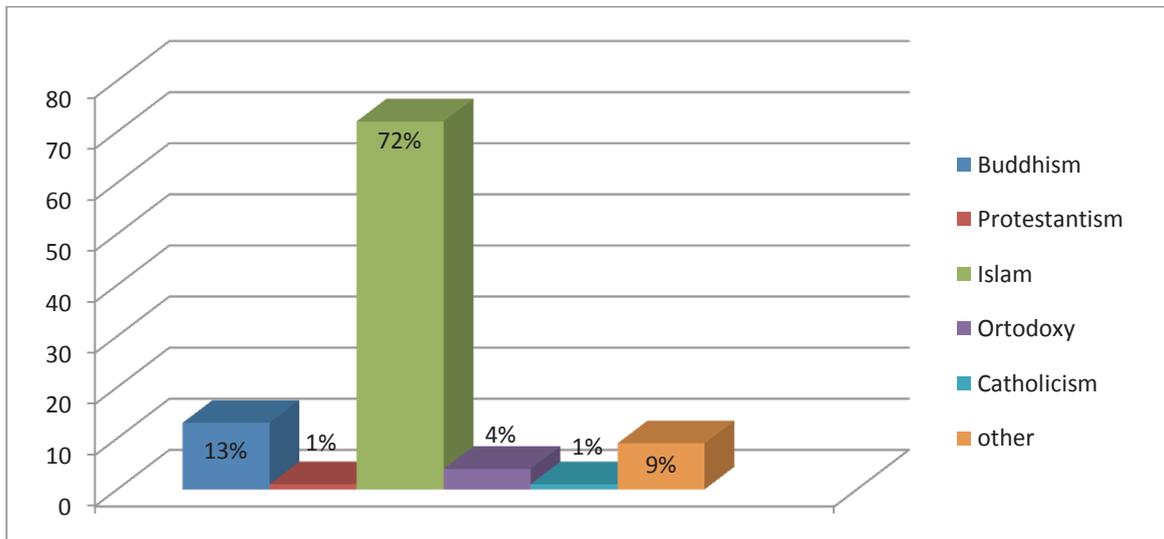


Fig. 2. Religious belonging in Bayan-Ulgii aimag

It can be clearly seen that in Western Mongolia the dominant religions are Buddhism and Islam. A large percentage of respondents in Khovd aimag are indicated another religion. In Western Mongolia the growth of Protestant denominations noted by us on the basis of the results allows to talk about the stagnation in the growth of these denominations. In general, the spread of Christian denominations in Western Mongolia will remain under its former positions.

It should be noted that religious belonging in the Mongolian aimags is closely linked to the national identity. The basic mass of the respondents quite clearly indicates their ethnic belonging right up to indicate sub-ethnic group. In Khovd aimag, where the dominant faith is Buddhism, the population by ethnic group is located in the following way:

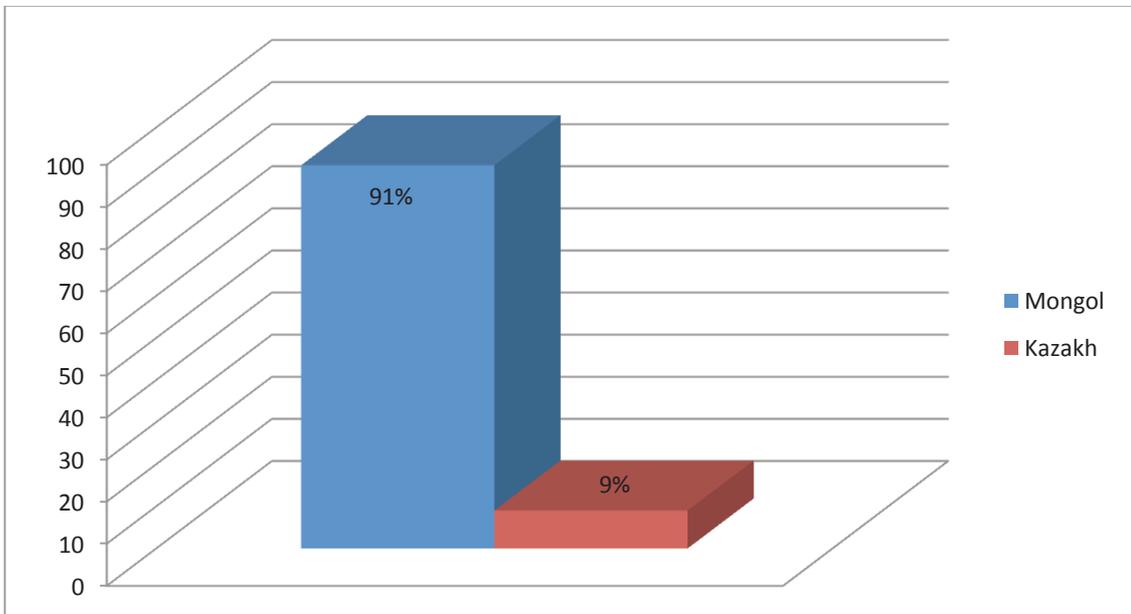


Fig. 3. National composition of respondents in Khovd aimag

In Bayan-Ulgii aimag 58% of the questioned population is Kazakhs. Other nationalities are located the following way:

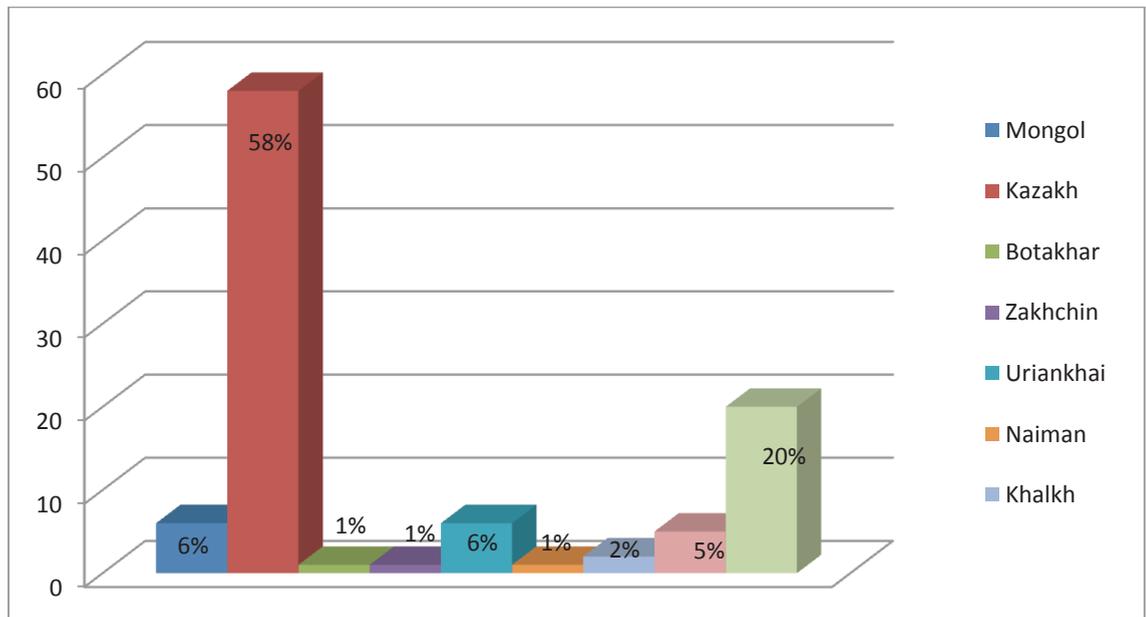


Fig. 4. National composition of the respondents in the Bayan-Ulgii aimag

Suspension of the growth of Christian denominations in this region in many ways is connected with a government policy. The state support is rendered for the traditional for Mongolia faiths - Islam and Buddhism (Namsaraeva, 2004; Sabirov, 2006).

The answers to questions about the celebration of religious holidays at home could indicate the religious level. In this case, 66% of respondents in Khovd and 49% in the Bayan-Ulgii aimags said that house religious holidays are not celebrated. However, despite this, the religious observance is important for 65% of respondents in the Bayan-Ulgii aimag and 54% of respondents in Khovd aimag.

The most important factor in regulation of international and interreligious relations is family and marriage relations. According to a survey in the Bayan-Ulgii aimag 65% (68 people) would not agree to a marriage with a representative of another faith, while 80 people (77%) said that their families have no representatives of other faiths. In Khovd aimag 58% of respondents (85 people) are against interreligious marriages, and 130 respondents (88%) have monoconfessional family. In the case of marriage with representatives of different faith in Khovd aimag a preference is given for Buddhism (76% of respondents), on the second position is Catholicism - 53% and on the third is Islam - 29% of respondents. In Bayan-Ulgii aimag a preference is given for Protestantism (40% of respondents), the second position for Buddhism - 36% of respondents, and the third - 24% for Catholicism. In many ways, this tendency can be connected with the ethnic composition of these regions, as well as the dominant faiths. In Khovd aimag, where Buddhism is the dominant denomination, number people who wish to marry with representatives of the religion are higher than in Bayan-Ulgii aimag, where the dominant religion is Islam. Protestantism in the Western Mongolia is the most preferred denomination for the conclusion of interreligious marriage. The problem of how to easily find contact with representatives of other religion allows estimating an interfaith situation in the Western Mongolia. Thus, in the Khovd aimag 16% of the respondents answered that it is heavy, than it is easy to find contact with the representative of another faith, and 31% of respondents can't find contact with believers of another religion. In Bayan-Ulgii aimag percentage of respondents who answered this question in the same way was 15% and 31%.

On the territory of aimags there are no contradictions with the representatives of the dominant faiths. Thus, in Khovd aimag, 50% of respondents are not in contradictions with the Buddhist tradition, and Bayan-Ulgii aimag,

57% of respondents are not in contradictions with the Islamic tradition.

It's necessary to pay attention to the fact that sufficiently tolerant attitude towards the representatives of other faiths has been established on the territory of Mongolia. A total of 66% of the respondents in the Bayan-Ulgii and 68% - in Khovd aimag have no contradictions with the representatives of other faiths.

At the same time, it should be noted that 41% of the respondents have the most complicated interconfessional relations in Khovd aimag with representatives of Islam, as well as with representatives of the Catholic Church in 30% of cases.

In Bayan-Ulgii aimag with a predominantly Muslim population, 43% of respondents have conflicts with the Protestant denominations and 21% of respondents with representatives of Judaism. Conflict situation with representatives of Protestantism explains the stopping of growth of this denomination on the territory of Bayan-Ulgii aimag.

The reasons of the emergence of the conflicts are reflected in the following figures 5 and 6.

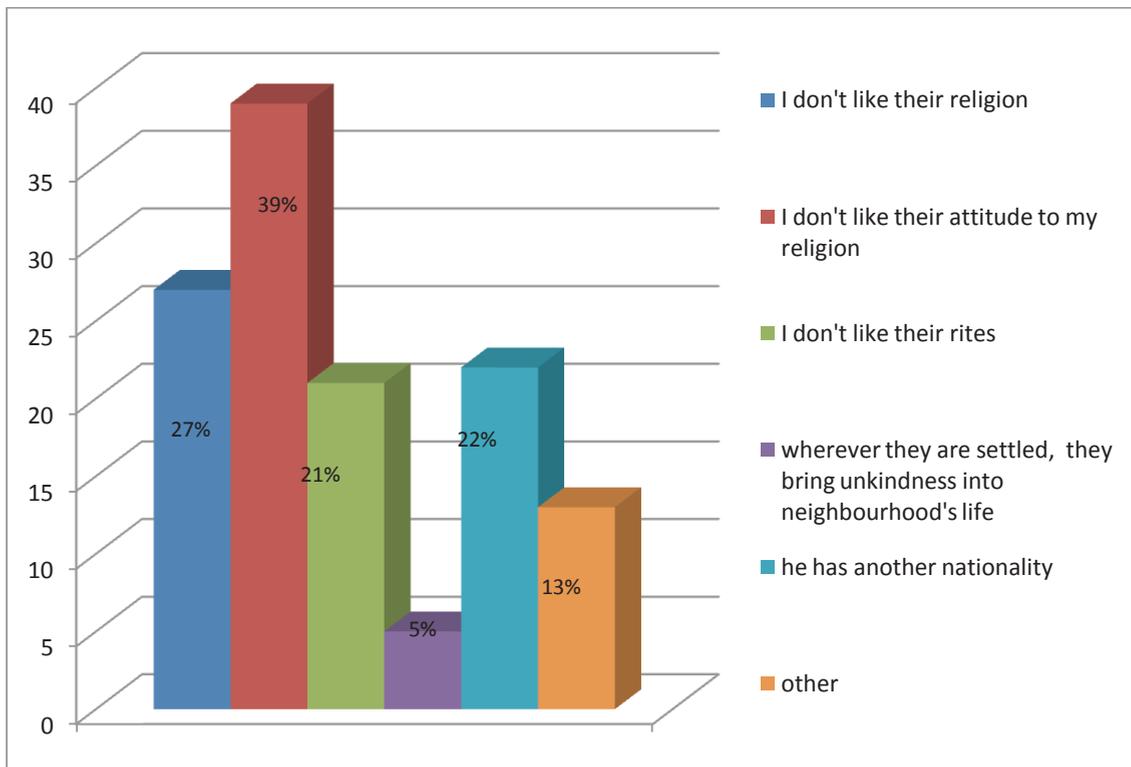


Fig.5 The reasons of emergence of the conflicts for religious motives in the Khovd aimag

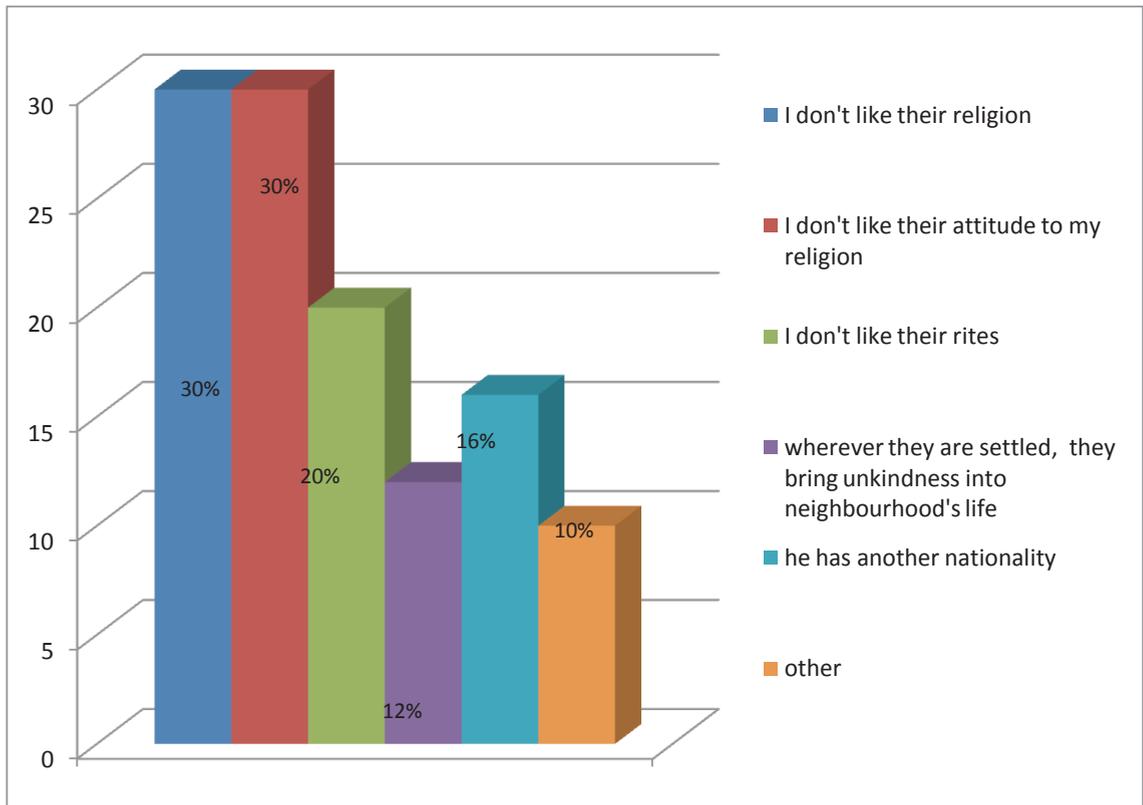


Fig. 6. The reasons of emergence of the conflicts for religious motives in the Bayan-Ulgii aimag

On the basis of the figure we see that the national trait is not the main reason of the arising conflicts. In Khovd aimag 22% of respondents and 16% of respondents in the Bayan-Ulgii aimag said that national characteristic is the reason for the conflicts. The attitude to the appearance of unknown denominations of Western Mongolia is not simple. In Khovd and Bayan-Ulgii aimags 46% of respondents find difficult to answer this question, 35% of respondents in Khovd aimag and 30% of respondents in Bayan-Ulgii aimag say about the negative attitude to the appearance of the unknown religion. Despite this, the religious situation in Western Mongolia, can be regarded as calm, 77% (113 people) of the respondents in Khovd and 60% (63 people) of the respondents in the Bayan-Ulgii aimags never feel the infringement of their religious rights.

As a result of the survey, it was found that the people of Western Mongolia are not receive enough information about the religious processes in the state. In Khovd aimag, 53% of respondents said about the lack of information received through the media, and 11% of respondents found this question difficult to answer. In Bayan-Ulgii aimag the percentage of dissatisfied was 41%, and 21% of respondents didn't answer. At the same time, people of the Bayan-Ulgii aimag aged 36 years to 60 years noted that they receive enough information about religion in the media. In Khovd aimag this kind of trend were not noticed. A large part of the inhabitants of Khovd aimag (50% of respondents) trust the media in coverage of religious issues. People aged 22 to 45 years have some doubts in the veracity of the material. At the same time, the percentage who believes that the media is not provided truth information ranges from 49% to 66%. Population of Bayan-Ulgii aimag trust media in the coverage of religious issues. In this case, we can not choose the category of persons who have some doubts in the received information through the media.

As a result of a short review of the research on the territory of Khovd and Bayan-Ulgii aimags of Mongolia we can come to the following conclusions. Today we should pay a particular attention to the aggravated negative

attitude towards the representatives of the Christian tradition and the reducing of the role of Protestant organizations in Western Mongolia, which activity were marked in previous years.

In addition, the conflicts between traditional religions - Buddhism and Islam, which previously was the main problem in interconfessional life of the Mongolian society is noted in a less degree. It should be said that the religion of the population of Khovd and Bayan-Ulgii aimag is generally associated with observance of religious rites. During the sociological research, it was noted that the population of Western Mongolia feel a need for a more complete and reliable knowledge about the life of religious communities. Over 5 years of research, we can say that the population of Khovd and Bayan-Ulgii aimag began to form a reasonable position on the negative relationship between church and state. The population of the region opposes the intervention of religious leaders (including representatives of traditional religions in Mongolia) in politics.

References

- Dashkovskiy, P.K., (2011). *The worldview of Sayan-Altai nomads and contiguous territories of the Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages (domestic historiography and modern research works)*. Barnaul: Altay State University Publishers.
- Klyashtorniy S.G., (2006). *Old Turkic Monuments of Runic Writing from Eastern Turkestan*. Saint Petersburg. Nauka Publishers.
- Litvinskiy B.A., (1997). *Buddhism and Buddhism culture of the Central Asia. Moscow oriental studies: Studies, Researches, Working*. Moscow.: Nauka Publishers.
- Nikitin A.B., (1984). *Christianity in Central Asia (Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages). Eastern Turkistan and Central Asia*. Moscow. Nauka Publishers.
- Namsaraeva S., (2004) Whom no one like in tolerant Mongolia. *NG-religion*. Retrieved from [http:// www.rusk.ru/st.php](http://www.rusk.ru/st.php)
- Nurtazina N.D. (2000). *Islam in the history of the Middle Ages Kazakhstan*. Almaty: "Farab" Publishers.
- Sabirov R., (2006). Old and new Buddhism of the modern Mongolia. Ancient country returns to the traditional religion. *NG-religion*. Retrieved from [http:// www.interfax-religion.ru](http://www.interfax-religion.ru)
- Skorodumova L.G., (2008). Buddhism in modern Mongolia (the problem of the identity preservation). *Buddhism culture: history, source study, linguistics and art: the Second Dorzhiev's readings*. Saint Petersburg.: Petersburg oriental studies.
- Sukhbat, G., (1978) *To question of the spreading of Buddhism among the early nomads of Mongolia. Archaeology and ethnography of Mongolia*. Novosibirsk: Nauka Publishers.
- Tishkov, V.A., (2004) *The experience of the ethnological monitoring*. Moscow., EAWARN.
- Yarkov, A.N., (2010) To the question of the place of Islam in the South Siberia in the early middle ages. *The worldview of the population of the Southern Siberia and Central Asia in the historical retrospective*. Barnaul: Azbuka Publishers.