

Chinese migrants in the territory of the Barguzin region in the first half of the 20th century: ethnoeconomic aspects

L S Tsydypova

Sochava Institute of Geography SB RAS, Irkutsk, Russia

E-mail: tsidipovaluda@mail.ru

Abstract. In this paper we consider the features of the contribution of Chinese migrants to the ethnoeconomic practices of the communities of the Barguzin basin, based on modern approaches to cultural geography and field research. The research area covers an island forest-steppe and steppe, surrounded by mountain-taiga areas. In the valley of the river Barguzin meadow steppes are replaced by forest-steppes and swampy areas. The diversity of natural environment provided a basis for the formation of various systems of ethnic wildlife management. During the establishing their residency the representatives of Evenks, Buryats, Russians, Poles, Jews, Chinese, Tatars, Ukrainians, Byelorussians and others formed the basis of ethnoeconomic practices and traditional economy as a whole complex of socio-natural observations, ideas, mutual interpretation of the traditions of various groups of local population. The key role of cultural traditions and nature management in formation of spatial features of the economic activities of local inhabitants is due to their historical continuity and compliance with both the needs of society and the landscape-geographical environment. The research resulted in a conclusion about the stable idea of the local population about their territorial unity and ethnic tolerance of the Barguzin community. The combination of hunting, nomadic cattle breeding, focal agriculture, farming, lake and river fishing, gathering reveals a connection between people and the natural-geographical and ethno-cultural features of the territory.

1. Introduction

The study area has a long and rich history of settlement and development. Different ethnic groups, in accordance with their settling and nature use preferences formed a multicultural settlement network, which was the result of a long period of development. Economic activities, maximally adapted to the natural and geographical landscape conditions are expressed in specific ways of life and nature management. In cultural geography it is established that traditions have a system-forming character in the process of cultural landscape development [1]. At the same time, the tradition is not frozen; it responds to the challenges of times and changes with its current. Therefore, the research methodology takes into account the features of the convergence of time steps and territorial manifestations of ethnoeconomic transformation in the subjective perception of the Barguzin community. The focus of the study concerns the processes of ethnocultural memory: "site peculiarity," the geographic center of economic landscapes, and the contribution of Chinese migrants to the demographic and economic and cultural characteristics of population. Strongly expressed interethnic communication, mostly, ethno-cultural mosaicism and diversity (differentiation), and the formation of a common regional identity (integration) are typical for this territory.

The territory of the Barguzinskaya depression is located between the Ikatskii and Barguzinskii ranges from the northeast to the southwest, and is one of the largest intermontane depressions of the



northeast of Buryatia. The absolute height of the depression ranges from 500 to 700 m, while the height of the surrounding mountain ranges reaches 2000-2700 above sea level. The territory of the depression lies in the mountain-taiga zone, and its middle part is an island of steppe and forest-steppe landscapes located in a closed intermountain depression among the mountain and taiga spaces.

In the floodplain areas and on the terraces of the Barguzin river and its tributaries, the mosaic alternation of meadow steppes, forest-steppes and swampy areas is characteristic. Forest vegetation prevails in foothill areas and on river slopes (up to 1100-1300 m). Forests are rich in berries, mushrooms and nuts. The Barguzinskii range stretches along the north-eastern shore of Lake Baikal. A high and hard-to-reach range, crowned with rocky peaks of golets, rises almost up to 3000 m. The Ikatskiirange borders the Barguzinskaya depression from the northeast. Its crests are wide, flat watershed spaces with gently flattened peaks. The climate of the Barguzinskaya depression is characterized by sharp continentality with comparative severity and aridity. The mountain regions of the Barguzinskii and Ikatskii ranges and the upper reaches of the Barguzin river have more severe climate conditions. The mean annual temperature in the depression is 2-3°, and in mountainous areas - 5-7°. Long winter (more than 6 months) is characterized by severe frosts, dryness, clear sky and wind bull. The mode of air temperature in the area is subject to large fluctuations not only during the year, but also in seasons - in certain months, and even within a day [2]. The administrative structure of the study area has undergone a number of changes. Thus, the Barguzinskii district was consistently considered an administrative unit in the pre-existing Transbaikal region, the Pribaikal region, the Pribaikal province and the Buryat-Mongolian ASSR, where the center was the town of Barguzin. In 1917 the Barguzinskii district was established, which included a compactly residing Russian population. Buryat and Evenk people entered the Barguzinskii aimak, formed within the former Barguzin steppe duma and the Bauntovskii Tungusskaya government. In 1923, after the foundation of the Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (BMASSR), the Barguzinskiidistrict and aimak unite into one administrative unit – the Barguzinskii aimak within the borders of the former Barguzinskii district and are part of the BMASSR.

In 1924, part of the territory occupied by Evenks moved to the Bauntovskii aimak [3]. In 1925, the Severobaikal'skii aimak has been founded and included a part of the Verkhneangarskaya volost' and the territory occupied by the Tungus from the Barguzinskii aimak. By decision of the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of September 26, 1927, "On the new administrative division of the BMSSR", the division of the republic into counties, volosts, and khoshuns was abolished, now the aimaks were divided only into rural (somon) and settlement councils, and the town of Barguzin was renamed into a rural settlement – village [4].

Ethno-economic relations have involved each member of the community in socio-economic and political processes, which have become important stages of personal and family biography. The significant role of local traditions, their transformation and existence in the Soviet period determined the features of regional identity up-to-date.

2. Objects, data and methods

The approach presented in the paper reveals the details of local history in the political, social and economic dimensions. The analysis included interviews of residents of the north-eastern part of the Barguzinskaya depression (settlements of Alla, Mogoito, Argada, Garga, Kurumkan, Baragkhan), these are people, born in 1920s and 40s, are descendants of Chinese immigrants, as well as those who directly knew and communicated with the first emigrants of China. Thus, the link between interethnic relations, attitudes towards the habitat, the specifics of natural-economic interactions, values and strategies for space development has been revealed. The ethnoeconomic features of Chinese migrants are considered in the context of the transformation of the Soviet nature use (collectivization and the difficult time after breakdown of traditions), accompanied by crisis and painful changes for all ethnoses of the territory. Constructions of nature use relations, based on the experience of the ethnic group and collected from its significant fragments are sketches that build events in a story, explaining the logic of interaction of the local population with each other and the authorities. The paper also uses

unpublished materials from the district archive. The research set out the tasks of studying the territorial arrangement and adaptation of Chinese emigrants, the specifics of their settlements; identification of key events that are significant for the formation of ethno-economic lines; analysis of stories of informants with an emphasis on economic practices and socio-demographic characteristics.

3. Results and discussion

The post-revolutionary period was characterized by the establishment in Russia of a state monopoly on gold mining, but the civil war that dragged on in Transbaikalia impeded the state-operated extraction. This was the period of gold industry decline, including the gold mining in the Barguzin taiga. In 1925, 687 workers were registered in the gold mining industry in the Barguzin taiga, about 70% of them were Chinese. Gold was mined mainly by gold diggers, and it was very difficult to keep a record of gold mined by them, and especially by the Chinese, as each sought to hide the true volume of extraction. By 1930, due to the tightening of the tax policy, they all stopped their work [5]. The usual occupation of the Chinese, apart from gold mining, was trade. Thus, M. Novomeiskii recalled: "... Chinese merchants, owners of small shops, got along with the local population and earned its trust. One feature of the Chinese trade was different: it had neither owners nor hired workers, the cooperative principle was dominant. The Chinese learned the spoken Russian to some extent, but somehow they always confused the forms of personal pronouns: "my said," "yours goes," "his has come," the same was noted by local residents: "... often came from Ikat to Barguzin and sold soap and teato the locals. And then the border has been closed (the Argada village) "[6]. After the closure of the gold mines, the state demanded the eviction of all migrant workers, explaining this requirement by the need to secure the Russian-Chinese border. During this period, the political leadership of China experienced a crisis [7]. Therefore, the remaining part of migrants at kuituns (northeastern steppe landscapes - L. Ts.) of the Barguzinskaya depression was being gradually attracted to nearby settlements: "*The Chinese arrived even under tsarist Russia. In the 1920s, the Chinese were mostly in Baunta [At the gold mines - L. Ts.]. (the Alla village). Then they appeared in Ulyunkhan, in Alla they were not, and then gradually began to appear and to settle here. Then they settled in Argad, Garga, Kurumkan and further. Those Chinese who dug gold, they, of course, left the Soviet Union, and the simple workers, they remained ... so, step by step. In Kurumkan there were many of them*" (the Kurumkan village). Thus, the chronological period of the resettlement is noted by the informants in the 1920s and 30s, but in the books of economic records Chinese are first mentioned in the 1940s, and the place of leaving is Karaftit (Baunta). The main occupations to the 40s of the 20th century are: "truck farmer" and "brickman". Later, workers were attracted to the nearest collective farms, only a few continued to work in a brick factory. Among the additional single types of employment, the old-timers noted the cooking skills of Chinese, as well as sewing and repairing shoes: "... they cooked masterfully! Men cooked, we had such a chef Ch. The aroma could be heard for many kilometers. And our women did not know how, and we did not eat such dishes before. Later they learned ..." (the Baragkhan village).

During this period, the first Chinese migrants formed a settlement of compact residing of Sino-Russian and Sino-Buryat families, intermarriage ties were consolidated, and, consequently, acculturation and traditional knowledge exchange have intensified. During 1941-1950 92% of the previously migrated and already settled Chinese joined collective farms and communes. Thus, the population was about 200 people [8]. An important distinctive feature in the Chinese family was education in the spirit of cohesion and diligence [9]. During this period, the places of compact residence of the Chinese in the Buryat settlements were called "Shanghai".

Today, the microtoponymic plan of the locality of the old settlement (remote periphery) is a memorable center, where all the spatio-temporal echoes of political and social changes were manifested. Despite the compact residence in an alien environment, the assimilation process ensured stability and inviolability of residence on the territory and the continuation of the family - the names in Chinese families were preserved in Russian transcription. This process was accompanied by the

development of economic and cultural skills; the Chinese studied Buryat and Russian everyday communication.

Religiously, the descendants honor local traditions. Religious syncretism is observed, feast and funeral rites are taken (95%), traditions of family events (75%), and economic activities (95%). Zhambalova notes: "In the life of the descendants there are currently no special Chinese cultural elements except for one respected family of the Barguzin settlement. Here, the garden is cultivated according to Chinese technology with Chinese tools of labor, on holidays they prepare Chinese dishes; they celebrate the New Year according to the Chinese calendar "[10].

The results of the survey reveal a persistent positive attitude towards migrants in the Soviet period, caused by the inevitable economic difficulties that all residents of the territory experienced. Most families, due to the borrowing the traditional Chinese gardening skills, prevented the problem of hunger to some extent: *"They taught us to conduct irrigation systems,... planted cabbage, I remember such a L., very much saved during the war - gave cabbage, turnips. But the Buryats, they did not know how to plant, and in general they did not eat that way before. Berries were not planted ... "*. The history of the resettlement of Chinese people meant not only a new social environment and cultural traditions for local residents, but also the formation of a new land use system, as well as specific ideology of the border regions, which determined the views of local communities on their own place in the local history of the region.

4. Conclusion

Under extreme climate and difficult living conditions, the Chinese integration in the ethnocultural landscape of Barguzin Baikal region represents a positive phenomenon of the system of interethnic relations of the region. As a result of the interview, it was established that the descendants of Chinese migrants still represent a close-knit, friendly, industrious collective in the vision of local residents. Chinese families and migrant groups literally survived due to tolerant inter-ethnic ties of all the ethnic groups of the territory, and in turn, helped to survival to local communities in a difficult economic situation. Buryats, Evenks, Russians, Jews, Chinese and other ethnic groups of the Barguzinskaya depression are united by intermarriages, mutual assistance and support, and the exchange of cultural traditions.

The adaptation of Chinese migrants and their descendants in the predominantly Buryat territories had its own peculiarities. Despite the compactness of living in an alien environment, the processes of assimilation and acculturation provided stability, the opportunity to work and continue their family line. The key to the successful adaptation of migrants was the daily training of the Buryat and Russian languages, the development of economic and cultural skills of Buryats, Evenks and Russians.

The Chinese learned to interact not only with new societies and ethnic groups, but also with the natural environment that is unusual for them and contrasting in landscapes and the result of this interaction can be considered successful. In the materials of the survey of old-timers, a tendency to complement each other's civil and ethnic identity is seen. Traditions, as such, are blurred; religious ideas of descendants of Chinese migrants correspond to the general picture of local communities - Buddhism, shamanism. The ethnic identity, "Chineseness" gives way to other forms of self-identification, like "Barguzinian", and also has a local character: "Argadians, Gargins, Baragkhans" etc. Today the descendants of the Chinese live in the settlements of the Kurumkanskii district (Alla, Argada, Garga, Kurumkan, Baragkhan), and Ulan-Ude.

The obtained results suggest that a consistent analysis of family-generic stories serves as a reliable source providing an understanding of how ethnoeconomic lines of interaction become the basis for mutual assistance and the strength of territorial self-identification of all ethnic groups in the region. As a result, it can be noted that the traditional ethno-economic life-support practices that have been developed over a long period in polyethnic communities contribute to a dynamic and flexible transformation and adaptation to changing socio-economic and sociocultural conditions.

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