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The cargo cult phenomenon in the social sciences

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Abstract

In modern studies in the field of ethnography, the phenomenon of a cargo cult is usually reduced to the third law of Arthur C. Clarke, according to which any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. Indeed, the belief that the technology of transportation and production of industrial goods for subsistence Indians seemed to be a magical act. In ethnography, the presence of a cargo cult made it possible to formulate hypotheses that mythological events had some material basis. However, this interpretation is very narrow and does not include the cultural component. Indeed, any new technology can be presented as a manifestation of magic in the most general sense. However, in this regard, the fact is not taken into account that the inhabitants of this region explained all the phenomena of life through magical influence, including those that do not relate to the manifestation of human activity, such as natural phenomena. At the end of the article, it is concluded that the term cargo-cult in its cultural aspect can simultaneously express the following assessment of actions: lack of understanding of the technology or methodology of ongoing processes; useless waste of resources; the absolute impossibility of obtaining the desired result; an unattainable gap in development between the original and a copy, a misunderstanding of the causes and historical context of phenomena.

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Keywords

Cargo cult, Melanesian religious beliefs, John Frum, social institutions, ethnography, mythology.

Introduction

The culturological phenomenon of the cargo cult (aircraft worshipers) is of significant interest for explaining various phenomena and processes and has long ceased to be reflected only in studies in the field of Melanesian religious beliefs. This term is widely used in psychology, philosophy, science of science, cultural anthropology, and sociology.

In the most general sense, its independent study is of interest for determining the degree of intercultural communication between different civilizations and cultures. At the same time, the description of the cargo cult phenomenon as a complex phenomenon showed the degree of misunderstanding between the actions of the participants in communication. No less significant is the study of this cultural phenomenon in order to understand in what situations even civilizations considered to be developed can be in the position of "Melanesians".

Main content

In the most general sense, the cargo cult is the religious beliefs of the Melanesians, who represent that the goods of industrial production of developed countries are created by the spirits of their ancestors and are intended to satisfy their needs.

However, "white people" with the help of odd manipulations seized power over them. In the future, this cult is developed through the belief that by repeating the "magic" rituals of "white people" it is possible either to regain power over the power of material wealth, or it is possible to gain unhindered access to them, by repeating the actions of "white people" who have access to magical knowledge.

It became widespread during the Second World War, when a lot of cargo began to come to the youth of Papua New Guinea to provide the US Army in the war with Japan. Some of these cargoes were delivered to the local population as material assistance to provide military bases or accidentally, as a result of incorrect transportation of goods.

As a result of receiving a significant amount of material wealth, the traditional cults of the area were forgotten and the locals began to worship aircraft that brought manufactured goods such as weapons, clothing or canned food. That is, the necessary elements of aircraft worshipers were not just the addition of local religious cults, but their complete replacement. All this, on the one hand, testifies to the level of religious beliefs, which differ in a rather primitive character - from the "deity" it was only required to provide material benefits. On the other hand, it indicates that the inhabitants considered themselves worthy of possessing all the benefits of civilization without participating in the process of economic exchange.

However, after the end of the war, cargo no longer arrived, which caused the Melanesians to imitate the actions of pilots and air traffic controllers by imitating the form of their activity. In particular, they built runways and planes out of wood, and made headphones out of halves of coconuts. However, despite the fact that they actually completely repeated the actions of the "whites", the benefits did not return to them, which became the reason for their abandonment.

Thus, they partially exist among two tribes on the island of Tanna and had a further development, according to which a prophet must return on a certain day, revive dead ancestors, give youth and health, as well as innumerable wealth. It should be noted that this cult is preserved by the efforts of the priest, who claims to be in constant communication with the prophet, and convinces the inhabitants of the island to expect him. Since various religious teachings constantly carried out a mission on this island,

its inhabitants are receptive to ideas

A common characteristic of all cargo cults was that they, through external repetition, tried to recreate the functions of things and the direct participation in this of the spirits of their ancestors. It was they who were supposed to send wealth to their descendants. At the same time, the beliefs themselves could differ - the ancestors could both include messianic beliefs - that is, liberation from the influence of "white" people through the messiah, which could be related to both a mythical character such as John Frum, and the face of God the Trinity in Christianity - Jesus Christ. At the same time, the latter was supposed to appear in the second coming to the Hmong people in camouflage driving a military jeep and bring all kinds of benefits (according to another version, take them to lands where there will be no death).

In order to worship, the followers of a cargo cult must, in addition to imitating aircraft, perform such actions as perform ritual dances so that the ancestors of the Paita people return by rail or carve models of cassette recorders from wood in order to talk with dead ancestors. Cults could have real-life prophets (such as Wovoka, the prophet of the Payuta people), priests (Mkwati in Southern Rhodesia), and high priests (such as Nambas in the cult of John Frum).

In modern research, it is often customary to reduce the phenomenon of a cargo cult to Arthur C. Clarke's third law, according to which any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. Indeed, the belief that the technology of transportation and production of industrial goods for subsistence Indians seemed to be a magical act. In ethnography, the presence of a cargo cult made it possible to formulate hypotheses that mythological events had some material basis.

However, according to the author, this interpretation is very narrow and does not include the cultural component. Indeed, any new technology can be presented as a manifestation of magic in the most general sense. However, in this regard, the fact is not taken into account that the inhabitants of this region explained all the phenomena of life through magical influence, including those that do not relate to the manifestation of human activity, such as natural phenomena.

On the other hand, the cargo cult has another culturological feature - through the use of this category, any unproductive actions of people who do not understand the essence of the process are described. The inclusion of the Russian education system in the Bologna process and the application of the methods of state management of the national economy that have developed in other countries can be safely called cargo culture. According to a number of researchers, the same term defines modern scientific methods, when using quantitative tools they try to describe personality characteristics, such as "socio-nics". In modern scientific literature, it is through this cultural concept that the attitude to a number of studies is determined, such as neurolinguistic programming in psychology [Roderique-Davies, 2009]

Conclusion

Thus, the term cargo-cult in its cultural aspect can simultaneously express the following assessment of actions:

- lack of understanding of the technology or methodology of ongoing processes;
- useless waste of resources;
- the absolute impossibility of obtaining the desired result;
- an unattainable gap in development between the original and the copy;

– misunderstanding of the causes and historical context of phenomena.

Also, the example of a cargo cult is a useful concept for all actors in the socio-economic sphere who copy the institutions of public life without taking into account all the factors that determine the success of its development in the environment where it developed in a “natural” way.

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Феномен карго-культа в социальных науках

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Аннотация

В современных исследованиях в области этнографии феномен карго-культа принято сводить к третьему закону Артура Кларка, согласно которому любая достаточно развитая технология неотличима от магии. Действительно, вера в то, что технологии транспортировки и производства промышленных товаров для индейцев, живущих натуральным хозяйством, представлялась магическим действием. В этнографии наличие карго-культа позволило сформулировать гипотезы о том, что мифологические события имели некоторую материальную основу. Однако такая трактовка является весьма узкой и не включает в себя учет культурологической составляющей. Действительно, любая новая технология может быть представлена как проявление магии в самом общем смысле. Однако в этом отношении не учитывается тот факт, что жители данного региона все явления жизни объясняли посредством магического воздействия, в том числе такие, которые не относятся к проявлению деятельности людей, такие как природные явления. В заключении статьи

делается вывод о том, что термин карго-культу в его культурологическом аспекте может выражать одновременно следующую оценку действий: отсутствие понимание технологии или методологии происходящих процессов; бесполезную трату ресурсов; абсолютную невозможность получения желаемого результата; недостижимый разрыв в развитии между оригиналом и копией, непонимание причин и исторического контекста явлений.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

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Ключевые слова

Карго-культ, религиозные верования меланезицев, Джон Фрум, социальные институты, этнография, мифология.

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