FOLK TRADITION AND ETHNO-CULTURAL PROCESSES IN MODERN KALMYKIA: CONTENT AND TYPOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS[1]

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The article presents the results of field research on the traditional heritage of the Don Kalmyks, which is considered in the broad context of historical circumstances and ethno-social processes in the South Russian region. The focus is on the current state of the subethnic culture: the sources of its content, factors, forms and subjects of intergenerational transmission. Summarizing the field observations, the author suggests a structural and functional model of the modern Kalmyk tradition, in which he identifies three levels, according to the leading phenomenological feature: actual, memorial and constructive. The factors that determined the direction of historical dynamics are divided into a number of categories, in accordance with the scale and selectivity of the events in which the Don Kalmyks were consolidated with other communities. This classification is supplemented by the typology of the bearers of tradition, which is based on the age hierarchy, correlated with specific social experience. The main source of the research are the field materials of the ethnolinguistic expedition to the Yashaltinskiy and Gorodovikovskiy districts of the Republic of Kalmykia carried out by the Southern Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences in 2010.

Keywords: Kalmyks, Cossacks, tradition, structural and functional model, bearer of tradition, systemic transformation.

Introduction

The Don Kalmyks (Buzava) are an ideal subject of the frontier studies. On the one hand, they are representatives of the people closely connected with broad Eurasian steppe frontier. On the other hand, they are a sub-ethnic group, formed as a result of the interaction with another frontier group – the Don Cossacks. The choice of the contemporary Buzava original culture as a subject of the study leads the researcher to another bound, an internal one, where the complex relationships between the representatives of various generations display oneself.

The study of traditional culture in the modern conditions highlights the problem of sources for the research of a group identity. On the one

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hand, the reliance on expert opinions on this issue is not always justified, since they do not cover all the diversity of age groups or social strata of the given community. On the other hand, notions of the special role of certain authorities, as well as institutions or structures, in the preservation and transfer of historical and cultural heritage are often based on complex and not always transparent grounds.

Currently, in the Russian Federation, traditional cultures of the different ethnic groups exist simultaneously in the several parallel versions, each of which may claim the status of genuine. And group or individual social experience define adherence to this or that variant of the tradition to a greater extent than a natural succession of cultural forms. Such cultural heterogeneity, as a rule, is typical for periods of turbulent social transformations, which are present in the history of many nations.

The peculiarity of the current situation in the Russian regions is that over the past hundred years processes that have literally turned the traditional foundations of the population's existence have occurred (and continue to occur) not only constantly, very rapidly but also inconsistently. At the most general level, each of the last four generations of Russians may be claimed to possess their own version of the ethnic tradition. The differences between these generational versions are of a twofold nature: some of them arose as a result of the reduction of traditional culture, as society was modernized, and could be traced diachronically: from archaic and conservative to innovative forms. Other differences, generated by specific temporal ideological factors, may be multidirectional. They reflect contradictory phenomena of ethnic, social and religious nihilism, cultural regeneration, intentional or forced archaization, supranational generalization, ethnic and cultural egocentrism, and neglecting the peculiarities of local traditions. A variegated conglomerate of representations of traditional culture shape the complexes of different status in the space of the Russian regions, while the districts in the South of the Russian Federation demonstrate particularly multicomponent examples of such complexes due to their high polyethnicity and the high level of national and political conflict.

A promising object for exploring the problem of the origin of a given tradition, its content, and features of transmitting are the Don Kalmyks. Selecting this group for such a study can be explained by the relative transparency of the ethnic and social genesis of this community in the historical space of the South of Russia. In addition, the relatively weak involvement of the population of the Republic of Kalmykia in actual regional conflicts today reduces the polemic and political bias of their national positioning, which allows the researcher to concentrate on the cultural aspects of the problem.

The main sources of this study are the materials and results of the ethnolinguistic field work held by the Southern Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences in the Republic of Kalmykia in 2010. Classical publications on the history and ethnography of the Kalmyk people and especially the Don Kalmyks (Maslakovets, 1872; Popov, 1919, pp. 284–329; Dushan, 2016), as well as modern studies (Maksimov, 2016), were used as a comparative base for cross-cultural and chronological research.

Historical backgrounds

From the first half of the 17th century, the history of the Kalmyk people is connected with the lands of the Don region and the history of the Don Cossacks. By the turn of the 20th century, the Kalmyk Buddhists represented the second largest ethnic and confessional community among the three main constituents of the Don Cossacks, along with Christians (Eastern Slavs) and Muslims (the Turks). Kalmyks are the only group within the Don Host, which not only had a social (Cossack) identity but also preserved ethnic and cultural self-sufficiency. They originally had complete family and tribal structures, ideological independence and a life support system that met the regional conditions.

The gradual integration of the Kalmyk group into the society of the Don Cossacks was accompanied by a relatively early (for the Kalmyk community in general) transition to a settled way of life, the formation of new settlement and economic traditions. Several systemic factors such as the military social organization, military service and contacts with foreign-speaking, especially the East Slavic population had the transforming influence on the mentality, ethnic everyday and religious culture of the Kalmyk Cossacks. During the 19th century, the Kalmyks of the Don Host acquired the ethnonym “Buzava.” Thus, we can conclude that by the beginning of the 20th century, in the Don Region, a Don sub-ethnos of the Kalmyk people was formed, with its ethnographic originality, self-consciousness, and name.

The global and tragic events of the subsequent period, such as the First and Second World Wars, the collapse of the Russian Empire and the creation of the Soviet state, collectivization, deportation of 1943–1944, as well as territorial and administrative transformations, influenced the changes in the state of the traditional heritage of the entire Kalmyk people. Buzava was not an exception, and one of the specific factors that had a devastating impact on the culture of this particular group was the abolition of the Cossack class since the most important basis for the sub-ethnic consolidation of the Don Kalmyks and their social cultivation was eliminated (Sharmandziev, 2013). The settlement of this group also

changed: the Don villages, located within the Kalmyk nomad area of the former Don Host Region, ceased to exist as Kalmyk settlements. At present, most of the Don Kalmyks live in the territory of two districts of the Republic of Kalmykia: Gorodovikovskiy and Yashaltinskiy, and nowhere form compact settlements. Interethnic marriages have become very popular (Namrueva, 2013). The Kalmyk language remains a natural language of everyday communication only for a part of the old people, the Buzava dialect is practically lost.

Structural levels of the traditional culture of the Don Kalmyks

The field study of the modern state of the Don Kalmyk traditional culture the Gorodovikovskiy and Yashaltinskiy districts allowed to present it in the form of a structural-functional model.

The folk tradition of Buzava now exists as the complex, which includes forms of organization of everyday life and everyday behaviour; celebration of family and calendar events, guest etiquette; visiting of khuruls (Buddhist temples) and sacred places; folk medical and magical practices. It is necessary to emphasize that in the limits of the abovementioned cultural representations, verbal and actional codes of traditional culture are reproduced, symbolic and sacred artifacts are used. The generalization of the materials of this active level allows defining the structure and composition of traditional phenomena in living existence, the actual corpus of folklore texts.

The next level of existence of the Buzava tradition is memorial, it complements the active level, being with him in a stable interaction, and includes recommendations of old people, whose authority is based on personal experience, and retelling memories that they once heard from the elders. Stage forms of performing folklore may be also referred to this memorial level. Often, the cultural workers of the rural clubs (district cultural institutions) and enthusiasts of the amateur groups base their repertoire on the knowledge of old people but supplement it by use of earlier or professionally collected materials, i.e. reconstruct the tradition. Actually, already at this level, the transmitted forms may lose the Don authenticity and acquire the status of secondary – generalized ethnic (all-Kalmyk) – forms. In the most positive case, the tradition inherited from the Buzava ancestors is complemented by the information about the traditional ritual culture of a different origin. In other cases, within the mainstream of Soviet practice, which still represents the most popular model of working with the population throughout the country, the so-called folk tradition is simply a product of cultural creativity (Gavrilova, 2016).

The indicated tendency is being generalized at the next level, which is determined by the sufficiently large value that the translation of

information about the Kalmyk traditional culture through the republican and regional media (newspapers, radio, television, the Internet) has for the Kalmyk society. As a rule, the broadcasting information includes descriptions of phenomena, more archaic than existing, sometimes recorded in remote areas, from real or hypothetical ancestors, as well as from Kalmyk-related peoples. The data coming into the information space may be known from the ancient manuscripts and epic texts or restored through the efforts of specialists. This level of existence of the tradition can be called constructive, since teachers and cultural workers draw information from different sources and create educational and recreational programs, addressing mainly children and youth. A certain part of the knowledge acquired by them saturates the active level, gradually transforming it. The artistic reminiscences of the national epic Djangar are indicative in this respect. Its ideological postulates occupying pivotal positions in the cultural and historical heritage are now creatively reinterpreted and transmitted by complex visual means (Batyreva, Batyreva, 2015).

The ratio of the volumes of information currently circulating at each level significantly increases from active to constructive. At the same time, the degree of its authenticity is the reverse, if one considers that this authenticity corresponds to the complex of culture that the ancestors of modern representatives of specific intra-ethnic groups of the Kalmyk population possessed at the turn of the 20th century. The most general tendencies are the levelling of dialectal (local) differences, artificial archaization, and transformation of the Kalmyk tradition by popularizing the Tibetan and Mongolian standards of culture (Bakaeva, 2016; Terentyev, 2016).

Factors of changing the traditions of the Don Kalmyks

The ethnic history of the group, as well as the tragedies experienced by the Kalmyks, including the Don Kalmyks, in the 20th century, allow differentiating the factors that determined the current state of the traditional heritage of the community. Among them, several categories can be identified. The author define them as supranational (relating to global processes), regional (characteristic of the greater part of the South Russian population), national repressive (which affected the peoples who survived deportation), ethnic (fair for the Kalmyk people in general), and class (affecting the dynamics of the Cossack culture and directly the Don Kalmyks). The most important role in the self-positioning of representatives of the Kalmyk people belongs to the processes of experiencing collective trauma, which affected the preservation of the ethnic heritage and the status aspects of the bearer of the tradition. The

topic of Stalinist repression in modern and, in particular, Kalmyk studies today is provided by a significant number of works (Grin, 2001; Richardson, 2002). In some of them, in the context of traumatic experience, issues of intergenerational transmission are considered. In particular, the work of Marianne Hirsch shows a number of patterns of spontaneous memorial behaviour, a kind of manifestation of inherited and redeposited reflection, according to which tragic events are experienced more sharply and uncompromisingly by the descendants of immediate participants, while the latter are inclined to silence their experience or reconcile with the prevailing circumstances (Hirsch, 2008).

The typology of the bearers of tradition

Summarizing the results of work with informants allow dividing them into three groups according to the level of possessing of traditional culture and/or awareness of it. The quality of possessing the tradition is consistently correlated with the age characteristics. In this connection, it is reasonable to designate the groups as a senior, middle and younger.

The most valuable in terms of possession of information is the older group of respondents: those who at the time of deportation (December 1943 – March 1944) turned 10 or more years old. They were witnesses of how their parents were preparing for traditional holidays, behaving themselves in everyday life. In childhood and adolescence, they were included in the usual ritual practices, as a result of which more authentic traditional information survived, not only in passive but also in active memory. The priority status of the senior age group of informants can be defined as the status of the last representatives of the Kalmyk people, who perceived national traditions during their natural existence in the period immediately preceding the so-called cultural break. Regardless of the knowledge and unique experience of the respondents of this category, they are rarely associated with modern processes of revision and reconstruction of the historical and cultural heritage. They are not an active force in the society that has any influence on the intergenerational cultural transmission. The fragmentation and everyday nature of traditional knowledge, which predominate in their personal repertoire, the partial replacement of the earlier impressions (informatively more significant) with subsequent ones, the psychological consequences of deportation lead to the fact that older people are easily eliminated from performing the functions of cultural donors not only outside the family but also in communication with younger relatives. They do not feel authoritative possessors of the tradition and often do not seem to be those for the youth.

The second (middle) age group of informants is those who were born between 1930–1935 and the mid-1950s. They did not live in their

homeland before the deportation, or they do not remember it. Respondents of the middle group heard a lot from their older relatives. They paid attention to this information only in cases where the situation permitted, depending on the specific and very diverse circumstances of the family's life or in connection with personal inclinations. Respondents of this group with varying degrees of confidence and completeness retell family narratives, know elements of the rituals. In particular, they feel confident in the sphere of calendar rituals, describe and, as a rule, are able to prepare traditional dishes, know table and guest etiquette. This confidence is not always reasonable: in most cases, the performed rituals are not very variable and deployed, the descriptions are rather sparse. Knowledge of the meaning of the performed actions is shallow, as a rule, reduced, often secondary. Those representatives of the middle generation who in recent years did not become parishioners of the newly discovered Buddhist temples and did not learn national traditions are the least familiar with the Kalmyk tradition in any form.

The representatives of the middle group of informants, who returned from Siberia young or were born soon after the return, have their own variant of mixing ethnic traditions. Significant characteristics of this mixture are such categories as its degree (it is much stronger and deeper than in the case of the representatives of the previous group) and ethnic originality. Unlike the older generation, whose culture has noticeable Southern Russian, possibly Cossack traits, the middle generation was influenced by the Ukrainian culture to a large extent. This is clear, in particular, in lexical and phonetic borrowings, which, along with the partial loss of the national language, attracted the attention of researchers. Informants of the middle age group are characterized by a kind of illegibility in the performance of calendar rites, which in some cases borders on the complete erasure of ethnocultural and ethno-confessional differences.

The younger group included informants born in the 1960s and 1970s, mainly grown apart from the national tradition. They are distinguished by their sensitivity to new phenomena in social and cultural life. Due to the active social status and low level of possessing traditions of the respondents of the younger group, they are inclined to construct ethnic traditions. In this respect, they show great similarity with their peers, representatives of other nations of the former Soviet Union.

Thus, the features of the formation and functioning of the Kalmyk tradition at the present time are in many ways consistent with the conclusions concerning the manageability of collective memory, in the content of which the communicative component may have a transforming potential (Assmann, 1995).

Conclusions

Consideration of the current state of the traditional heritage of the Don Kalmyks in the form of a structural and functional model and the study of the features of participation of different categories of collective identity bearers in the cultural transmission reveal a number of problems typical for the post-Soviet boom of the ethno-social building. Similar phenomena can be traced, first of all, in connection with the phenomena of social consolidation on the basis of re-experiencing and rethinking of collective trauma – the revival of the Cossacks, the reclamation of the ideas of Great Circassia, Ukrainian mono-nationalism, etc. The common feature of these phenomena is the suppression of natural empirical forms of intergenerational inheritance of culture and its replacement by a variety of quasi-tools associated with new social institutions and information technologies. Transformation of transmission mechanisms directly affects the content of the tradition, since the latter loses its connection with life support systems and becomes a convenient object for manipulations.

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НАРОДНАЯ ТРАДИЦИЯ И ЭТНОКУЛЬТУРНЫЕ ПРОЦЕССЫ В СОВРЕМЕННОЙ КАЛМЫКИИ: СОДЕРЖАТЕЛЬНО-ТИПОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ НАБЛЮДЕНИЯ[1]

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В статье представлены результаты полевых исследований традиционного наследия донских калмыков, которое рассматривается в широком контексте исторических обстоятельств и этносоциальных процессов южнороссийского региона.

В центре внимания находится современное состояние субэтнической культуры: источники ее содержательного наполнения, факторы, формы и субъекты межпоколенческой трансмиссии.

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Обобщая полевые наблюдения, автор предлагает структурно-функциональную модель современной калмыцкой традиции, в которой выделяет три уровня, согласно ведущему феноменологическому признаку: актуальный, меморативный и конструктивный. Факторы, определившие направление исторической динамики, подразделяются на ряд категорий, в соответствии с масштабом и избирательностью событий, в рамках которых донские калмыки были консолидированы с другими сообществами. Данную классификацию дополняет типология носителей традиции, в основе которой лежит возрастная иерархия, соотнесенная со специфическим социальным опытом.

Основной источник исследования – полевые материалы этнолингвистической экспедиции в Яшалтинский и Городовиковский районы Республики Калмыкия, осуществленной Институтом социально-экономических и гуманитарных исследований Южного научного центра РАН в 2010 г.

Ключевые слова: калмыки, казаки, традиция, структурно-функциональная модель, носитель традиции, системная трансформация.

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