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メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2009-04-28 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Glavatskaya, Elena メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	<a href="https://doi.org/10.15021/00002802">https://doi.org/10.15021/00002802</a>

## Religious and ethnic identity among the Khanty: processes of change

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The Khanty (formally known as Ostyak) are a Finno-Ugric people, numbering approximately 22,000. They are one of the 26 widely-dispersed small indigenous peoples of Russia. The great majority of the Khanty still live in Khanty-Mansiysk National Okrug, while others live in Jamalo-Nenetskiy National Okrug and Tomskaya oblast.

Three Khanty groups, northern, southern, and eastern, can be distinguished by their means of subsistence, language and culture. The economies of all three Khanty groups were in the main based on hunting, trapping, and gathering. In the north, reindeer herding supplemented this pattern; in the south, agriculture. Traditionally, the Khanty lived in widely-scattered extended family settlements. Many are now literate in Russian and fluently bilingual. Despite the missionary work of the Orthodox Church and the suppression of religion during the Soviet era, traditional rituals and beliefs are still alive in some areas. The southern Khanty were incorporated into Russian society by the middle of this century, and no longer live a traditional way of life.

The process of ethnic consolidation of the Khanty started later than that of their neighbors, the Russians, the Komi, and the Tartars, due to the traditional pattern of settlement. Because of the distribution of natural resources in the Siberian taiga, Khanty life has been traditionally concentrated within small settlements. It was not possible to live in large settlements and communities because of the long distances involved in travelling to areas for hunting, trapping, and gathering. In each major river catchment one could find a few small settlements, 10-40 km apart (Gemuev et al. 1989: 22). These groups developed dialects of their own. Today, six main Khanty dialects are usually distinguished.

By the beginning of the Russian colonization of Siberia at the end of the 16th century there were several Khanty *knjazhestva* (principalities) of varying sizes in north-western Siberia. The biggest and the most powerful among them was Koda, on the east bank of the Ob River. The sixteenth century was a period of political consolidation, when the major principalities were struggling against each other for political superiority. Russian conquest, and the system of rule that was established in Siberia, affected the social and political structures of Khanty societies and hindered autonomous development. A few Khanty nobles died during the wars and uprisings against Russian power; some were taken as *amanaty* (hostages) to Russian towns; and others had to accept subordination to the Russian powers in Siberia. The major Khanty principalities lost their political independence, and hence their significance as autonomous political centers.

Nevertheless, some managed to keep their role as religious centers, each with its own sacred places where Khanty used to come at certain times to make sacrifices and worship their deities (Bakhrushin 1955: 86-152).

Since that time, ethnic religions and religious identity have become factors of great importance in the ethnic consolidation of the Khanty. It is important, therefore, to trace religious change and its influence on Khanty ethnic identity from the beginning of missionary activity, through the atheistic policies of the Russian State, up to present-day religious revitalization. These religious changes have varied in different periods and places within the Khanty area.<sup>1</sup> The approach of the present chapter is to distinguish types of religious change among the Khanty and define their influence on ethnic identity at the every stage of the process. It is important first to present a brief history of the interaction between the ethnic religion of the Khanty on the one hand, and Christianity and atheistic ideology on the other, focusing particularly on their influence on religious and ethnic identity.

### **Religious changes among the Khanty: a bird's-eye view**

#### ***I***

At the beginning of Russian development of the Khanty lands in the 17th century, baptizing indigenous peoples was not an end in itself, but merely accompanied colonization as a whole. Russian Government policy prohibited forced baptism of people dwelling in north-western Siberia. This policy was enacted because of the insecure position of the Russians in that region. An uprising among the indigenous peoples was a real danger at that time, and military forces were not sufficient to defend Russian forts or peasant settlements. The Government preferred to deal with non-baptized but peaceful indigenous peoples.

There was also a strong economic reason for the Russian Government not to promote intensive baptism of the Khanty. Since furs were Russia's main export item at that time, it was economically dependent on *jasak* - the fur tax paid by the Siberian indigenous peoples to the Russian State. The average value of *jasak* at the turn of the 17th century was 5-12 sables per person per year, which roughly corresponded to the price of a cow. However, it was a common Russian practice in the 17th century that those who became baptized were exempt from paying *jasak*.

The Orthodox Church, which might otherwise have initiated a process of baptism, was in a similar situation to that of the Russian Government. It did not have enough resources, either material or financial, nor sufficient priests, to baptize the indigenous peoples. The lack of priests was particularly severe. Some Siberian towns had no priest until the creation of the Diocese of Siberia in Tobolsk in 1621. The local governor of Tobolsk reported to the Czar that many Christians were dying without receiving communion, and many Russian babies remained unbaptized. Moreover, the position of the Russian Orthodox Church in the 17th century was complicated by two unfavorable factors. The Church was wrestling with secular powers for its economic and spiritual

independence, and was trying to maintain its integrity in the face of divisions among clerical parties. The Russian Orthodox Church was defeated in both battles. It split into the Orthodox Church and the Old Believers in 1666, and it had become totally subordinated to the state by 1721. Thus, neither the Russian Government nor the Orthodox Church was able to undertake extensive baptisms of the Khanty in the 17th century.

There was, however, one sector of society which was very interested in baptizing indigenous people, namely, the 'Cossacks' and 'Strelets' - members of the Russian State military service in Siberia. These troops were used by the Russian State to defend its eastern borders and to conquer new territories. They fought against those Siberian peoples who aligned themselves with the Tartars or made efforts to become independent, and who did not want to pay fur taxes to the Russian Czar. It was a common Russian practice in the 16th - 17th centuries that all indigenous people captured by the Cossacks during military actions were considered Cossack property. By contrast, the Government was interested in limiting the enslavement of indigenous people in order to retain them as *jasak* payers. Contrary to the position of the Russian Government regarding forced baptism in Siberia, therefore, the Russian military was eager to baptize indigenous people after capturing them in the course of such conflicts because baptism released them from the obligatory fur tax and the new owners could then use them as serfs, or even sell them to other Russians.

The military thus turned out to be the most concerned and active 'missionaries' in the region. Frequently occupied with military operations, they resorted to force as the only way of converting indigenous people to Christianity. Siberia was very distant from the center of the State and its bureaucracy, and it could take several months to bring the Czar's orders from Moscow to Siberia. In this situation Cossacks and Strelets felt themselves less dependant on state orders and acted on their own initiative. Several Acts were issued during the 17th century in which the Russian Government prohibited forced baptism of Siberian peoples, but these laws were often ignored (Glavatskaia 1996: 229-240). Fortunately for the indigenous people, however, the practice of forced baptism did not become widespread, contrary as it was to the Government policy of limiting the enslavement of these peoples, and against baptism, in order to retain them as suppliers of valuable furs.

There were also other influences on the spread of Christianity among the Khanty. In contrast to its position regarding the baptism of ordinary indigenous people, the Russian Government welcomed the adoption of Christianity by noble Khanty and even legally promoted it by a number of laws which gave Christian nobility priority of inheritance of ancestral lands and power over their kinsfolk. Thus by adopting Christianity, noble Khanty became incorporated into the Russian administrative system in Siberia. These noble converts usually practiced both Orthodox and indigenous rituals (Glavatskaia 1996: 234).

The increasing exhaustion of hunting and fishing resources on Khanty lands inevitably led to the inability of some Khanty to pay the obligatory *jasak*, and consequently was a reason for voluntary baptism and its associated automatic exemption

from *jasak*. Also, some parents sold or pawned their children to Russians during periods of starvation. Usually such children were baptized by these patrons. Voluntary baptism was also attractive for some indigenous individuals because it led to their exemption from the fur tax and the exculpation of any criminal charges; undergoing baptism cleared a person of all sin, even murder. In such a situation the Khanty regarded baptism as a way of escape.

By the end of the 17th century the Russian colonization of Siberia had resulted in a small number of new converts among the Khanty. Converted indigenous people had three alternatives following baptism: first, to remain at the monastery or nunnery where they were baptized; second, to become servants to a Russian family; and third, to be taken into state service as Cossacks.

Measures were taken to strengthen people in their new faith. Apart from giving them baptismal presents, Paul, the Metropolitan of Siberia and Tobolsk, was instructed by the Czar to treat the Siberian peoples kindly so that their kinsfolk would be well disposed towards accepting baptism at a later date (Polnoje sobranije zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii s 1649 g. 1825 Vol.II: 662). The common policy was that it was not allowed for the newly-converted to return to their former way of life, because the possibility that they would revert to their old ways was so great. The obligatory isolation of the converted from their kinsfolk increased Russian cultural influence among the newly-baptized, with the result that converts gradually lost their ethnic as well as their religious identity. However, during the 17th century the Khanty as a whole managed to retain both their religious and ethnic identity.

## II

At the beginning of the 18th century, the policy of the Russian State towards the Siberian peoples changed. The Russian political position in Siberia became stronger and more stable, in part because the Russian population had grown to outnumber the indigenous inhabitants of the area. The economic interests of the Russian State in north-western Siberia turned to mining, iron works and the industrial development of the territories, and away from the fur trade. Russia was also rapidly developing into a powerful empire with a national identity of its own.

In 1701 the Russian Orthodox Church was ordered by Czar Peter I (1689-1725) to baptize the Siberian peoples, and given the power to use all means necessary to do so. The Metropolitan Feolophey Leschinski, who made several voyages to Khanty settlements, conducted intensive missionary work during the period 1712-1726. He was accompanied by military troops and a translator, and baptized numerous Khanty. Altogether 40,000 Khanty, Mansi, Selkups, Nenets and other indigenous peoples were baptized during that time, according to official reports. Hundreds of Khanty images of gods were seized and burned during that time by Orthodox missionaries. Many sacred places where the Khanty worshipped and made sacrifices to their deities were desecrated and destroyed. This did not prevent Khanty from making new images and creating new sacred places. However, those few of them who lived in constant close contact with Russians were ready to change their indigenous religion for Orthodoxy. In general, the

majority of Khanty managed to keep their religion even during that period of enforced baptism. The failure of the Russian Government's policies of Christianization in relation to the Siberian indigenous peoples may be explained by the fact that mass baptisms did not give missionaries the opportunity to isolate converts from their former ethnic, cultural and religious environment.

Russian cultural and religious influence increased along with the growth of the Russian population in Siberia, with the erection of numerous churches and chapels in the Khanty area, and the implementation of a system of control over converts. Some of the Khanty gradually accepted various elements of Christianity, but preserved their indigenous religion as well; both religions existed side by side. The descendants of those who had been baptized during the first century of Russian colonization, however, became more and more Russian in the course of the 18th century.

As the Russian authorities realized that enforced Christianization of the Khanty was not having the desired results, namely full conversion and the relinquishment of the indigenous religion, they ended this form of direct action, although by this time almost all Siberian people were baptized. The abandonment of forced baptism became more pronounced by the latter half of the 18th century. During the reign of Empress Ekaterina II (1762-1796) religious tolerance was promoted (*Polnoje sobranije zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii s 1649 g. 1825 Vol.XVIII: 275*). A special committee of experts was sent to Siberia by the Empress to investigate indigenous peoples' complaints regarding abuses by missionaries. The findings resulted in the elimination of enforced baptism.

### *III*

A new wave of missionary activity occurred on the eastern frontier of the Russian Empire during the 19th century as a result of which Christian ideas gradually penetrated further into Khanty life. The groups that were in close contact with Russian settlers were eager to take part in at least some Christian rituals. Many agreed to be baptized, but practiced their indigenous religious rituals as well. Those people who had already been baptized during the former periods were finally incorporated into the Russian Orthodox community.

Although most of the Khanty were baptized by that time, it is evident that they were far from being considered Christians. Numerous priests and explorers reported that the Khanty (as well as other Siberian peoples) did not follow Christian ethics, did not attend church, and made sacrifices to their indigenous deities. Missionaries were faced with the problem of making baptized Khanty follow the prescribed Christian disciplines which, given the nomadic Khanty life as hunters, fishermen and reindeer herders, was difficult.

The development of Russian national self-consciousness resulted in a search for the roots and sources of 'Russianism' in Orthodoxy. Russian State interests were understood by the majority of Russian society as a quick and absolute incorporation of all non-Russian peoples into the Russian Orthodox community structure, which inevitably implied ethnic acculturation. Converted Siberian peoples were expected to become 'Russians', live like Russians, speak Russian, be faithful Orthodox believers and active parishioners. The idea that 'Christianization meant Russification', spread among

missionaries as well (Glavatskaia 1997: 73-81). From that time onward, the Khanty found themselves under more serious pressure from the Orthodox Church and secular authorities.

Radical economic and lifestyle changes affected Khanty people in regions where the Russian population predominated, and it was inevitable that they would become Russified. Christianity, with its associated destruction of the indigenous religious and ethnic identity, spread throughout the majority of the native south Khanty population.

It is interesting to note that a close connection between ethnicity and religion was also clear for the Khanty themselves. This view is obvious from the argument which some Khanty used when they refused to be baptized and yet wanted to be polite and reasonable. They used to say that they certainly would like to be baptized but could not, because they did not speak the Russian language and did not live like Russians. That is, they did not consider themselves Russian enough to become Christians.

In order to reconcile two different religious systems and make it easier for Khanty to accept Christianity, some missionaries tried to explain their ideas using terms understandable by their congregation. Such missionaries were familiar with the ethnic religion and habits of the Khanty and used this knowledge in their work. For example, to express the idea of God they used the idea of Torm or Numi Torm, the Supreme Deity of the Khanty. To express the idea of Jesus Christ they used the idea of Mir Vanty Khu, another important Khanty deity, the younger son of Numi Torm. The idea of the Virgin Mother was explained through the image of Anki Pugos, a female deity, who was the sister or wife of Numi Torm and the mother of Mir Vanty Khu, according to the Khanty beliefs. This means of promoting Christianity increased syncretism in the beliefs and ritual practices of some Khanty. The more orthodox clergy criticized these missionaries, even if their sermons prepared the ground for Christian ideas in the minds of the Khanty.

Some Khanty moved to the far northern or eastern areas as soon as Russian colonizers appeared. These groups managed to keep both their religious and ethnic identities largely intact, in spite of Russian State and Orthodox Church pressure, until the Soviet era.

#### *IV*

The atheistic ideology of the totalitarian Soviet State, and the system of compulsory education in particular, as well as economic change, led to Russification and the destruction of both the religious and the ethnic identity of the Khanty. The heaviest blows were inflicted upon the weakest links in the chain of religious and ethnic cultural transmission. The establishment of boarding schools separated children from their families' everyday life and vital rituals. Thus, school children had no possibility of practicing their native languages and at the same time were exposed to Russian culture. For some of them this meant the loss of both religious and ethnic identity.

In 1918 a State Decree was issued that proclaimed freedom of worship in Soviet Russia (Institut Marxizma-Leninizma 1957: 373). Yet the policies of the Bolshevik party towards religion were more radical and meant an uncompromising fight against any manifestations of religious consciousness (KPSS v rezoljucijah i reshenijah 1983: 83).

When the Bolsheviks gained power in Russia and the state became totalitarian, this fight intensified. In their fight against religion, state authorities used political, economic, social and psychological measures. According to the constitution approved in 1918, all shamans, Orthodox priests and their family members were disenfranchised. They could not be elected and could not take part in the elections of either the Supreme Council or village councils. These measures had as their aims the isolation of shamans from the everyday life of their kinsfolk, and priests from their congregations, and the undermining of their authority. Since there was no strict definition of a shaman, among the disenfranchised were both persons who practiced shamanic seances and those who only practiced common rituals, such as knocking on an axe before going to hunt.

There was also direct persecution of shamans for their activities. As early as 1926, a crime-prevention committee in the Tobolsk region decided to consider shamanism as a crime, and hence used the militia to persecute shamans who insisted young people should participate in worship or in sacrificial rituals. Healing seances performed by shamans were also forbidden, and provided another reason for persecution. In 1933, the state political board carried out the search for so-called 'counter-revolutionary elements', including shamans and Orthodox priests, in order to arrest and deport them (Radchenko and Smirnova 1994: 222-225).

Various means were used to incite the Khanty against shamans and Orthodox priests. Numerous articles were published in mass media newspapers and magazines, as well as special booklets, describing shamans and Orthodox priests as greedy for money, liars, and criminals (see for example, Eristov 1933). Many plays performed during that time in Khanty settlements depicted shamans as enemies of the common people. Many anti-religious placards were displayed in schools. Children were given an important role in the struggle, since they were expected to bring home an entirely negative attitude towards religion and to spread it among their adult relatives. In acts of direct sacrilege aimed at the both the indigenous religion and the Orthodox Church, atheistic activists destroyed cultic and sacred places. Apart from Soviet and party activists, some Khanty who had abandoned their beliefs and adopted the new ideology, participated in these anti-religious activities. Their negative attitudes towards either the indigenous religion or the Orthodox Church affected their kinsfolk greatly.

Besides all these measures against shamans and priests, much was done to fight against religious beliefs in general. Schools became the main battlefield in this struggle. For this reason, during the famous Kazym uprising of the Khanty in 1931-1933, people demanded that local schools should be closed. Pupils were violently recruited to schools and parents were not allowed to take their children back. On one occasion the chief of the regional education board beat a parent who came to take his son home (Radchenko and Smirnova 1994: 205-209).

In the Soviet totalitarian atheistic state there was no place for heterodoxy. Visible manifestations of religious belief had to be kept exclusively within the family or sometimes even restricted to the personal level, since public rituals were strictly forbidden. This policy resulted in the rapid loss of indigenous and Orthodox religions, and replacement of ethnic identities by so-called Soviet identity among almost all Khanty



groups. It was also within this period that shamans lost almost all their main 'supernatural' obligations: those of predicting, healing, and mediating with the deities in favor of their kinsfolk. The only function of shamans which was still alive and vital, and which the state could not replace, was their vast experience in conducting the traditional way of life, and their knowledge of cultural traditions, habits, manners, legends, myths, songs, games, stories, and so on. That is, in sum, all those things which make it possible to distinguish those people from all others, and help to maintain their ethnic identity.

## V

The 1980s were marked by the rapid weakening of the power of the Communist party in the country, and a decline in the strength of its ideology, influence, and control over the minds of the Soviet people. From that time the idea that all peoples of the Soviet Union were becoming a so-called 'sole Soviet nation' was put aside, and the dramatic rise of national identities became the main tendency. While many of the other manifestations of Khanty ethnic identity had been almost lost by the 1980s and despite all actions against their indigenous religion, the latter remained significant and visible. So it is not surprising that when a process of Khanty ethnic consolidation emerged, it focused on the problem of legitimizing the right of the indigenous people to live a traditional way of life, and was directed towards revitalization of religious festivals and forgotten rituals.

A sizeable number of Khanty had lost their religious identity during the preceding atheistic period. Very few of those who have lost their language, traditions, and culture still identify themselves as Khanty. They live in Russian towns as a part of the Russian majority and are not involved in the process of ethnic and religious revitalization.

The Russian Orthodox Church was revitalized at the end of the Communist atheistic epoch. Renewed proselytizing was aimed at bringing people back into the fold of the Russian Orthodox Church, and in some cases has been successful. This process, however, does not result in the strengthening of ethnic identity. All of these main tendencies are developing in various parts of north-western Siberia, and making an impact on the processes of religious and ethnic change among the Khanty.

### **Religious change among the Khanty: a classification**

#### ***General classification of religious changes***

The idea of categorizing religious change according to how a foreign religion has been accepted, was first proposed by Åke Hultkrantz. He distinguished three main types of response by an indigenous religion to a foreign one (Hultkrantz 1973: 214-217). This schema was used by Håkan Rydving in his research on religious changes among the Saami, with a focus, however, on changes in the indigenous religion and not on how Christianity was accepted. Thus he distinguished three main possible types of development:

- (A) A positive development involving a strengthening of the indigenous religious heritage can lead to both
  - (A1) the preservation of the indigenous religion, or

- (A2) its revitalization; old rites are revived and renewed.
- (B) A negative development involving an acceptance of the foreign religion can result in
  - (B1) two religions functioning side by side,
  - (B2) established syncretism, or
  - (B3) total absorption of the foreign religion and decline of the indigenous one.
- (C) A manifestly positive, but latently negative, development occurs when traditional and new religious elements are integrated into a new whole, a new religion. (Rydving 1993: 13-14)

***Classification of religious changes among the Khanty***

The history of the interaction between the ethnic religion of the Khanty, Christianity, and an atheistic ideology, reveals several types of religious change. In order to categorize these changes it has been necessary to develop a classification relevant to the Khanty case, which can take into consideration the peculiarity of the atheistic period and the importance of religious identity for the process of ethnic consolidation among the Khanty. Thus, to analyze the Khanty case, it became necessary to categorize the types of religious development not only according to how the indigenous religion reacted to the pressure of a foreign religion, but also according to how it affected ethnic identity at each stage of the process. It is possible to distinguish four main types of religious development:

- (A) A development involving a strengthening of the indigenous religious heritage and the preservation of ethnic identity (EI), which can lead to
  - (A1) the preservation of the indigenous religion, or
  - (A2) its revitalization; old rites are revived and renewed.
- (B) A development involving the acceptance of the foreign religion. This type of religious change does not inevitably mean change to the core of ethnic identity (EI), but it can have various results:
  - (B1) both religions exist side by side with different functions,
  - (B2) established syncretism, or
  - (B3) total absorption of the foreign religion and the decline of the indigenous religion. This almost always results in the formation of a new identity (NI).
- (C) A development involving the formation of a new religion.
- (D) A development involving the weakening of religious identities, but with the indigenous religion not being replaced by a foreign one. It can result in:
  - (D1) a weaker form of religious identity, or even
  - (D2) the collapse of religious identity.
 Both cases result in the weakening of ethnic identity and the formation of a new additional identity (NI).

It should be noted that these developments have reference to situations at certain points in time. In the short survey above of the history of the interaction between three elements - the ethnic religion of the Khanty, Christianity and the atheistic ideology of the

Soviet State - one can readily distinguish several periods. Using change in Russian State policies towards indigenous religions as the main criterion (focusing mainly on their goals and the methods of their realization), five distinct periods can be identified:

Period I - (the late 16th century-1700) - includes events from the beginning of Russian colonization of the Khanty lands until 1701, when the Russian emperor Peter I issued a decree to baptize all indigenous Siberian peoples, a time of minimal baptismal activity;

Period II - (1701-late 18th century) - the time of active policies of forced baptism of the Khanty;

Period III - (19th century-1920s) - the time of widespread missionary work and missionary institutions along with programs of Russification of the indigenous peoples of Siberia;

Period IV - (1930s-1970s) - the time of anti-religious policies, religious persecutions and the system of compulsory education, which led to the loss of ethnic identity;

Period V - (1980s-1990s) - the time of weakening state control over religion, the rise of ethnic identity, and the revitalization of religions.

Table 1 presents a historical overview of religious changes among different Khanty communities and groups of individuals, and their influence upon the ethnic identity of the Khanty. The horizontal axis is divided into five distinct periods of Russian State policy towards religion. The vertical axis is divided into six different Khanty communities and/or groups of individuals which are distinguishable by the extent of Russian cultural influence on each. Group 1 comprises Khanty communities of the far north and other largely inaccessible areas which experienced very little if any Russian influence until the 20th century. Group 2 consists of communities that were only slightly touched by Russian culture by the late 19th century when they migrated to the main body of the Ob River from its tributaries. Group 3 includes communities and groups of individuals who experienced strong Russian influence as a result of intensive missionary work by newly-established Orthodox mission institutes, or their involvement in Russian trade and industrial enterprises. Group 4 comprises communities which were located some distance from Russian settlements, often on the Ob's tributaries, and which gradually accepted Christianity as a result of frequent contact with the Russian population. Group 5 represents the Khanty nobility who accepted Christianity, lived in Russian settlements and merged into Russian society in two or three generations. Group 6 consists of individuals who were baptized and isolated from their kin's influence as early as the 17th century. EI stands for traditional ethnic identity, NI for new identity. Religious change accompanied by the formation of a new identity is judged to be negative and marked '-': religious change which involves the retention of indigenous ethnic identity is judged to be positive and marked '+'.

**Table 1** Religious changes among the Khanty and their influence on Khanty ethnic identity

Groups	Periods of Russian State policy towards religion									
	I		II		III		IV		V	
1	A1 EI	+	A1 EI	+	A1 EI	+	D1 EI	-	A2 EI	+
2	A1 EI	+	A1 EI	+	B1 EI	+	D1 EI	-	B1 EI	+
3	A1 EI	+	A1 EI	+	B1 NI	-	D1 NI	-	B3 NI	-
4	A1 EI	+	B1 EI	+	B1 EI	+	D1 EI	-	B1 EI	+
5	B1 EI	+	B3 NI	-	B3 EI	-	D1 NI	-	D2 NI	-
6	B3 NI	-	B3 NI	-	B3 NI	-	D1 NI	-	B3 NI	-

### Conclusions

Summarizing this short survey of the history of religious encounters among the Khanty it is possible to make the following statements:

- Indigenous religion has always played an important role in the maintenance of Khanty ethnic identity. Full (A1) or even partial (B1, B2) preservation of the indigenous religion resulted in the preservation of ethnic identity among the Khanty.
- The period of forced baptism did not significantly affect the religious or ethnic identity of the Khanty in general.
- Christianization, along with a rapid increase in Russian influence and isolation from kinsfolk, led to a loss of ethnic identity for some Khanty (groups 3, 5, 6).
- The acceptance of Christianity among some Khanty (group 4) was halted by the influence of the atheistic policy of the Soviet State during Period IV.
- Religious change C, the formation of a new religion, has never been reported among the Khanty.
- The forced destruction of religious traditions (whether indigenous or Orthodox) during the atheistic period resulted in the destruction of ethnic identity.
- The contemporary process of the maintenance of ethnic identity among the Khanty is closely connected with the maintenance and revitalization of the indigenous religion, and renewal of its rites (groups 1, 2, 4).

## Acknowledgements

This paper was prepared at the Center for Advanced Studies (SHS) of the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters. It is my pleasure to thank here the administration of the Center and all the colleagues with whom I worked in 1998-1999. I also wish to express special thanks to Professor Håkan Rydving for his valuable criticism and comments during my work on this study.

## Notes

- 1) Mapping religious change among the Khanty is a very important task, and could be a subject for future research.

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