

**THE EAST ASIAN EXARCHATE OF THE MOSCOW  
PATRIARCHATE OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH  
IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 1950S**

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**Abstract:** *The article analyzes the East Asian Exarchate of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church established on the territory of China in 1946. The basis of the research was archival sources, documents of the State Archives of the Russian Federation. Reports, correspondence of the leadership of the Exarchate with the Moscow Patriarchate, with the Council for the affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church under the Council of Ministers of the USSR were used for the article. The authors highlight the existence of the Exarchate within the framework of the dioceses of the Orthodox Church on the territory of China during the change of the state policy in the relations of religions. It is noted that the period of the Exarchate's formation was during the difficult years of the departure of Orthodox believers from China, due to which the number of parishioners was reduced. In addition, the authors emphasize that it is necessary to further study the history of the existence and activities of the East Asian Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church with the introduction of new, previously unknown documents into the scientific circulation.*

**Keywords:** religion, orthodoxy, parish, East Asian Exarchate, Exarch, spiritual mission, China.

The history of Orthodoxy in China has recently attracted increasing interest among researchers and the public. There is a certain number of publications of Russian and foreign researchers, in which the authors give a description of various aspects of the existence and activity in the country of the Russian Orthodox Church.

There are several general works on the history of Orthodoxy in China. Undoubtedly, the main specialists are Dionysius<sup>1</sup> (Pozdnyaev) and V. Datsyshen.<sup>2</sup> There are also some other generalizing works.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dionysius (Pozdnyaev), „The Chinese Orthodox Church on the road to autonomy”, in *Problems of the Far East*, no. 4, 1998, pp. 125-134; Idem, *Orthodoxy in China (1900-1997)*, Moscow, Svyato-Vladimir Brotherhood, 1998, p. 276; Idem, *The Church in China: Towards Autonomy, Alpha and Omega*, available at: [www.aliom.orthodoxy.ru](http://www.aliom.orthodoxy.ru), accessed on 05.XI.2017.

<sup>2</sup> V. G. Datsyshen, Bishop Innokenty (Figurovsky), „The beginning of a new stage in the history of the Russian Spiritual Mission in Beijing”, in *Chinese evangelist*, no. 1. 2000; V. G. Datsyshen, *History of the Russian Spiritual Mission in China. Hong Kong: Orthodox Brotherhood of the Saints of the First-Old Apostles Peter and Paul*, 2010, pp. 448; Idem, *Chinese*

Many publications exist on the history of the Orthodox Spiritual Mission in China, which examine the period before the establishment of Soviet power in China. These are the works of S. A. Golovin,<sup>4</sup> A. B. Efimov,<sup>5</sup> A. S. Fuganov,<sup>6</sup> S. A. Shubina.<sup>7</sup>

Wonderful book *The last articles and documents* of Ksenia Keping was published in 2003, which contains the texts of K. Keping, the Exarch and some works by other authors.<sup>8</sup> Ksenia Keping is a witness of the events, niece of the Exarch of the East Asian Exarchate Victor (Svyatin).

Despite the existence of a certain number of publications, the history of Orthodoxy in China is not studied evenly. Not all facts have an unambiguous assessment, there are certain gaps. In the opinion of the authors, it is possible to give a more detailed description of the history of the existence and activity of the East Asian Exarchate of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The characterization of the state of the Exarchate is given in one of the reports of the Patriarchal Exarch in East Asia and the Head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission to the People's Republic of China

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*Orthodox Church on the eve and during the Second World War. State, society, church in the history of Russia of the XX century*, Ivanovo, Ivanovo State University, 2016, pp. 124-130; Idem, *Christianity in China: History and Modernity*, Moscow, Scientific and Educational Forum on International Relations, 2007, p. 240.

<sup>3</sup> N. M. Vekshina, *Orthodoxy in China. Cognition of the beyond: modern oriental studies and spiritual traditions of the East*, available at: [www.torchinov.com](http://www.torchinov.com), accessed on 05.XI.2017; Palladiy (Kafarov), *Some considerations about the alleged establishment of an Orthodox preaching mission in China*, The Chinese Evangelist, 1915, pp. 36-45; M. L. Titarenko, *Orthodoxy in China*, Moscow, Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, 2010, p. 251.

<sup>4</sup> S. A. Golovin, *Albazinty in China and the founding of the Russian spiritual mission. Russia and China: history and perspectives of cooperation*, Blagoveshchensk, Blagoveshchensk State Pedagogical University, 2016, pp. 137-147; Idem, *The Russian Spiritual Mission in China: A Historical Sketch*, Blagoveshchensk, Publisher BSPU, 2013, p. 284.

<sup>5</sup> A. B. Efimov, *Essays on the history of missionary work of the Russian Orthodox Church*, Moscow, Svyato-Tikhonovsky University, 2007, p. 688.

<sup>6</sup> A. S. Fuganov, „On the Anniversary of the Beijing Spiritual Mission”, in *Herald of the Russian Christian Humanitarian Academy*, volume 14, no. 1, 2013, pp. 34-41.

<sup>7</sup> S. A. Shubina, *Russian Orthodox Mission in China (XVIII-early XX centuries)*, Yaroslavl, Yaroslavl State University named after P. G. Demidov, 1998, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Archbishop Victor (Svyatin), *The property of the Russian spiritual mission in China as of January 11, 1950 in Ksenia Keping, Latest articles and documents*, St. Petersburg, 2003, pp. 314-327; T. A. Bogdanova, O. V. Vasilyeva, *Archives of Metropolitan Victor (Svyatin) in the Russian National Library in Ksenia Keping. Latest articles and documents*, St. Petersburg, Omega, 2003, pp. 314-327; K. Keping, *The last head of the Russian spiritual mission in China*, St. Petersburg, Omega, 2003, pp. 264-272; K. Keping, *The fate of the Russian spiritual mission in China*, St. Petersburg, Omega, 2003, pp. 236-263.

Archbishop Victor (Svyatin) addressed to His Holiness Patriarch Alexy of Simansky of Moscow and All Russia. He noted that in recent years the demands of the Chinese population have constantly changed, including in terms of satisfying religious needs. At the same time, the authorities were forced to react to the changing situation. Governmental Religious departments sought ways to expediently organize the religious life of the people, not limited to declaring freedom of conscience and confession. In this situation, according to the Exarch, the Orthodox Church could provide significant assistance to the Chinese government.<sup>9</sup> However, the leadership of the Exarchate believed that the active participation of the Exarchate and the Mission in spreading Orthodoxy in Chinese territory could lead to problems at the considered time.

According to the Exarch, the Chinese authorities were very wary of such a new, little-known religious institution as the East Asian Exarchate, at the beginning of the 1950s. The reason is that the East Asian Exarchate was headed by a foreigner, located on the territory of China. On the other hand, it was financially and administratively dependent on the USSR. Because of these reasons, several difficulties arose. It was almost impossible to cope with the difficulties. This made the existence of the Exarchate very difficult.

It was almost impossible to obtain visiting documents for representatives of the Orthodox clergy in China at the turn of the 1940s-1950s. It was impossible to leave the settlements that were the diocesan centers of the new dioceses of the ROC in China. This led to the fact that the connection between the dioceses, between the parishes inside the dioceses, as well as the dioceses with the leadership of the Exarchate, gradually came to naught. While the dioceses of the center of China were still linked, remote dioceses lived their lives, in fact, in isolation. An example of a remote diocese was the Xinjiang Diocese.

The Bishop's Council of the Exarchate met only once because of difficulties with visiting documents. In addition to the difficulties with moving around the country since the Chinese authorities did not write out travel documents, there were other problems. So, the Chinese authorities did not give permission for the publication of the magazine of the Spiritual Mission, which had been published almost 50 years before, beginning in 1904 as „News of the Brotherhood of the Orthodox Church in China”, and since 1907 as „Chinese Evangelist”. It is noted in some works that the journal was closed in 1954 in connection

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<sup>9</sup> The State Archives of the Russian Federation (GARF), F. R6991, op. 1, j. 1106.

with the closure of the Spiritual Mission,<sup>10</sup> however Victor (Svyatin) said that the magazine had not been published since 1952. According to Victor, the work of the entire missionary printing and bookbinding was stopped at the same time.<sup>11</sup>

There were internal contradictions inherent in Chinese Orthodoxy. It was about a bishop of Chinese origin Simeone (Du), who occupied the Shanghai Department from 1950 to 1965. Victor (Svyatin) called him a „brake” in the development of the East Asian Exarchate, noting that he, relying on local organizations, undermined the foundations of the existence of the Orthodox Church in China as a single ecclesiastical organization within the Moscow Patriarchate.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, the Exarchate had financial difficulties. According to some reports, only 2.000 US dollars in 1950 were paid for the property of the Spiritual Mission in China. According to the Exarch, this completely undermined the economic foundations of the existence of both the Mission and the Exarchate in general. In addition, the incomes, due to which the budget was replenished earlier, disappeared. The income from the rent for the premises of the soap mill, the premises in the mission park, the villa in Peytayjo disappeared. The income house of the mission (at the address: Sinkaju 185) was transferred to the Government of China. Also, there was no income from the farmsteads in the Northeast of China (Manchuria) and in Shanghai.<sup>13</sup> The house in Peitaihao was occupied by the military units of the Chinese army. The remaining premises, previously rented, were not used. The Mission preferred to rent out premises without engaging in any production. This was mentioned in one of the letters of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Council of Ministers of the USSR, where it was said that property should be made cost-effective, and if it can not be done, then it must be transferred to the government of China to reduce maintenance costs.<sup>14</sup>

The authors consider that one of the most serious remarks is the idea that the legal status of the Exarchate at the beginning of the 1950s is not clear. Obligations and rights of the Exarchate were not understood.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps this was the reason for the ineffective activity of the Exarchate

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<sup>10</sup> A. Volokhova, O. Voropaeva, „Chinese Blagovestnik: a review of the journal for 1999-2000”, in *Problems of the Far East*, no. 4, 2001, pp. 172-176.

<sup>11</sup> The State Archives of the Russian Federation (GARF), F. R6991, op. 1, j. 1106.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, j. 1002.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, j. 1106.

leadership. Another point is that contacts with the Moscow Patriarchate were weak, as Viktor (Svyatin) wrote, „*I do not have any directives*”.<sup>16</sup> On the one hand, the lack of clear instructions was a negative factor, on the other, the Exarch had a certain independence in resolving internal issues.

Thus, the existence of the East Asian Exarchate can be described as rather complex. The first years of the East Asian Exarchate, in a state of division into dioceses, were during the difficult period for Orthodoxy in China. During this period, there was a significant departure from the country for Orthodox believers, which led to a reduction in parishioners, and ultimately to a reduction in financial revenues. In the literature there is a statement that this became the main reason for the decline of Orthodoxy in the country, and then the closing of the Spiritual Mission and the East Asian Exarchate. However, it is obvious that the division of the exarchate into the diocese played a big role. A small number of Orthodox believers could well exist within the framework of the Exarchate-the institutionalized structure of the Russian Orthodox Church. There was no need to create dioceses.

According to the author, the second component, which left a mark on the existence of the Exarchate, is the appointment of the Chinese by origin as clergymen and bishops. On the one hand, the shortage of priests led to this, and it was easier for Chinese clergy to communicate with Chinese parishioners, but on the other hand, it led to the development of internal contradictions in the church and the development of separatist tendencies. So, the confrontation arose between the first bishop of Chinese origin-Simon (Du) and the archpriest Michael Rogozhkin.<sup>17</sup>

Later, Simeon (Du) with Protopriest Michael Rogozhkin actively began to pursue a policy aimed at secession of the Shanghai Diocese from the East Asian Exarchate and the creation of an independent Chinese national Orthodox church.<sup>18</sup> The Shanghai Diocese represented two churches and one prayer house in a rented apartment in Shanghai, it is obvious that nothing good could come of this idea. The idea of creating an independent Chinese church was actively supported by Exarch Viktor (Svyatin) in one of the letters of the early 1950s. At the same time, he noted that „*the Shanghai Diocese, with the panic of its leaders, is rapidly on the decline*”.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, j. 1002.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, j. 1106.

The Exarchate's leadership could not resolve the issue with clergymen and deaneries in the Xinjiang Diocese for a long time. There were no replies to the requests at all, or the proposed candidates were immediately rejected by the Moscow Patriarchate.<sup>20</sup>

At first the unjustified division of the Exarchate into the diocese, then again the unjustified struggle for independence, several parishes in Shanghai, the Exarch's weak attention to the remote Xinjiang Diocese and to the internal affairs of the more closely-located dioceses caused the end of the Exarchate and the decline of Orthodoxy in China.

Archival documents give an incomplete assessment of the state of Orthodoxy in China in the late 1940s-early 1950s. It is called „confusion”. The result was the request of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church under the Council of Ministers of the USSR to the Soviet Embassy in China to clarify the true situation.<sup>21</sup>

There was no clear picture of the property of the Exarchate and the Spiritual Mission to the turn of the 40s-50s of the 20th century, which also raised questions in the Council for the ROC Affairs.<sup>22</sup>

It can be added that in fact the situation was not so bad as the Exarchate's management tried to describe in letters addressed to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Alexy (Simansky), as well as in reports and correspondence with the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church under the Council of Ministers THE USSR. Victor (Svyatin) noted in a letter of the end of 1952 that „310 people of Chinese nationality have been baptized lately, 550 pupils are currently studying free of charge in the schools of the mission”.<sup>23</sup> These were large enough figures that could influence the further development of Orthodoxy in the country.

The northern courtyard of the spiritual Mission of Beiguan received the Red Banner of Honors for the execution of orders of the civil government in 1952, believers actively participated in the „patriotic life of the people”. According to the authors, this indicates that there was no serious persecution of Orthodoxy by the Chinese authorities at the beginning of the 1950s and the decline of Orthodoxy was the result of internal actions.

The main problem of the Exarchate was the lack of money, but no action was taken to solve the problem. Moreover, Victor (Svyatin) noted that „the decisive factor for resolving problems would be the appointment of the

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, j. 1002.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, j. 1106.

*Exarch of East Asia as a healthier, more determined and more authoritative bishop and able to stand at the helm of the future Chinese Orthodox Church”<sup>24</sup>*

During the study of the history of Orthodoxy in China, it seems that the East Asian Exarchate had no prospects for development. Its closure was natural, the question was when it would be. It happened in 1954.

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem.*

