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Soviet-Japanese Confrontation and the “Buddhist Factor” (1927-1945)

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Abstract. The article analyzes the “Buddhist factor” in Soviet-Japanese relations during the period between 1927 and 1945, namely, its role in the political and military confrontation of the U.S.S.R. and Japan.

Keywords: *Buddhism, religious policy of the U.S.S.R., Soviet-Japanese relations, Far East, Buryatia, Kalmykia.*

The problems of relations between the U.S.S.R. and Japan have been examined thoroughly enough in Soviet and Russian historiography. Such aspects as diplomatic relations between the two countries, the geopolitical situation in the Asia-Pacific Region in the 1920s-1940s,¹ the course of the Soviet-Japanese war of 1945,² as well as the formation of the “image of the enemy”³ have also been examined well enough. In the past two decades a number of works have been published discussing certain aspects of Buddhist confession in the U.S.S.R. in the 1920s-1940s period.⁴ However, the connection of the “Buddhist factor” with Soviet-Japanese relations, particularly, the role of this factor in the political and military confrontation of the U.S.S.R. and Japan during the said period has not been dealt with by our scholars well enough.

As is known, the military-political confrontation of the Soviet state and Japan actually began right after the October Revolution of 1917. During the Civil War Japan took part in the anti-Soviet military intervention, having occupied part of the territory of the Far Eastern Republic (Northern Sakhalin remained under Japanese occupation until 1925). The establishment of diplomatic relations between the U.S.S.R. and Japan on January 20, 1925, to a certain extent lifted tension in the region. Nevertheless, a troubled situation remained on the Far Eastern borders of the U.S.S.R., which was due to the activity of the White Guard émigré organizations in Manchuria and unfriendly policy toward our country pursued by the Chinese government of Zhang Zuolin and Chiang Kai-shek, as well as the activity of the Tibetan religious leader the 9th Panchen Lama

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(Panchen Bogdo), who fled to China in 1923. The danger still existed of foreign interference right up to the military intervention, in the internal affairs of the friendly Mongolian and Tannu Tuva People's republics.

After a short period of "calm" in Soviet-Japanese relations the situation changed for the worse when Emperor Hirohito came to power in Japan in December 1926, and G. Tanaka was appointed prime minister in April 1927. From that time on the Soviet leadership began to receive more frequently reports through various channels about the Japanese plans to attack the U.S.S.R.,⁵ and also about a new course of the Japanese government aimed at the "unification of peoples of Asia... against the U.S.S.R." It was specially emphasized that "this would be done largely with the help of the Buddhist clergy and religion."⁶

By the autumn of 1927 the further worsening of the situation in the "Buddhist East" became quite evident for the Soviet authorities due to a "partial defeat of the Chinese revolution," the "aggressive policy" of imperialist powers, and "their use of Panchen Bogdo in the anti-Soviet affairs," including his visit to Inner Mongolia "with a view to fighting Bolshevik influence." This was why the Soviet leadership deemed it necessary to neutralize the "Buddhist factor" in international politics by "the implementation of flexible and cautious policy" toward clergymen in all currents within the Buddhist community of the Soviet Union (Renovationists, Conservatives and "Neutrals"). It was supposed to prevent the emergence of "all kinds of undesirable political consequences," including the emigration of lamas to Mongolia and Tibet and the distribution of "negative information about the U.S.S.R." by them, concerning persecutions of Buddhists.⁷ Such tactical move toward Buddhist confession should have contributed to the attempts to establish relations with Tibet which were undertaken by the Soviet leadership in 1927-1928.

However, this "warming" of policy toward Buddhism in the U.S.S.R. was short-lived, which was due to foreign-policy reasons (collapse of the Soviet mission to Tibet), as well as domestic political factors (forced collectivization of agriculture and other reforms). The "fight against lamas" in the U.S.S.R. was declared "one of the most urgent tasks" to oppose the "international role of Buddhism," which was now regarded as a "reactionary force of worldwide scope."⁸

The Soviet leaders did not have any doubts in that the aggressive designs of Japan would be based on the "Buddhist factor," inasmuch as this religion was "well adapted to serving Japan's imperialist policy."⁹ It was revealed that the Japanese government carried on "intensive work to organize an all-Buddhist center," which would make "energetic attempts to submit the Buddhist population of China, Tibet and India to Japanese influence."¹⁰ The material of the AUCP(B) and Comintern contained information about Japan's preparation of aggression against the Soviet Union and its allies, including "the concentration of military forces on the border of the U.S.S.R. and Mongolia," and "dispatch of emissaries to people's republics," and also about the participation of the "richest lamas" in these actions of the Japanese.¹¹

The Soviet press openly stated that “Japanese imperialism had the aim to further strengthen its position in Manchuria and Mongolia,”¹² that is, on the border of the U.S.S.R. Indeed, these territories were the most important places in the expansionist plans of Japan. In 1931 the Japanese army occupied North-East China where the puppet Manchukuo state was formed in 1932. The military threat to the U.S.S.R. in the Far East became much greater. Soviet propaganda directly stated that Japan “aimed to seize the entire Soviet Far East right up to Lake Baikal,”¹³ and in Manchuria “it created a springboard for a war against the U.S.S.R.”¹⁴ The “Buddhist factor” in the aggressive plans of Japan was invariably emphasized, and it was stated that “preparations for an attack on the Soviet Far East took place with great participation of the Japanese clergy,” and the “religious organizations of Japan carried on frenzied anti-Soviet propaganda calling for the occupation of the Soviet Maritime Territory.”¹⁵

After the creation of Manchukuo Soviet-Manchurian (in reality Soviet-Japanese) border clashes became quite regular. By the autumn of 1933 relations between the U.S.S.R. and Japan had markedly deteriorated. The Soviet leadership now faced the need to increase military and moral-political rebuff to the potential Japanese aggression. This was why J. Stalin gave a signal in October 1933 to start a long-term anti-Japanese ideological campaign, which had the aim to justify in the eyes of the country’s population the strengthening of the military presence in the Soviet Far East, the reinforcement of the state borders in the region, the construction of military enterprises in the region, etc. Japan was thus given the “image of the enemy.”¹⁶

Anti-Buddhist propaganda became a component part of the anti-Japanese campaign in which the Soviet and Communist party press and anti-religious mass publications played an important role. The printed material of this kind asserted that Buddhism in Japan “served imperialism” with a view to fighting revolutionary ideas,¹⁷ and was “a powerful weapon of great-power and monarchic propaganda.”¹⁸ It was stated that “numerous Buddhist organizations” of Japan “help ideological preparation of imperialist wars,” “publish militarist literature and contribute to the fascist movement,” and “their representatives played a notable role in calling for a ‘big war’.”¹⁹ Data was cited about a considerable number of Buddhist priests (151,855 in 1928),²⁰ temples (100,000 in 1928),²¹ and Buddhist believers in Japan (from 18 to 42 million in 1928),²² who formed the bulk of believers in that country.²³

One of the leaders of the Union of Militant Atheists A. Dolotov wrote about the “negative historical role of Buddhism, saying that during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 Buddhist clergymen blessed Japanese soldiers, calling on them to kill Russians.”²⁴ The journal *Antireligioznik* wrote that Buddhist monks in Japan were fighting communism and “supported landlords in their struggle against peasants.”²⁵ These assertions were accompanied by pseudo-literary legends as, for instance, a story published in the journal *Bezbozhnik* in 1934 about how a Buddhist priest in Japan betrayed a young communist to the police.²⁶

S. Ursynovich, an active atheist, wrote that "the Japanese imperialism displayed an exceptional attention to Buddhism," and "the rapacious look of an unscrupulous Japanese businessman out to seize new markets and lands can be seen in the immovable gaze of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas."²⁷ In 1936 the Soviet press reported that "young Buddhist priests in Japan have military schooling before saying morning prayers"²⁸ and take part in military demonstrations.²⁹

Propaganda noted the strengthening of the "Buddhist factor, which was dangerous for the Soviet Union" not only in the Asia-Pacific Region, but in the entire world (new communities were formed, new temples were opened, and religious conferences were held).³⁰ In an essay entitled "Tibet" (1935-1936)" by B. Aleksandrov it was emphasized that Japan had long demonstrated "its expansionist schemes in Tibet," where it organized "political intrigues" and tried "to use lamas in its expansionist interests." Such assertions were corroborated by the facts of "capture in Tibet of Japanese spies and Buddhist lamas, who turned out to be Japanese army officers, as well as caches of Japanese arms."³¹ In 1936 the Soviet press reported that "Japanese posts were created in big lamaseries in Inner Mongolia."³² It was noted that during the occupation of Manchuria by Japan the number of Buddhist temples increased considerably – in 1932 there were 793 such temples, whereas the figure had risen to 1,200 by 1937.³³

Soviet propaganda made the conclusion that "all Buddhists in the world had long been associated with Japan."³⁴ "A whole number of Buddhist priests were known as active participants in the fascist movement," and "numerous religious organizations actively help the Japanese imperialists prepare and implement plans of seizure and plunder."³⁵ "The loyalty of lamas to Japanese fascists," in the view of Soviet atheists, "was proved by their everyday activity in Mongolia, Tibet and other countries, and "the name of Buddha justified the horrors of fascist aggression" and "the Japanese plans of conquest and submission of China."³⁶

Soviet propaganda accused Buddhist priests in the entire world of espionage in favor of Japan. Buddhist missionaries were regarded as "advance agents of imperialist conquest."³⁷ A. Kalinchenko, an active atheist, asserted that all missionaries were "agents of Japanese imperialism," who "under the guise of religious propaganda and racial and cultural rapprochement were engaged in military espionage and collection of information about the military forces and revolutionary movement in China."³⁸ In the view of the Buryat anti-religious figure B. Togmitov, the Japanese headed "the many-thousand army of Buddhist missionaries in China and other countries of their domination and sphere of influence."³⁹ A review of the book *The Incendiaries of New Predatory Wars in the East* published in the journal *Antireligioznik* said that that Buddhist priests were "agents of Japanese imperialism" in China, Manchuria and Mongolia."⁴⁰

Accusations of "work for the Japanese secret intelligence service" were hurled not only at missionaries, but at all Buddhist believers (for instance, it was said that "Japanese imperialists often used Buddhist monks as their agent-residents for organizing anti-Chinese provocations").⁴¹ The Buddhist temples opened

in China (42) and in Manchuria (155) during Japanese occupation were named "spy dens of Japanese agents," who camouflaged their activities by "the slogan of unity of interests of Chinese and Japanese Buddhists." Propaganda asserted that "when Japanese generals organized demonstrations in honor of the invaders in Manchurian cities, Buddhist spies marched in the front ranks," and "in the person of corrupt lamas the Japanese intelligence spread its tentacles on the territory of Mongolia where these lamas took part in organizing counter-revolutionary forays which were crushed."⁴² In Tannu Tuva the lamas were declared "the inner reserve," that is "the fifth column" of the potential Japanese intervention.⁴³

Of course, the Soviet authorities were worried by the "activation" of Buddhism in the U.S.S.R., too. In particular, "the development of the cult of Osyr-Jalma, the God of war, in whose honor a stupa was built in the Aginsky Datsan in Buryatia in 1929," was regarded as an anti-Soviet act aimed at turning the attention of believers to the coming of "Shambala"⁴⁴ and helping the Japanese aggression in preparations for war.⁴⁵ Propaganda informed about Buddhist priests' pro-Japanese utterances. For example, the lama-doctor N. Dorizhapov arrested in Buryatia in 1936 allegedly had said that "soon Japan would come from the East and Germany from the West, and then Soviet power would be no more."⁴⁶

Meanwhile, the international situation in the Far East became very tense. In October 1936 Germany and Japan signed a protocol on military-political cooperation, which turned into the Anti-Comintern Pact in a month's time. In July 1937 Japan started aggression against China. That same year the Japanese special services helped organize the Mongolian Congress in Inner Mongolia and formed a pro-Japanese "autonomous government,"⁴⁷ which headed the puppet state Mengjiang in the central part of Inner Mongolia.⁴⁸ Soviet propaganda noted that "the Japanese command paid special attention to the unification of Mongolian Lamaists and Japanese Buddhists."⁴⁹ The Japanese intelligence service and military tried to use the idea of Pan-Mongolism in their interests. Japan called on all Mongolian peoples, including the Buryats and Kalmyks, to create their own unified state, propagating cultural and racial kinship of Mongols and Japanese.⁵⁰ Such developments were fraught with danger for the U.S.S.R. whose leadership had to oppose Japanese influence on Pan-Mongolian ideology and the activity connected with the "Buddhist factor."

According to expert T. Khaludorov, the Soviet leadership began to suspect the Buryat people of sympathies for Japan after the active members of the Buryat People's Duma succeeded in drawing part of the Buryat population in the Pan-Mongolian movement (1919-1920).⁵¹ Indeed, Soviet propaganda emphasized that the Pan-Mongolists who stepped up their activities in Buryatia after the October Revolution, were "loyal servants" of Japan,⁵² because that country posed as a zealous supporter of the creation of "Great Mongolia,"⁵³ and even tried "to set up a puppet "Pan-Mongolian state" with the help of the Russian tsarist general G. Semyonov."⁵⁴ Non-acceptance of the ideas of Pan-Mongolism in the U.S.S.R. was officially based on the fact that this ideology "led to the liq-

uidation of the independence of Mongolia and transfer of the fate of the Mongolian people into the hands of the Japanese imperialists."⁵⁵ In actual fact, the Soviet leadership feared that in case of the creation of the unified Mongolian state the U.S.S.R. could lose its "Mongolian" republics – Buryatia and Kalmykia.

Negative attitude to the ideology of Pan-Mongolism increased in the Soviet Union by the early 1930s because of a growing threat on the part of Japan.⁵⁶ Pan-Mongolism was now directly connected with the "Buddhist factor," which bolstered up this ideology.⁵⁷ However, Soviet propaganda noted the positive experience of opposing Pan-Mongolism and Japanese influence when at the time of the establishment of the Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Republic the Soviet authorities "had no fear" of Japan and rebuffed those who opposed the establishment of that republic believing that "it would play into the hands of the Japanese imperialists" and "create a favorable situation for Japanese propaganda of Pan-Mongolism."⁵⁸ On the basis of this experience the Soviet leadership tried to oppose Pan-Mongolism in the 1930s.

In view of the exacerbation of the international situation, the Soviet authorities started to implement decisive measures against the Buddhist clergy in 1937: all of them were groundlessly accused of "espionage." At first the role of "agents of the Japanese military circles" were given to the "reactionary lamas maintaining ties with their followers and associates who had fled abroad."⁵⁹ They were branded as spies doing their treacherous work "under the guise of gathering herbs for Tibetan medicine."⁶⁰ In view of this, working people were called on to increase "vigilance with regard to the religious agents of fascism," improve "anti-religious work," and unmask and denounce "espionage activity of clergymen."⁶¹

In September 1937, at the 2nd plenary meeting of the Buryat-Mongolian regional Communist Party committee all lamas were accused of "ties with foreign countries."⁶² The 3rd plenary meeting in October 1937 openly announced that all Buddhist priests were "Japanese spies."⁶³ In November 1937, a group of Buddhist priests in Kalmykia were accused of "counter-revolutionary agitation concerning the alleged war in the Far East" (evidently, between the U.S.S.R. and Japan) and "propagation of defeatist sentiments."⁶⁴

Against the backdrop of mass reprisals against Buddhist priests and believers, the U.S.S.R. and Japan came up closely to a direct military clash. In June 1937 a specially guarded border zone 300-400 kilometers wide was established in the Soviet Far East along the frontier with Manchukuo.⁶⁵ The Communist Party bodies informed the local population that "Japan was actively preparing for war against the U.S.S.R."⁶⁶

During the Soviet-Japanese military confrontation at Lake Khasan in July-August 1938 and Khalkhin Gol River in May-September 1939, propaganda about the "anti-Soviet role" of the Buddhist factor reached its peak. It was stated that Japan was able to carry out its "provocative attack on our borders" with direct assistance of clergymen.⁶⁷ It was constantly emphasized that Japan was a

“Buddhist state” dominated by the ideology of a sacred mission “to unite all Buddhists under Japanese leadership.” This was why “militarist propaganda and agitation was carried on in all 86,671 Buddhist temples of Japan.”⁶⁸ Japan’s Buddhist clergy was allegedly “striving to use religious sentiments of the population, calling on all believers in the name of Buddha for victory in war,”⁶⁹ and conducting “prayers for the victory of Japan” in all temples. Soviet propaganda noted sarcastically that Buddha was “at the service of the Japanese military circles” and was proclaimed “the sacred patron of the Japanese warriors.” It was reported that in one of the Japanese temples a huge military helmet was made for a gigantic statue of Buddha and put on its head, and the inscription was placed on its chest – “I call for ideological mobilization of the Japanese nation.”⁷⁰

It was announced in 1938 that the hostile activity of the Japanese under the guise of Buddhist missionary work was widely carried on in the Far Eastern regions of the Soviet Union.⁷¹ Propaganda harped on “the ties” of the Buryat and Kalmyk lamas with Japan. It was claimed that the “intervention prepared by the Japanese fascists against the U.S.S.R.” was declared by Buddhist clergy “a sacred war of the heavenly forces against Russian heretics and atheists.” The lamas allegedly spread information that “Shambala is Japan.” This activity was termed by Soviet propaganda “Shambala teaching” and proclaimed “a weapon of counter-revolutionary defeatist agitation in favor of Japanese fascism and fanning nationalist sentiments among believers.”⁷² “The Lamaist subversive group unmasked by the NKVD bodies in 1938” was accused of planning to turn Buryat Mongolia into a “protectorate of Japan.”⁷³ One of the spiritual leaders of Buddhists in the U.S.S.R. Hambo-Lama A. Dorzhiev arrested by NKVD, who died in prison in January 1938, was denounced as “an agent of the Japanese Intelligence.”⁷⁴ He was also accused of drawing his subordinates in an “anti-Soviet counter-revolutionary organization.”⁷⁵

It was announced in 1939 that “Japanese spy priests had penetrated into the U.S.S.R. and that quite a few of them were uncovered by the Soviet counter-intelligence.”⁷⁶ A group of Buddhist priests in Buryatia was branded as “spies and saboteurs who, using the support of Trotskyite and bourgeois and nationalistic traitors and saboteurs,” set up a “ramified organization with its center in Gusi-noozersky Datsan,” and “compiled a plan of turning Buryat-Mongolia into a Japanese colony.” This group was arrested and sent to prison in 1939.⁷⁷

On the whole, “ties with Japan” was commonplace in the spy mania that spread in the Soviet Union at the time of Great Terror. In the 1930s many Soviet officials and military commanders were arrested on frame-up charges and shot as “agents of the Japanese Intelligence Service.”⁷⁸ Among them was the Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Republic M. Yerbanov.⁷⁹ In August and September of 1937, according to a decision of the Politburo of the CC AUCP(B), the entire Korean population was deported from the Soviet Far East. It was considered “disloyal” in view of the fact that Korea used to be part of the Japanese Empire at the time.

In 1938, the Chinese population was also deported from the Far Eastern territory on similar grounds.⁸⁰

Subsequently, anti-Buddhist propaganda in the U.S.S.R. diminished because the authorities became convinced of the utter defeat of Buddhism: by the end of the 1930 there was not a single functioning Buddhist temple or monastery left in the country. Soviet propaganda material mentioned very seldom the "Buddhist factor" in connection with Japan: in particular, the Soviet press published information in 1940 about the attempts of the Japanese government to create the "national Japanese church, for which purpose a uniform Buddhist center was opened in the country."⁸¹ After the developments at Khalkhin Gol the Soviet-Japanese relations somewhat normalized. On April 13, 1941, a neutrality pact between the two countries was signed for a term of four years. Official anti-Japanese propaganda became milder in view of these foreign political changes.

During the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945) the "Buddhist factor" was not harped on. The British scholar W. Kolarz believed that the war should have worsened the position of the Soviet Buddhists" because "Japan that had always been regarded as a force using Buddhism for its own purposes was an ally of Germany, which should have increased Kremlin's suspicions with regard to its Buddhist citizens."⁸² On the contrary, however, during the war anti-religious propaganda, including anti-Buddhist campaign, was played down; first, in connection with the need to mobilize all citizens of the country, including believers, for the defense of the Motherland, and later, in view of the course taken by the Soviet leadership to use religious confessions in the interests of domestic and foreign policy to the maximum. This was why the "Buddhist factor" lost its significance for Soviet propaganda during the Soviet-Japanese war in August-September 1945, which ended in the utter defeat of Japan.

In 1945-1946, within the framework of a new course of Soviet religious policy, Buddhism in the U.S.S.R. was again legalized (the opening of the Ivolginsky Datsan and the setting up of the Central Spiritual Buddhist Board). The "Buddhist factor" again acquired its former significance in the Soviet-Japanese relations in those years, especially on the territories returned to the U.S.S.R. (South Sakhalin and Kuril Islands). In 1936 there were 82 Buddhist temples with 120 priests in that region (Japanese province of Karafuto). The number of parishioners was 53,174. According to Sakhalin scholar I. Samarin, with the coming of the Soviet administration a new and difficult period for Buddhism began in this region. During the first few months of the new rule many Buddhist temples were plundered and destroyed, and parishioners left their homes and fled to Hokkaido. However, later on, the Soviet executive and Communist party bodies tried to take into account the influence of the Buddhist clergy on the life of the Japanese population there. Buddhist priests were free from all mobilizations, food products were supplied to them, and the temples received the "status of inviolability." Nevertheless, in view of the outflow of the Japanese population the Buddhist temples became empty. In 1947 they were given over to other bodies for differ-

ent purposes.⁸³ After the deportation of the Japanese population from South Sakhalin and Kuril Islands the role of the Buddhist factor in the Soviet-Japanese confrontation of the 1920s-1940s ceased to exist.

Harping on the “negative” role of the Buddhist factor during the Soviet-Japanese confrontation was prompted not only by foreign policy reasons, but also by domestic circumstances. After a short period of “flirting” with Buddhist confession in the hope of using it for fanning a “world revolution” in the East, the country’s leadership took the course to eradicating this religion in the mid-1920s. Along with other confessions, Buddhism was regarded as a “hostile force” capable to disrupt the socialist transformation of the economy and moral and political “upbringing and education” of the country’s citizens. One should agree with W. Kolarz’s view that the Soviet authorities in their attitude to Buddhism were bent to “identifying it with each enemy of the Soviet Union and communism in Asia,” including Japanese militarism.⁸⁴ This view became stronger especially after Japan entered into an alliance with Hitler’s Germany.

The history of the emergence of the national religion of the Altai people – Burkhanism – has also played a definite role in the close attention of the Soviet leadership to the use of the “Buddhist factor” by Japan in its interests. As written by S. Tyukhteneva, the mythological image of Burkhan-Oirot-Yapon-khan, which embodied the image of the Emperor of Japan as an enemy of the Emperor of Russia, came into being among the Altai people in the period of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. During that period Japan had no agents among the Altai population, because it had neither claims to, nor geopolitical interests in the territory of Altai. However, some sections of the Altai people were really interested in Japan’s victory over Russia, which, as they hoped, would bring them national liberation.⁸⁵ This was why Burkhanism was viewed by the government of the Russian Empire as anti-government and “pro-Japanese” religion. Nevertheless, this conclusion is disputable.

The question of the essential significance of the Pan-Mongolian factor in the aggressive plans of Japan is also arguable. T. Khaludorov, for instance, maintains that the Pan-Mongolian movement came into being in 1919 mainly at the instigation of the Japanese military.⁸⁶ At the same time S. Angayeva emphasizes the erroneous nature of the view that the Pan-Mongolian movement was inspired by Japan; this idea came into being among radical Buryat intellectuals (Ts. Zhamtsarano, E.-D. Rinchino), as well as among religious figures (A. Dorzhiyev, Ch. Iroltuyev) in the early 20th century.⁸⁷ Pan-Mongolism could be used by Japan as part of its “Pan-Asiatic Doctrine, which put forward the slogan “Asia for Asians” (read – “for the Japanese”).⁸⁸

The growing apprehensions of the Soviet leadership concerning Buddhist confession were based on their conviction that the Japanese authorities placed their stake on religion, widely using in their foreign policy interests not only Buddhism, but also other confessions, which were allegedly “at the service of Japanese fascism” and helped “the Japanese bourgeoisie and military to imple-

ment their plans."⁸⁹ The Soviet mass media spread the view that there were 253,000 functioning temples, monasteries and prayer-houses of various religions in Japan, which "were engaged in vicious propaganda of obscurantism and anthropophobia."⁹⁰ Much attention was paid to the fact that the Japanese authorities were striving to unite all popular confessions in the country and put them under their control – in particular, a unified Shintoist center was set up and a unification conference of Protestants was held.⁹¹

In view of special significance of the Orthodox Church factor for the U.S.S.R., Soviet propaganda asserted that this confession "cooperated" with the Japanese invaders during the Civil War in Russia,⁹² including with the help of Orthodox priests from among ethnic Japanese.⁹³ The Japanese Christian Orthodox Church was branded as one of the "religious spying organizations of Japanese imperialism"⁹⁴ and "an instrument of the intelligence" then.⁹⁵ The negative role of Christianity as a whole was emphasized; it was claimed that "Japanese agents under the guise of Christian priests virtually invaded China and Mongolia";⁹⁶ "the Christian world supported Japan in its aggressive schemes against the U.S.S.R."⁹⁷ and the Pope was "an ally of the Japanese military."⁹⁸

Soviet propaganda emphasized the fact of Japan's using the Muslim factor," too. It was claimed that during the Civil War Russian Muslims had allegedly "helped" Japan. Islamic priests in Bashkiria, Central Asia, in the Crimea and the Caucasus were branded as "Japanese spies" during the 1930s.⁹⁹ It was stressed that the Japanese were using Muslims all over the world for their purposes.¹⁰⁰ B. Aleksandrov wrote that in China the Japanese used "the Muslim religious chauvinistic circles for their aggressive aims" with a view to "uniting all Mongolian-Tibetan territories of China"¹⁰¹ under the hegemony of the Japanese 'defenders' of these oppressed nationalities."¹⁰² Muslim priests in Indochina and the Dutch Indies (Indonesia) were branded as "agents of the Japanese militarists."¹⁰³

At the same time in Japan itself the Buddhist factor aimed at the ideological mobilization of the Japanese for a war against the Soviet Union did not play any significant role. The Japanese leadership preferred to use it for mobilizing public opinion in their interests in other countries of the Asia-Pacific Region. The main ideological mobilizing force in Japan was Shintoism, which had the status of state religion from 1868. The status of Shintoism became greater than that of Buddhism because most Buddhist ritual objects were confiscated and destroyed and temples were given over to Shintoists.¹⁰⁴ Shintoism, the most ancient religion of Japan, which had deep roots among the people, was turned into a system of political propaganda of the Japanese monarchy. This was why this religious ideological system presented greater danger for the U.S.S.R. than Buddhism. The Soviet authorities were well aware of this, especially at the time of the annexation of South Sakhalin. A memorandum of G. Aleksandrov, Head of the Department of Propaganda of the CC AUCP(B), submitted to A. Zhdanov, CC Politburo member, of September 18, 1946, said that "measures had to be taken to eliminate the official character of the Shintoist cult and put a stop to using Shintoist temples for laud-

ing the Japanese monarchy and propagating the ideology of militarism and racial exclusiveness. It was noted as a positive fact that in Japan itself state Shintoism connected with the adoration of the Emperor was banned by the U.S. military administration, and Shintoist confession was separated from the state.¹⁰⁵

Buddhism in Japan was in disgrace right up to the end of World War II, when freedom of religion was restored there.¹⁰⁶ This is why it may be assumed that the “Buddhist factor” in the aggressive plans of Japan aimed against the U.S.S.R. was specially fanned by Soviet propaganda. All the more so since the Soviet Union was not the primary object of aggression for Japan, especially after the latter entered into a protracted war with China. The most favorable direction of expansion for Japan was Southeast Asia with its warm climate, rich natural resources and convenient sea transport routes. This was proved by the subsequent events in the region.¹⁰⁷ Japan directed its basic operations to the south – China, Indochina, Indonesia and Oceania.

Although the Japanese state used Buddhist confession in its aims, there were no grounds to regard Buddhists as the natural “allies” of Japan, all the more so, aggressors or initiators of wars and international conflicts. Although, on the basis of facts cited by K. Gerasimova, after the occupation of Manchuria by Japan, “Buryat lamas made predictions that the coming of foreign saviors of faith would be beneficial for Buryat life,”¹⁰⁸ such statements reflected not hatred for Russia, but hopes for an end to Soviet power, restoration of former life, revival or religion, etc. By emphasizing the “Buddhist factor” in Japanese aggression, the Soviet authorities had an additional and quite important pretext for the ultimate destruction of Buddhist confession in the U.S.S.R., as well as in the allied countries – Mongolia and Tannu Tuva in the 1920s-1930s.

NOTES:

1. *VKP(b), Komintern i Yaponiya, 1917-1941* [AUCP(B), Comintern and Japan, 1917-1941], Moscow, 2001, 700 pp.; V. Safronov, *SSSR, SShA i yaponskaya agressiya na Dal'nem Vostoke i Tikhom okeane, 1931-1945 gg.* [The U.S.S.R., the U.S.A. and Japanese Aggression in the Far East and Pacific Ocean, 1931-1945], Moscow, 2001, 453 pp.

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43. *Rezolyutsii IX s'ezda TARP* [Resolutions of the 9th Congress of the Tannu Tuva Workers' Party], Kyzyl, 1932, pp. 5, 16.
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