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The Russian Spiritual Mission in Japan and the Role of Nikolai Kasatkin

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Abstract

Spiritual religious relations among states and peoples are one of the most relevant topics for modern researchers since these relations become a unifying factor among states and nations even under conditions of armed conflict. A vivid example would be the activities of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Japan that have become an illustration of successful activity of the Orthodox Church. Especially it must be mentioned that this religious mission can't be successful without the fruitful activity of such historical persons as Nikolai Kasatkin. The multifaceted activity of Archbishop Nicholas deserves study at once for many reasons. Firstly, Nikolai Kasatkin was not only the spiritual representative of Russia in Japan, but an educator. He made a huge contribution through his translations of religious books. Nikolai Kasatkin began his translation activity from the study of Japan itself, its culture, religious literature and society. Secondly, he devoted an important role to pedagogical activity. Under his leadership the Catechetical College, Theological seminary, Seminary for Girls and other institutions were opened. Thirdly, despite the prohibition of Christianity in the initial period of the formation of missionary activity and further on the Russo-Japanese war, Nikolai Kasatkin continued to persistently explain to the Japanese people the attitude of the Orthodox religion. He found new ways to finance the activities of the spiritual mission in Japan persistently describing in detail all the necessary information to the Russian government in his telegrams. With the enormous support of the Japanese people and the Russian government, and through other sources of funding, Nikolai Kasatkin founded several churches that serve as spiritual centers in Japan to this day.

Keywords: Russia, Japan, history of missionary activity, Orthodoxy, religious relations, history of building of churches.

1. Introduction

Relevance of the research topic is currently determined both by complete lack of knowledge and lack of developed document and actual material, the major part of which has remained and remain to be inaccessible to researchers in Kazakhstani historiography. Many materials on the history of the Japanese Orthodox Church were lost during the dramatic events of the XXth century; therefore the most rapid introduction of preserved material into scientific use is of particular importance and necessity. Research on the Russian spiritual mission in Japan has also become more relevant since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Of course, there were studies on this subject in Soviet historiography, but due to the closed world of the Western world, Russian researchers did not have access to important documents and research in Japan itself.

Relevance of the research topic is also determined by the fact that the stable relations of the Russian Federation as our nearest neighbor with one of the leading states of the Asia-Pacific Region, Japan may affect Kazakhstan security. The Orthodox Church, orthodox tradition and orthodox spiritual culture are a living phenomenon and continue to have some impact on spiritual, cultural and social life not only in Japan but also in Kazakhstan. In addition, Kazakhstan as Russia in the foreign policy concept pays considerable attention to the Eurasian idea. In the Eurasian project of the President of the Russian Federation V. Putin,

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the Asia-Pacific region was defined by the Russian leadership as a necessary direction in the implementation of the Eurasian concept. Of course, now, in the context of a pandemic and differences in the national interests of these states, Eurasian cooperation in the trade and economic sphere is not fully realized. But the positive tendencies of spiritual and cultural rapprochement between Russia and Japan can further serve as a basis for this cooperation to implement the Eurasian concept. In this regard, this problem is not only of academic interest.

The development of the Russian ecclesiastical mission in Japan represented by Nikolai Kasatkin and his followers greatly contributed to the development of the Russian-Japanese relations particularly in the field of education and culture, facilitated by its varied works the spiritual rapprochement of the two nations with such different civilizations and cultures.

2. Materials and methods

The main sources on the topic of the work were the diaries of Nikolai Kasatkin and many other Russian researchers published in the form of research papers and monographs.

By now, a complete scientifically prepared and thoroughly commented publication of these lengthy diaries edited by the most prominent specialists on the history of Russian culture and Japanese Orthodoxy M. Naganawa, Y. Nakamura, K. Nakamura and R. Yasui was published in Japan. The first volume containing the notes for 1870–1876, 1879–1882, 1903–1905 was published by the press of Hokkaido university ([Dnevniky Svyatogo Nikolaya Yaponskogo, 1994](#)). Also the authors of this article used in the work the diaries of Nikolai Kasatkin published in 2003 ([Dnevniky Svyatogo Nikolaya Yaponskogo, 2003](#)) and in 2004 ([Dnevniky Svyatogo Nikolaya Yaponskogo, 2004](#)) years.

Periodicals of the Japanese Orthodox Church represent a special group of the sources. Archbishop Nikolai was also a creator of orthodox periodicals and orthodox book publishing in Japan. Materials on advancement of Orthodoxy in Japan during establishment of the Japanese Orthodox Church published in *The Moscow News* should be considered as an important source ([Gavrikov, 2011](#)).

After the death of Nikolai Kasatkin, appeared the works in the form of memoirs and obituaries, which also play a significant role as sources. This is the for example, the work of Arkhimandrit Sergii ([Arkhimandrit Sergii, 2013](#)).

Also these are, for example, the works by D.M. Pozdneev ([Pozdneev, 1912](#)) and S.V. Nedachin ([Nedachin, 1911](#)).

When solving the research problems, both general scientific methods (analysis and synthesis, specifications, generalization) and traditional methods of historical analysis were used. In studying the role and contribution of Nikolai Kasatkin to the development of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission a comparative historical, statistical research methods were used.

Analysis of the works by both the researchers before the XXIth century and modern researches, such as A. B. Efimov ([Efimov, 2007](#)), L.M. Ermakova ([Ermakova, 2005](#)), N. Sukhanova ([Sukhanova, 2013](#)) and others, forms the basis for the work.

Contribution of Nikolai Kasatkin and his activity in Japan is covered in the works by G.D. Ivanova ([Ivanova, 1996](#)), E.B. Sablina ([Sablina, 2006](#)), A.N. Khokhlov ([Khokhlov, 1994](#)), O.V. Shatalov ([Shatalov, 2000](#)).

3. Discussion

The problem of Russian missionary activity in Japan has been a closed topic for a long time in Russia. There were a few works after the decease of Nikolai Kasatkin, e.g. the works by D.M. Pozdneev ([Pozdneev, 1912](#)) and S.V. Nedachin ([Nedachin, 1911](#)). The importance of these works is that though the authors had no archive documents, they were able to receive information directly from the witnesses of that period, first of all, from Nikolai Kasatkin.

The works of Japanese authors, who like Archimandrite Sergius were in direct contact with Nikolai Kasatkin, should be noted as very significant sources. Japanese followers and successors of Archbishop Nikolai leaved evangelical works for Orthodox Japanese way back in 90s of XIXth – early XXth century. It stands to mention such authors as Ishikava Kindzaburo ([Kindzaburo, 1892](#); [Kindzaburo, 1893](#)), Midzushima Koe ([Koe, 1904](#)), Morita Re ([Re, 1904](#)).

After 1917, there was a long break in studying the history of the Japanese Orthodox Church. It was related to political changes in Russia. Small publications of that time of the Soviet print were dominated by a more critical view. According to this view the Japanese Orthodox Church served the interests of the Russian and Japanese imperialism. Studying of Orthodoxy was not encouraged in Japan either: in the pre-war years – under the impact of hardcore nationalist ideas, in the post-war years – under the impact of Marxist and Communist ideas. A change took place only by the late 1960s, which was due to preparation of Archbishop Nikolai for canonization by the Russian Orthodox Church and granting self-rule to the Japanese Orthodox Church in 1970. However, Japanese scientists confidently had the lead here because the history of Orthodoxy in Japan remained to be a closed topic for the Soviet academic science until the late 1980s.

Nevertheless, certain issues considered in our work, were touched upon by researchers to varying degrees. But these works were more bibliographic and reference literature, also in the form of textbooks on the history of Japan.

In the *Soviet period of Russian history*, certain problems related to the activities of the Orthodox Mission in Japan, were considered in the publications of the Moscow Patriarchate. Their appearance is directly related to the canonization of Archbishop Nicholas of Japan in 1970. In connection with this event, the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate" published a number of reference articles, in which attention is paid to first of all to the spiritual biography of St. Nicholas ([O kanonizatsii arkhiepiskopa Nikolaya Yaponskogo, 1970](#)).

It should also be noted that the very first scientific article where were considered the activities of St. Nicholas was published in 1977 in the magazine "Narody Azii i Afriki". This article deserves the most highly appreciated. In this article, the author described St. Nicholas as one of pioneers of Russian Japanese studies ([Sherbina, 1977](#)).

A more detailed description of the main stages in the life and work of St. Nicholas was developed by Antonii ([Antonii, 1976](#)).

From the late 1980s the history of Orthodoxy attracts increasingly greater attention of the Russian scientists. Informative historiographical works about Orthodoxy in Japan, life and activity of Archbishop Nikolai were published in recent years: "Life and work of Saint Nikolai of Japan" by G.D. Ivanova ([Ivanova, 1996](#)), "The Role of the Tokyo Orthodox Seminary in training of translators, specialists on Japan" by A.N. Khokhlov ([Khokhlov, 1994](#)) and others. These articles were included in the second issue of collection of works "Orthodoxy in the Far East" ([Pravoslavie na Dal'nem Vostoke, 1996](#)) dedicated to the memory of Archbishop Nikolai was the result of cooperation between the Saint Petersburg State University and the Saint Petersburg Theological Academy. The collection of works contains several articles about the activity of Nikolai Kasatkin, opinions of the Japanese authors about the Russian Ecclesiastic Mission in Japan and so on.

Cooperation of historians of the two countries in Japan is represented by the activities of the scientific society "The Russians in Japan", which mainly deals with the history of Russian Diaspora in the Far East but also pays a great deal of attention to the history of Orthodoxy in Japan. Meanwhile, it should be noted that more recently in Russia, the life and works of Archbishop Nikolai attract increasingly greater attention not only of scientists-historians but also of writers and journalists. The articles of the history of orthodoxy in Japan are published not only in academic but also in widely read periodicals (*Moscow Journal, Japan Today* and others), however, their scientific and authentic level quite often leaves room for improvement.

As the chronological scope for this research was the period of religious activity of Kasatkin in Japan. The researchers turn to an important stage in the history and evolution of the Ecclesiastical Mission covering the period from 1870 to 1912. The thing is that at this particular time the approval of the Ecclesiastic Mission took place, the main forms of its activity were generated, directions of cultural exchanges were outlined, its main institutes were established.

The period from 1870 to 1912 is characterized with the vigorous activity of Saint Nikolai (Ivan Dmitrievich Kasatkin, 1834–1912), who was the founder of the Ecclesiastic Mission. Certainly, the stage of the Mission's history during the Russian-Japanese war is somewhat different from previous years by its objectives. Nonetheless, it is, by all means, important and makes it possible to consider the problem of the Ecclesiastic Mission's activities in the war period (1904–1905). Since, despite the presence of a military conflict between Japan and Russia, the Russian spiritual mission in Japan, represented by Nikolai Kasatkin, continued its religious activities, providing all kinds of support in the spiritual enlightenment of the Japanese people. This experience is particularly relevant today and may be viewed as an example of successful activity of the Orthodox Church in the difficult years of the history.

Overview of the aforesaid publications makes it possible to state with confidence that there is a lack of special research dedicated directly to the subject of thesis, analysis of the activities of the Russian Ecclesiastic Mission in Japan from 1868 to 1912 before the XXIth century.

In the early XXIth century, the works which look at certain issues reviewed in our article saw the light. These are complex research works of E.B. Sablina and N. Sukhanova. The researcher E.B. Sablina in her work was the first to attempt to make a complex research of the history of the Japanese Orthodox Church based on achievements of various scientific disciplines, which had never been consolidated before. The scientific novelty of the work is primarily determined by field studies of the author who personally visited almost all Orthodox churches within Japan, interviewed their priests and parishioners, and prepared a collection of documents and photo materials based on the results of her trips. This is the first time in the history of the Russian Japanese studies when such work was done. And she also defended the candidate dissertation on this topic ([Sablina, 2006](#)).

It should also be noted the work of N. Sukhanova on the Orthodox mission of Russia in Japan. As noted by the author in her book for the first time, a detailed analysis of the historical legacy passed by the Japanese Orthodox Church in search of an adequate canonical status is offered. She reveals the influence of the external and internal political factors to the internal church situation of, as well as processes that have taken place in the modern history of the Russian Church. The work was carried out on a large volume of diverse, often inaccessible sources, accompanied by unique illustrative material ([Sukhanova, 2013](#)).

Of particular value are the publications relating to the history of the Russian Ecclesiastic Mission and activity of Nikolai of Japan, the authors of which are European and American specialists. Let us note that we references to the Ecclesiastical Mission can be found only in general works directly dedicated to the problems of contacts between Russia and Japan, the religious situation in Japan. These are the works of such authors as Anesaki (Anesaki, 1980), Hideo (Hideo, 1969), Bojanowska (Bojanowska, 2018), Wolff (Wolff, 2006), Chaplin (Chaplin, 2012). The authors of these publications limit themselves by brief information about the activities of the Mission.

The assessment of the activities of the Ecclesiastical Mission in Japan by European and American specialists, in our view, were, first of all, influenced by a certain tradition dating back to the late XIXth – early XXth century. Despite the seeming agreement among the Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant Churches in Japan, one cannot underestimate the existence of apparent or hidden competition which was proved by the life of the Orthodox community in the Japanese islands, of which Saint Nikolai wrote in his publications.

The issues related to the history of establishment of the Ecclesiastical Mission in Japan are most consistently and comprehensively covered in the works of the Japanese researchers who notably contributed to the studying the history of Orthodoxy in Japan and the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission. For Japanese scientists of different fields and scientific qualification, Orthodoxy at the modern stage as well as its history is daily reality.

Strengthening of Orthodox faith in Japanese environment was evidenced by construction of new cathedrals, improvements pertaining to publishing and pedagogical activities. These events were amply covered in the works of Japanese authors as Ushimary Yasuo (Yasuo, 1988).

Of the above listed publications by the Japanese authors, only chronological table and part of materials contained in the book by Naganawa Mitsuo were translated into Russian. Translation was made by L.V. Zenina (Zenina, 1996).

4. Results

The Christian religion in Japan began to establish not only with arrival of Nikolai Kasatkin in this country. Before the end of the XIXth century the Europeans also made attempts to advance the Christian religion in Japan.

The Christian religion reached the coast of Japan in the XIXth century. In 1494, Portugal and Spain signed an agreement according to which the whole world was divided into two by these maritime states. With the approval of the Pope they gained a monopoly for conquering the territories and trade in all seas and islands of their parts. Catholics were called for missionary sermon among pagans in the new lands. For that purpose, a priest or a monk was present on each ship.

The Portuguese arrived in Japan in 1542, and Jesuits missionaries showed up soon after that in 1549, the monks of the French order – only in 1593, and Protestants in 1600 (Efimov, 2007: 273).

For the first time, the proclamation of Gospel was started in Japan back in 1549 by the catholic monk Francis Xavier. In 1551, by the time of Francis's travel to China, Japan already had over three thousands of new Christians. Francis dreamt to start Christianization of China so that Christianity could then be adopted all over Japan. However, he was never able to implement this endeavor. In 1552, Francis passed away in the islands near China, and his companion Fernandez stayed in Japan (Bestremyannaya, 2006: 6).

Russian cosmographies of the XVIIth century report about the success of the catholic mission in Japan as follows: "Children are christened. For the sake of repentance they dry their bodies with fasting. Like us, they are christened against demoniacal temptations and obviously they will follow Christian morals and faith" (Ermakova, 2005: 183).

By the XVIIth century the number of people who adopted Christianity went up. By 1640 there were about 700 thousand Christians in Japan according to Western sources, about 300 thousand Christians according to Japanese ones. These data indicate the successful activity of Jesuits in Japan (Bestremyannaya, 2006: 275).

However, advancement of Christianity among Japanese population was not so smooth. Colonial competition of Spain and Portugal, arrivals of the Dutch and the English promoted the undermining of the authority of missionaries in eyes of the Japanese powers even more. Anti-Christian orders were adopted, as a result of which all Jesuits left Japan.

Japan became a closed country. In 1638, Japan was closed for foreigners legislatively under a threat of death penalty. Thus, the first attempts of the missionary activities failed. This situation lasted until the XIXth century, when Japan had already undergone significant changes. This time "opening" of Japan attracted the attention of not only European countries but Russia as well.

In the late XIXth century, both Russia and Japan went through major reforms in all directions and spheres of social and political life, which became a prerequisite for establishing the Russian missionary activity. Overall, the development of relationship between Russia and Japan in various spheres was influenced by the international situation.

The Japanese leadership under conditions of the country's "forced opening" was faced with the task of preservation the national independence. It was necessary to make reforms in the country.

The events of 1868–1869 known as “Meiji Restoration” opened the way of capitalist development and rapid modernization for Japan, drastically changed the structure of Japanese society and defined the further path of the country’s development. To preserve themselves as an independent nation the Japanese had to master the achievements of the Europeans not only in the field of processes and technology but also in the modern state building. This implied apprehension of new political, economic and other ideas, ideas in the field of culture, unusual or even strange to the Japanese mind. Social reorganization was based on the new ideology. Western ideas – democracy, liberalism, personal rights and freedom of individual came into collision with the Confucian code of subordination to elders, with a shogun on top of the social pyramid and masses of people at its base approved by Tokugawa rulers. Christianity was the religion of the West, and it was thought that it would help Japan to join the ranks of civilized countries.

Japan’s seclusion policy, called *sakoku*, lasted for more than two centuries. Once it ended, the humiliation of western intrusion would create pressure for ongoing change in Japanese society. This ultimately would lead, in 1868, to the abolition of the Tokugawa shogunate and the reconfiguration of power in favor of a new generation of oligarchs, centered on the emperor Meiji. The Meiji Restoration would markedly increase the pace of Japan’s modernization, ushering in rapid industrialization and the transition to a modern centralized state. One of the new government’s first orders of business would be the attempt to renegotiate the “unequal treaties”. Japan was forced to sign with the United States, Russia, and Western European powers in the 1850s (Edyta, 2018: 110).

Commodore Perry’s squadron reached Japan on July 14, 1853, and Putiatin arrived five weeks later, on August 22, 1853. Numerous and lengthy repairs to the rickety *Pallada*, required on most stopovers, had caused significant delays. After a hurricane on the Indian Ocean loosened the main mast, Putiatin had requested a new frigate from St. Petersburg. The steam-powered American squadron also enjoyed a technological edge over the Russian sailing ships (with the one exception of the steam-engine schooner *Vostok*, purchased by Putiatin in England).

A religious factor may have also disadvantaged the Russians. According to some reports not mentioned by Goncharov, Putiatin, known to be devout in his Russian Orthodox faith chose the aging *Pallada* over available newer vessels because it contained a chapel (Shklovskii, 1983: 379).

In 1871, the government of Meiji proclaimed the policy of “civilization and enlightenment” (*bunmei kaika*) directed at overcoming the country’s feudal backwardness and comprehensive transformation of Japanese society in accordance with the contemporary European style.

As noted by professor Togawa Tsuguo, Japanese government “classified the countries by five categories: civilized, enlightened, semi-enlightened, uncivilized and barbarian” (Tsuguo, 1990: 33). Russia was attributed to the second group according to this classification, therefore, from the ample experience of America and England fewer students were sent to this country.

In the XIXth century, changes also took place in Russia. More and more Russia began to present itself as an actor interested in the expansion of its territories.

Russia sought such a treaty in order to restore its edge in the imperial contest for Asia. Having been reduced in China to hitchhiking on British gains, the Russians and the Americans were determined to lead the way in Japan. Both countries, by mid-century, had compelling interests there. For the United States, the development of California following the discovery of gold in 1848, and expansion into the Pacific Northwest, increased the importance of Asia’s Pacific Rim. American whalers and traders bound for Asia needed coal-refueling bases for their steamships. The safety of shipwrecks and crews was also a key concern. Russia, for its part, had colonies in eastern Siberia and Alaska that faced considerable provisioning problems, due to mostly impassable, frozen northern seas and the hardships of crossing Siberia. Trade with Japan could alleviate this problem.

Political considerations added to the commercial imperatives. While Western Europe dominated the Atlantic, the Russians and the Americans increasingly felt that their respective manifest destinies bound them to the Pacific. Britain’s 1842 victory in the First Opium War had opened a new chapter in Russia’s Asian politics. The Russian government resolved that Japan could not go the way of China – that is, become a sphere of British influence that would weaken Russia’s position in East Asia. Conceived as early as 1843, the Russian expedition to Japan had been postponed. The widely publicized news of the Americans’ impending expedition propelled the project (Wolff, 2006; Chaplin, 2012).

In the Synodical period, at gaining access to the Far East boundaries and emergence of the Russian interests in the region, the Russian Orthodox Church established three Asian missions – in 1713 in China, in 1870 in Japan and in 1879 in Korea. The Russian missionary activities developed primarily within its own state: serving of the missionaries was parallel to development of the new territories included in it – the North, Siberia, the Pacific coast, Russian Alaska, was carried out mostly among local small peoples, going hand in hand with civilizing activities and in vast majority of cases led to natural expansion of own canonical territory of the Russian Church, while establishment of foreign parishes was driven by the objectives of the spiritual direction of the Russian congregations living outside of the home country (Sukhanova, 2013: 5).

Activity of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Japan under charismatic leadership of its head, Saint Nikolai (Kasatkin), Equal of the Apostles was unprecedented in terms of its scale and outcomes. Nikolai

Kasatkin made a great contribution to the development of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Japan, preaching Christ even under conditions of war.

It all started when Nikolai Kasatkin saw an announcement. One fine day, a student of ecclesiastical academy Ivan Kasatkin, who had an inexplicable craving for Japan, saw a poster in the classroom calling for a priest for Russian consulate in Hakodate in the island of Ezo (Hokkaido) in Japan. It happened in June 1860, in the final year of his studies at the academy. “One day passing through academic circles I absolutely without thinking gazed at a lying white sheet of paper which read as follows: “Would anyone wish to go to Japan to take the position of a senior priest at the ambassador’s church in Hakodate and start preaching Orthodoxy in this country. Why wouldn’t I go, I thought, and on the same day after the night service I already belonged to Japan” (*Dnevnik Svyatogo Nikolaya Yaponskogo, 2004: 18*).

On July 2, 1861, Hieromonk Nikolai arrived in Hakodate on board the Russian ship “Amur”. By that time, the city became a port city open for external relations, one of the small centers of international culture along with Nagasaki and Kanagawa. Nikolai had high hopes in respect of Japan and under the influence of his youthhood dream pictured it in all its glory. But he got disappointed when he came to Japan. He wrote about his feelings and disappointment as follows: “When I was going there, I dreamt a lot about my Japan. It appeared in my imagination as a bride with a bouquet in her hands waiting for my arrival. Once the news of Christ wakes up in her darkness, everything will be renewed. I arrived and saw that my bride was sleeping in the most prosaic sense and did not even think about me. I was young at that time and did not lack imagination which painted for me crowds of the congregation flowing from all over, and the future followers of the Word of God, since it would sound in the country of Japan. What was my disappointment when upon arrival in Japan I saw quite the opposite of what I dreamt of ... I was bullied and thrown with stones” (*Arkhimandrit Sergii (Stragorodskii, 1897: 96)*).

As argued by historian of religion Anesaki Masaharu, success of this second generation of missionaries is, first of all, attributed to all the noble motives, with which the converts perceived their sermons. Among these enthusiasts, the majority was composed of the young people from the environment of samurais, and their intentions to adopt Christianity were to a great extent provoked by the noble aims to create a new spiritual basis for revival of the nation, renew political life in the country. Christianity most of all attracted them not by the doctrine of sin and atonement but by Christ’s strength of character and persistence of his apostles. Their faith was more ethical than religious and fit in the ideas of the Confucianism about honor and persistence in pursuing a goal; their samurai spirit was inspired and revived by Christian ideas (*Anesaki, 1980: 18*).

An assistance of the Mission to prisoners of war in 1904-1905 years during the Japanese-Russian war was highly appreciated in lots of Japanese researchers. Usimaru Yasuo, professor at Tokyo Orthodox Seminary, mentioned: “Assistance expanded to level of national organization, was movable and controlled by law-glorious priests. It has been very useful for strengthening of moral spirit of Russian prisoners of war. It must not be forgotten in Japan, nor in Russia.” (*Yasuo, 1988: 231*)

What kind of important actions were taken by Nikolai Kasatkin in order to strengthen the influence of the Christian religion on the Japanese land? Why is it him who we should consider as the main founder of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Japan?

First of all, one must note his great outreach activities. This work was carried out in two directions: translation of religious books and publishing activity.

Nikolai Kasatkin was among the first who translated religious books into Japanese. He started with the studies of Japan. Nikolai began to learn the language, literature, history, religion of Japan, trying to penetrate the innermost feelings of Japanese people, the spirit of its history, its worldview. He gained surprising mastery of this language, both conversational and literary, and according to a well-known scholar of Japan D. Pozdnev who personally knew the Metropolitan he spoke Japanese not only fluently and easily but also beautifully and strongly, though with an accent typical of the inhabitants of northern Akita prefecture (*Pozdnev, 1912: 4*). Consul Goshkevich, the pioneer of the Russian Japanese studies and the author of the first Japanese-Russian dictionary helped him to study the language and the country.

“During this time he mastered all sciences so well that later some Japanese newspapers wrote that he knew Japan better than the Japanese” (*Nakamura, 1979: 112*).

Once he learned to speak and write in the Japanese language that was used for original and translated academic works, Nikolai Kasatkin proceeded to the translation of the New Testament from Chinese into Japanese. He checked and corrected the translation with one Japanese scientist. Here is Nikolai Kasatkin wrote about this tremendous translation work: “The work progressed very rapidly until I, while gradually reading the Chinese text, got completely disappointed in its trustworthiness. I requested another translation of the New Testament from China. It turns out that one text was so literal that it results in language irregularity and often obscurity, the other one is so flamboyant – very often resulting in perfect rephrasing and up to omission or insertion of many words. It made me to thoroughly compare the text with the Russian and Slavic translations. Rarely found inconsistencies between one and the other (always, as far I noticed, against the first one) prompted me look into the Vulgate and the English text, finally, I got the Greek New Testament as well. Looking through each verse in all these readings, and reading the complicated parts in the translation of Chrysostom, at last I reached such slowness in translation that I translated not more than

15 verses within 5 hours which were spent on this work per day” ([Dnevniky Svyatogo Nikolaya Yaponskogo, 1994: 709](#)).

Nikolai Kasatkin also translated the Catholic Epistles, the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, half of the Epistle to the Romans as well as Orthodox Confession of Saint Demetrius of Rostov, Chatechism for the Catechumens, Brief History of the Old Testament, morning and evening prayers, unorthodoxies’ conversion and christening ceremony.

The primary role in the mission was played by the translation of theological literature. Not a single day without translation - such an order was established by Kasatkin from the first years of his living in Japan and remained until the last days of his life ([Justin, 1988: 36](#)).

One of the first endeavors of father Nikolai was establishing the library attached to the Mission. Despite the obvious financial constraints of the Ecclesiastical Mission, he managed to replenish the library book stock. Its basis was formed by the books donated by I.A. Goshkevich, own publications and books sent from Russia.

In exchange to the Mission’s publications, the library received, for example, duplicates of the books from the Rumyantsev library. The Mission library made exchange with the libraries of Moscow and Saint Petersburg Theological Academies, the Imperial Public Library. In 1904, the book stock of the Mission library included more than 10 thousand volumes. It contained religious, secular, scientific and popular literature ([Paichadze, 1995](#)).

Saint Nikolai placed great emphasis on publication of the Russian classic works. On the pages of the journals issued by the Mission, many popular works of the Russian writers who helped the Japanese to come to know Russia better and get to like it were published.

Own periodical of the Russian mission were published. *The Orthodox News* (Seikyo simpo) was published twice a month, partly in Russian, partly in Japanese; *The Orthodox Talks* (Seikyo yova) monthly journals, “Uranisiki” women’s journal (Modesty) were published. There were shorter publications as well: *Sinkai* (Spiritual Sea), *Niva* (Garden), *Simei* (Purpose). The students translated the religious moral literature from Russian: lives of the saints, extracts from *The Sunday Reading* journal, “Abridged Restatement of Dogmas of the Orthodox Church”.

Secondly, one of the main merits of Nikolai Kasatkin was that the number of believers in Japan increased during his vigorous activity. Only in the fourth year Nikolai Kasatkin managed to convert the first Japanese to Orthodox Christianity. It was the Buddhist priest Sawabe. In 1868, Saint Nikolai converted the first Japanese man Sawabe Takuma to Orthodox Christianity, who assumed the name Paul. Samurai, shinshoku-kannushi (meaning “god’s employee”) Sawabe at first was wary of strangers, however, after Nikolai’s patient explanations got a burning desire come over to the Russian faith.

As described by one of the most prominent Russian researchers, Japan also had its own Saul, antichristian. One day shinshoku Sawabe Takuma broke into the house of Nikolai the Apostle in Hakodate to kill the harbinger of Orthodoxy. With his eyes sparkling with anger, breathing with menace and murder on God’s disciples, Saul-Sawabe shouted wrathfully: “All of you, foreigners, should be killed. You came here to look out for our land. And you with your preaching will harm Japan most of all”.

God made the miracle of conversion of this antichristian. “Is it fair to judge, and especially judge someone without listening to him?” – responded God out of the Saint Nikolai’s mouth. “Speak up!” said the priest ([Platonova, 1916: 21-22](#)). Having listened to Nikolai, Sawabe became Christian with the name Paul.

Following his example, Hakodate doctor Sakai, christened John, as well as Jacob Urano were secretly baptized. After they started sharing their new views with their co-citizens, they were sent to imprisonment. To get them out, father Nikolai had to turn to the capital – to the progressive representatives of the new authority Iwakura Tomomi and Kido Takayoshi ([Ivanova, 1996: 10](#)).

By 1868, 20 Japanese were ready to adopt Orthodox Christianity. Paul Sawabe and two Japanese brought by him, doctors John Sakai and Jacob Urano were christened the first on May 18. That is how the foundation of Orthodox community in Japan was laid.

Seeing that many years of work finally began to yield fruit, in 1869, Nikolai went to Russia to ask the Holy Synod to establish the Russian ecclesiastical mission in Japan. On March 22, 1871 he returned to Hakodate as its head (Sukhanova, Tsvetushchaya vetka Sakury).

Activity of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Japan on the cusp of the XIXth-XXth centuries is quite broadly covered on the pages of domestic periodic press. Since the mid 1870s information about the activity of Russian missionaries in the Land of the Rising Sun regularly appeared on the pages of the oldest Russian newspaper – *Moscow Gazette*. The fact that “Nikolai secretly carries out preaching activity in Hakodate under conditions of prohibition of Christianity” was, for the first time, reported by *the Moscow Gazette* in the editorial paragraph “The Russian Orthodox missionary in Japan” in the issue dated October 8, 1867 ([Sablina, 2006: 44](#)). It should be pointed out that the item by M. Katkova and P. Leontieva was put in Sunday issue (No. 219) of the newspaper with the reference to Saint Petersburg’s newspaper *Severnaya Pochta*, where in No. 215 dated October 4 (16), 1867 an editorial article “The Orthodox Missionary in Japan” was put. In the reviewed article, in particular, it was reported that despite the “extremely unfavorable conditions” father Nikolai had the chance to involve two Japanese, which the more they come to know Christianity, the more they got attached to him, and now help father Nikolai in the field chosen by him” ([Gavrikov, 2011: 228](#)).

Huge amount of work by Nikolai Kasatkin on increasing in the number of believers in Japan was appreciated by the Russian government as well. This appreciation was received thanks to application of the prince Konstantin Nikolaevich Romanov to the Holy Synod. He informed of the need of archimandrite Nikolai to be consecrated bishop as follows: “The Ecclesiastical Mission in Japan... by its success of converting quite a number of Japanese into Orthodox Christianity ... cannot but draw attention and full compassion of the whole Orthodox Russia”. This application had an effect, and the chief prosecutor of Synod mentioned in the note for the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russian Empire: “It would seem useful to elevate the head of the Japanese Mission to the rank of bishop” (Bestremyannaya, 2006: 18).

In March 1880, archimandrite Nikolai was consecrated bishop of Revel in the Saint Petersburg Alexander Nevsky Monastery. From that time on the Metropolitan was able consecrate clergy for the young Japanese Church.

In the year of Archbishop Nikolai’s decease, in 1912, there were 34,111 Orthodox Christians and 276 churches in Japan. All Japanese Christians numbered 150 000 people, among which were 62,000 Catholics and 45,000 Protestants. Although all missions (Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant) started their activity in Japan in almost at the same time in 1860s, the figures themselves do not reflect a real situation with each type of Christianity (Sablina, 2006: 122).

Thirdly, the pedagogical activity. Nikolai Kasatkin paid great attention to enlightenment of the people of Japan. With the cancellation of anti-Christian legislation in 1873, massive opportunities were offered for missionary activities. The private school of Saint Nikolai was reorganized into Catechetical College. From 1875 the Theological Seminary (Seikyo shingakko) with a seven-year program was opened. Classes were held according to curricula of secondary educational institutions. Along with the theological education it provided the knowledge of languages, history (Russian and Japanese), and Chinese classic authors essential for the Japanese. The best alumni of the seminary taught in junior school, teachers with academic qualification taught in senior school. The first graduation of the men’s seminary was in 1882.

The Mission’s academic program was exceptionally extensive. As stated by a well-known researcher of Christianity in Japan Kisimoto Hideo, the goals of advancement of Orthodoxy in Japan were linked with the language study. The first converted Japanese studied Russian (Hideo, 1969: 183).

As a spiritual educator Nikolai Kasatkin gave classes himself in senior school. Classes in the Theological Seminary were taught in Japanese.

As noted by one of the students of the Theological Seminary: “The students from the eldest to the youngest strongly realize that they study to be the preachers of the teachings of Christ in their country covered by the darkness of paganism and that they should deserve the future rank. There is not a shadow of that spiritual stagnation and routines which bloom so profusely in our Russian seminaries. Vice versa, Tokyo’s seminary has an aroma of life, energy and awareness of importance and dignity of the upcoming activity after graduation from an educational institution” (Prokhorenko, 1906: 348).

Later, the women’s seminary appeared where the female students were trained housekeeping and sewing, drawing and singing skills. Prestige of the female seminary enhanced from year to year, and by right it was recognized as one of the best schools in Japan.

In addition to the Theological Seminary and Seminary for girls, other educational institutions were opened as well: catechetical college, women’s college, college of psalm readers, and college for children in Hakodate. It should also be noted that many Japanese people by the assignment of the Mission got the opportunity to go onto further study in Russia.

The Mission directly owes its educational success to Saint Nikolai who monitored curricular of educational institutions, took care of their teaching staff, truly supported his students, and took their concerns close to heart. Also, he tried to solve financial problems of the educational institutions in every way. He thought about assignments and necessary activities for the development of the Mission all the time. Thus, in his diary Nikolai Kasatkin wrote in more details what the mission needed by that time. “*September 25, 1879. Tuesday.* It was boring and sad in the morning. I could not write the article. I am all the time worried by the thought on the essence of the matter, constant amount on the Mission. Absorbed in thinking, I wrote the following scheme in the form of memoranda to be provided and shown to the right persons. The ecclesiastical mission in Japan needs:

Bishop

7 missionaries

3 singing men and at the same time singing teachers at the Seminary and catechesis (catechetical college) and teacher assistants at the Seminary...” (Dnevnik Svyatogo Nikolaya Yaponskogo, 2003: 91). Further, he wrote everything in more details about the numbers on choir expenses and sources from which it should be taken.

Thanks to the efforts of father Nikolai, educational success of Ecclesiastical Mission was obvious. Thus, by 1904 the number of converted Christians made up 28597 people, the number of communities went up to 260. There were 28 priests, 7 deacons, 151 catechists, 12 psalm readers (Prokhorenko, 1907: 347).

Nikolai Kasatkin contributed to the development of teaching while also training specialists for Russia. With his support translators from among young Russians were trained at the Theological Seminary. The idea of teaching Japanese to the employees of the Russian consulate was given to vice admiral E. V. Putiatin and

the first consular I.A. Goshkevich. The Russian government needed specialists who would promote further development of relationship with Japan (Khokhlov, 1994: 64-66).

This task was addressed using the ecclesiastical mission in Japan. The first students from Russia – Fedor Legasov and Andrey Romanovsky were assigned to the Mission in 1902. They both spent more than four years in Japan. From the diary of Saint Nikolai we learn that they coped with this task quite well. At least, when these young men came back to Vladivostok, Saint Nikolai wrote down in his diary that they “started speaking Japanese just like the Japanese”, “learned the written language as well” including “reading of newspapers and easy books” (Dnevniki Svyatogo Nikolaya Yaponskogo, 1994: 84).

Sixthly, the next important direction of the Nikolai Kasatkin’s activity was construction of cathedrals. Orthodox Christianity in the islands of Japan was advanced, strengthened by construction of cathedrals. Nikolai Kasatkin greatly contributed to the construction of cathedrals in Japan. He sought necessary funding for construction in every way. Despite the government bans in the early 70s of XIXth century he continued his work on establishment of ecclesiastical mission in Tokyo and cathedral construction. One of the oldest Orthodox cathedrals in Japan is the Resurrection Church in Hakodate. Its construction dates back to the initial period of establishing the Russian Japanese diplomatic relationship. The church was built in 1859 on the initiative of Consul I.A. Goshkevich. It was the church where missionary work of hieromonk Nikolai started in 1861. This church was the initial founding development center for the Russian ecclesiastical mission in Japan.

In 1868, Japanese adopted Christianity by orthodox style in the churches in Hakodate. This church also became the initial base for teaching activity of the missionary efforts of Nikolai Kasatkin. In 1869, a missionary school was opened at the church. When in 1872 the Russian consulate was temporarily closed in Hakodate and moved to Tokyo, the consular church became the parish church. Two years later, father Anatoly, the student of Saint Nikolai established the first orthodox gymnasias attached to the church.

“The Orthodox church in Hakodate”, said Metropolitan Veniamin – “by its inner beauty is the best one in the entire Kamchatka eparchy after the Cathedral Church of the Annunciation. It is wooden on a stone foundation; built in Russian-Byzantium style on the highest spot in the city as if it rules the whole city making it look like an Orthodox Russian city from a distance. The interior of the church is decorated with elegance worthy of the Church of God; cornices and dome are embellished with golden baguettes, gold plated iconostasis with the icons of academic painting, sacristy is quite decent, the cathedral is clean at all times because Japanese do not walk into a cathedral other than leaving their shoes behind the doors. And the Hakodate church owes such accomplishment mainly to the efforts of archimandrite Nikolai, who not only collected donations for it and monitored all works but put his personal labor in the works” (Shatalov, 2000: 9).

In 1907, a big fire occurred in Hakodate, as a result of which the church was burnt down. Construction of the new church was continued in 1916 by Kawamura Idzo, a well-known Japanese architect who built several orthodox cathedrals in Japan.

A great number of cathedrals were built in Japan under Nikolai Kasatkin, such as the Church of the Annunciation in Hakodate (in 1891), the church in Morioka city (1897), etc. Both cathedrals survived and serve the development of ecclesiastical mission in Japan.

One of the main cathedrals in Japan upon which Nikolai Kasatkin put great hopes became the cathedral in Tokyo. Construction of this cathedral took place in harsh conditions. Nikolai Kasatkin also had to seek necessary funding for its construction.

It all started when Nikolai Kasatkin came to Tokyo. On February 28, 1872 the archimandrite arrived in Tokyo. At that time, Tokyo was still closed for foreigners. They were allowed to live in the small designated district Tsukiji. Officially, the Japanese were not allowed to adopt Christianity. In his small house Nikolai managed to prepare and christen twelve people, almost all of them came from Sendai. In August 1872, a relatively large land plot was bought on top of Surugadai hill for construction of the cathedral and new building of the mission. Later, it accommodated not only the building of the orthodox mission and cathedral but also the buildings of theological colleges – catechist men’s and (at a later time) women’s college, apartments of employees and auxiliary rooms, orphan home, library, icon workshop and shortly afterwards the seminary (1875) (Efimov, 2007: 284)

In 1873, the old orders against Christianity were cancelled and only since that time it became possible to develop the missionary activity in Tokyo. Thanks to this, the number of Orthodox Christians grew not only in terms of quantity but also in terms of quality. Cancellation of the old orders promoted further construction of the cathedral in Tokyo.

In 1872, on the frigate *Svetlana* under the command of Admiral K.N. Posyet, who had earlier been on Putiatin’s mission in Japan, the Grand Prince Aleksei Aleksandrovich visited a number of Japanese ports and had meetings with the emperor and senior representatives of the Japanese government. The Grand Prince donated 3,5 thousand dollars to the mission’s needs in Tokyo and 1,5 thousand dollars in Hakodate. The value of these amounts can be measured by the fact that back then US dollar cost one ruble and fifty kopecks (Sablina, 2006: 68).

In 1884, on the purchased high hill Surugadai in Tokyo, which affords a view of the whole city, near the emperor’s palace, the foundation was laid and construction of the Cathedral of the Savior on Blood under the project of a well-known architect Mikhail Arefievich Schurupov. The cathedral was made in Russian-

Byzantine style, similar to Vladimir Cathedral in Kiev, the dome and the Cross were seen at 20 km distance. Donations to construction of the cathedral came from all over Russia. Moscow alone collected 200 thousand rubles. The Orthodox Missionary Society increased an annual subsidy for the Japanese mission from 17 thousand rubles to 23 800 rubles (Dnevniky Svyatogo Nikolaya Yaponskogo, 2004: 94).

Nikolai Kasatkin wrote: “The cathedral is positively most remarkable building in the capital of Japan, which fame spread over Europe and the US even before its completion and which, has been completed by now, in all fairness, draws the attention, curiosity and surprise of all those who stay or visit Tokyo” (Levitsky, 1911: 16).

Consecration of the church took place 7 years later, on February 24, 1891. For the first time, the Orthodox Church bells rang full force over the city and attracted both Christians and pagans to the divine service. The festivity was attended by more than 4000 Christians, Metropolitan Nikolai was concelebrated by 19 priests and 6 deacons, the choir consisted of 150 singing men out of the seminarians and students of theological schools. The choir-master of the cathedral was deacon. Dmitriy Lvovsky brought by the Metropolitan from Russia and served in Japan until his death (Efimov, 2007: 289).

5. Conclusion

Thus, having examined the activities of Nikolai Kasatkin in Japan, we came to the following conclusions.

First, the establishment of the Russian spiritual mission in Japan was facilitated by socio-political and economic changes in both countries. The Meiji reforms changed the political character of Japanese development. From a once closed country, this state has turned into a country that has embarked on the path of “opening” to the Western world, including Russia. The Meiji era (1868–1912) was characterized by a number of important reforms in political, social and cultural life in Japan. These changes were reflected in relations with Russia, which was also interested in establishing good-neighborly relations in all spheres.

In Russia, this time was marked by extensive reforms in all areas and spheres of public and political life. Russia also became an active in foreign policy, since during this period there was a stubborn struggle for spheres of influence. The rivalry between England and France, the formation of a new united Empire as Germany, which began military operations in Europe, did not leave Russia aside from this geopolitical game. The intensive development of the Far Eastern territories by Russia, its desire to establish goodwill relations with its immediate neighbor prompted the development of cultural dialogue, to direct contacts with Japan. This was facilitated by the conclusion of an agreement between Russia and Japan in 1855 and the opening of the Russian General Consulate in Hakodate. Under Nikolai Kasatkin, the Orthodox Church was consecrated, which became the first step towards the spread of the Orthodox faith in Japan.

Secondly, the spiritual mission in Japan under the leadership of Nikolai Kasatkin was not easy. Upon arrival in Japan, he was disappointed. Since this country seemed to him “in the form of a bride waiting for his arrival with a bouquet in her hands”. As he recalled this bride was asleep and did not even think about him. But despite this, Nikolai Kasatkin with all his heart began to introduce the first seeds of the Orthodox religion in Japanese land. Of course, before Kasatkin, there were attempts to establish the Christian religion in the country, but they were not long and not so successful.

Thirdly, Nikolai Kasatkin began precisely with a huge educational activity, which was carried out in two directions as translation and publishing. Nikolai Kasatkin, with the aim of understanding “the Japanese themselves”, began precisely with the study of the Japanese language, history, culture and religion. He achieved an amazing knowledge of this language, both spoken and literary. Having learned to speak and write in Japanese, which was used for original and translated scholarly works, Nikolai began translating the New Testament from Chinese into Japanese. In addition, he translated the Catholic Epistles, the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, half of the Epistle to the Romans as well as Orthodox Confession of Saint Demetrius of Rostov, Chatechism for the Catechumens, Brief History of the Old Testament, morning and evening prayers, unorthodoxies’ conversion and christening ceremony, the rite of unification of the Gentiles and baptism.

Fourth, thanks to Nikolai Kasatkin, the number of believers has increased. But these results were not easy for him. Only in the fourth year Nikolai Kasatkin assured to convert the first Japanese Savabe to Orthodoxy. And this number increased from year to year. Nikolai Kasatkin laid the foundations of the “huge school of Orthodoxy” in Japan. His followers continued his work. Also, the fact that in 1912, the year when he died, the number of believers in Japan reached 34111 and 276 churches shows of his great contribution.

Fifthly, the pedagogical activity of Nikolai Kasatkin played an important role. He can undoubtedly be called a versatile personality. With his support, the Catechetical College, Theological Seminary and the Seminary for Girls were opened. He paid great attention to teaching in these institutions not only the Russian language, but also to the development of the work program itself. As the “main organizer” Nikolai Kasatkin did not leave the slightest question regarding the educational process from curricula to minor concerns of his students. Also, Nikolai Kasatkin prepared his followers for his country. With his support and the initiative of Vice Admiral E.A. Putyatin and the first consul Russian translators were studied and directed to work.

Sixth, after his arrival in Japan, Nikolai Kasatkin initially thought about the “centers” of Christians in Japan, about churches and temples. And in this way it was not easy for him. Restrictions of the Japanese

government, the earthquake in Japan and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 did not become a hindrance for Nikolai Kasatkin. Russian missionary work in Japan became an architectural and construction committee. The highest achievement of the Mission during this period was the construction of an Orthodox church in the center of Tokyo, the Cathedral of Nikorai-do, forever becoming the center of Orthodoxy in Japan, keeping the name its founder Nikolai Kasatkin.

The construction of Orthodox churches in Japan is undoubtedly possible belong to the most important area of the Mission's activities. Churches that have served Japanese believers through the centuries convincingly demonstrate the successes of Nikolai Kasatkin's Orthodox mission. Their architectural design so unusual in local conditions introduced parishioners with the history of Russian architecture, the most significant periods of glorious culture of Russia.

Thus, we can state that undoubtedly Nikolai Kasatkin is a versatile person who made a huge contribution to the establishment and strengthening of the Russian spiritual mission in Japan. With his pedagogic, publishing, translation activities and the construction of churches, he contributed to the spiritual and cultural rapprochement between Russia and Japan. It should also be noted that the spiritual mission headed by Nikolai Kasatkin became the basis of modern Russian-Japanese relations. On the other hand, it thus contributed to the implementation of the Eurasian concept defined by the leadership of Russia and Kazakhstan in the early 2000s (Sadykova, 2013; Zhumagulov, 2014; Zhumagulov, Sadykova, 2015; Sadykova, 2017). According to the speech of the President of the Russian Federation V.N. Putin in 2011, the Asia-Pacific region is a necessary and significant direction in the implementation of the Eurasian concept. At the same time, he admitted that it was Kazakhstan, on the initiative of N.A. Nazarbayev was the first to put forward Eurasian cooperation in the post-Soviet space already in the early 90s, immediately after the collapse of the USSR. In this regard, it should be noted that Kazakhstan initially and before independence tried to act as conductors of the Eurasian concept. A vivid example is the history of the Hun Empire, the Sheba state, the Avar Kaganate and the Altin Horde when our ancestors became a bridge between Europe and Asia.

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