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The Traditional Economy of Indigenous Peoples of Central Siberia (the Case of the Selkups)

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the traditional economy of the indigenous peoples of Central Siberia based on the example of the Selkups living in the Turukhansky District of the Krasnoyarsk Krai, in the village of Farkovo. This research is based on the participant observation method which allows researchers to study the modern state of the Selkups' traditional economy via direct interaction with the Selkup people. The research includes analysis of such activities as traditional crafts, food, clothing, traditional medicine, religion, customs, rituals, folklore, original artworks, language, decorative and applied arts, etc. The research assists in the illustration of the particular features of the Selkups' traditional economy, which consist of the coexistence of original forms of lifestyle and certain types of activities undergoing changes over the course of time. Their traditional activities that still remain in practice include fishing, traditional food, traditional medicine, certain customs and rituals, holidays, and their native language. Some changes in the implementation of the Selkups' traditional forms of economy are attributable to hunting, folklore (the existence of original works of art), and decorative and applied arts. The article provides a detailed description of each of the specified activities carried out by the Selkups. This description is based on results obtained from interviews with representatives of this ethnos. Furthermore, this article points out the reasons why some of the Selkups' traditional forms of economy, such as reindeer breeding, making traditional clothing, and developing folklore activities, in their original form are disappearing. Today, these disappeared forms of the Selkups' traditional activities remain only in the memory of certain representatives of the ethnos.

JEL Classification: R11; N15; N35; Z13.

Keywords: Traditional economy, Central Siberia, indigenous peoples, Selkups, lifestyle, types of activities.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article analyzes the traditional economy of indigenous peoples of Central Siberia based on the example of Selkups, one of the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North. The economic life of this ethnos has been analyzed not only in terms of the Selkups' traditional economic activities, but also in terms of such cultural practices as traditional food, clothing, traditional medicine, religion, customs, rituals, folklore, original artworks, language, decorative and applied arts, etc. When taken together, these Selkups' activities characterize the modern state of the traditional economy of the indigenous peoples of Central Siberia in general. The content of this article is organized according to the specified forms of the Selkups' activities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The modern traditional economy of indigenous peoples of Siberia has been analyzed in different works by both Russian and foreign scientists. There are numerous foreign researchers who are engaged in studying the topic of interest. They include, in part, M. Chakars, E.L. Sweet (USA) and A. Ventsel (Estonia). These scientists are interested in the economic experience gained by the Buryat and Russian women in the Republic of Buryatia before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union [1]. The economic situation of indigenous peoples of Siberia has also been considered in terms of the informal economy typical of indigenous peoples of the Republic of Sakha [2]. Some of the Russian scientists whose research results have been published in English language who must be given recognition include: N.P. Koptseva, A.V. Keush, V.I. Kirko, K.V. Reznikova, and N.G. Shyshatskiy. The economy of indigenous peoples of Siberia has been examined by the scientists in light of globalization and the ethnic self-identification of representatives of certain ethnocultural groups. The impact that the globalization has had on the economic situation of indigenous peoples of Taymyr has been analyzed by N.P. Koptseva [3]. The author notes the trend of the traditional economy of the Dolgans, Nenets, Nganasans, Evenks, and Enets transitioning to the new post-industrial world economy, which is more promising than these ethnoses' traditional activities. Such scientists as N.P. Koptseva, K.V. Reznikova, and V.I. Kirko [4] raise the question of interrelation between the ethnic processes taking place in the Evenki ethnocultural group and the economic interests pursued by "the professional elite" from among the representatives of the Evenki ethnos. The new social and economic policy of the North was analyzed in the article by V.I. Kirko, A.V. Keush, and N.G. Shyshatskiy [5].

The following two main subjects of the indigenous people's traditional economy's development have been analyzed in the domestic scientific sources of 2000-2017: problems in the northern peoples' traditional economic activities' adaptations to the conditions of the market economy and the development of such activities in the era of globalization. The following studies are primarily attributed to the first subject: conceptual approaches to the transformation of the occupations of indigenous peoples in the North and Siberia in the modern economy [6], [7], [8]; development of the institutional economy [9], [10], [11]; problems in the integration and modernization of the traditional economic forms of indigenous peoples in Southern Siberia [12]; and indigenous ethnic groups' market economy as a socio-cultural problem [13]. In socio-cultural research, scientists suggest strengthening the development of social infrastructure (satisfaction of the needs of peoples of the North of the Russian Federation) as it affects the development of the traditional economic sector [14], [15].

The second part of the scientific studies includes: the possibilities of introducing the “green” economy” for indigenous peoples [16], [17] and development of the traditional economy of indigenous peoples of the North in conservative and modern organizational ways [18], [19]. There are studies dedicated to the ways of the possible development of certain northern areas: in the Komi Republic – ethno-tourism and reindeer breeding [20]; in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug and Yugra – development of traditional crafts [21], [22], [23], [24]; in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) – future economic development will be associated with intensive development of natural resources, the development of industrial and post-industrial activities, and entry into the global information space [25], [26], [27], [28], [29].

3. METHODS

This research is based on the field method or the participant observation method. Its appearance dates back to the first half of the 20th century and is named after the British anthropologist B.K. Malinowski. He went on an expedition to the Trobriand Islands where he stayed for six months and was engaged in learning the language and observing the local traditions and norms. As a result, he was finally accepted by the locals, which allowed Malinowski to see the activities taking place in Trobriand society and make his own adequate interpretation [30].

The following fundamental principles have been developed since the existence of the field research method: studying people in their natural conditions; conducting studies by direct interaction with people; and striving to understand the structure of society and make theoretical conclusions on the basis of the same. It is remarkable that theoretical conclusions in field research must not precede the participant observation itself. Participant observations should be initiated without any hypotheses, but only with a general subject; a field itself will form such hypotheses [31].

This research has been conducted in the territory of Turukhansky District, in the village of Farkovo, the only place in the Krasnoyarsk Krai where the Selkups live compactly together. It is located at the confluence of the Farkovka River and the Turukhan River. Transport junctions are organized by air and river transport.

4. APPLIED RESEARCH RESULTS

As articulated earlier, the traditional economy of the indigenous peoples cannot be reduced to only original types of management; it includes an entire range of interdependent aspects of northern ethnoses’ lifestyle, including traditional food, clothes, medicine, customs, rituals, folklore, language, decorative and applied arts, etc. All these components of the traditional economy will be examined below [32].

The traditional crafts associated with the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North (ISNPN) in the Krasnoyarsk Krai include reindeer breeding, hunting, and fishing. However, in the case of the Selkups, reindeer breeding disappeared completely several decades ago, in the 1960s and 1970s, when the last deer were killed. But in Farkovo the tradition of fur-bearing animal hunting (primarily, sables) is rather widely developed. The reasons why hunting traditions are so popular are as follows: first, it is a traditional ethno-preserving economic sphere; secondly, Farkovo is a village that is rather remote from the “main land” where there are also actually no jobs (school, kindergarten, boiler rooms, post office, etc.), therefore many are engaged in hunting and fishing and live in forests and on lakes for nine months a year.

According to Selkups, their lifestyle is dramatically different and subject seasons and occupations. So, from the fall to the spring, hunters practically do not leave their forests, but live in winter huts and pitch tents there in order to spend the night during long walks. According to hunters, while on business, they do not drink alcohol, they keep to their strict schedule, they get up at 6 am, and come back from hunting only at 1-3 o'clock on the next day. This entire time they are chasing sables. In snowy conditions, hunters cover about 25 kilometers a day. Coming back at the beginning of the summer to their settlements, hunters sell skins they've obtained (according to the locals, several dozens of skins) and accumulated funds during their absence paid by the state to them as indigenous small-numbered peoples leading a traditional lifestyle.

For many years, hunting, as a traditional activity, has undergone certain changes. Before using firearms, hunters chased animals with such weapons as bows and arrows, spears, and knives. The Soviet authorities provided hunters with bullets without any calculations, at least there existed such an impression since their cost was then deducted from hunters' salaries and paid by state farms and collective farms where they were on payroll. Since perestroika, there have been serious problems. Now hunters have to use bullets as wisely as possible and save them. During the course of time, not only hunters' weapons, but also their living conditions, have changed: the Selkups do not use chums, but use tourist tents, an easy-to-install and easy-to-transport dwelling.

Fishing also remains one of the most important traditional crafts. Usually, caught fish are not sold, but intended to feed family members. The Selkups fish by using fishing rods and nets made from purple willow.

Traditional food is usually the most well-preserved sphere of authentic culture. The research conducted in the village of Farkovo confirms the fact that the Selkups regard Selkup bread, yukola (dried pressed fish), pors (dried fishmeal), and original sweets as the most widespread national dishes. It was customary to bake Selkup bread in heated sand that they tore apart to place upon it a prepared round flat cake also covered in sand. Initially, only flour and water were the main components used in making dough, only sometimes salt, as salt was a product rather difficult to get. As a result, they had a rather thick and thoroughly baked loaf. In the spring time, they added pike or orfe caviar to make the dough more nourishing. When flour reserves were nearly out, they'd take minced fish, added a small amount of flour on a flat surface, put a flat cake of minced fish on it, and left it for some time until the flour was absorbed, then they overturned the mixture and repeated the whole procedure. Afterwards, the flat cake was fired in heated sand to finally make fish and flour bread. When it became possible to buy imported products, the composition of the dough for Selkup bread changed to some degree. Now, other than water and flour, they add salt and soda.

The Selkups still prepare fish dishes as yukola and pors and remain the most popular of them. Also, they like to fry fish on sharp sticks. Pors is cleaned fish intestines that are fried on a pan in its own fat. Yukola is dried fish. Initially, it was cooked without salt because of its extreme deficiency. Now, when they cook yukola, they add in some salt. Yukola is consumed in its pure form as well as as a semi-finished product. So, well dried yukola was pounded to flour which was mixed with jam or powdered sugar in order to produce sweets. During the periods when sugar was in short supply, they, in order to preserve berries they picked such as cloudberry, blueberry, and bilberry, put them into bowls and covered with animal fat, most often with cervine fat. When it came time to eat the berries, the fat was removed. Such preservation allowed the berries to stay always fresh, but only some Selkups complained that it was never possible to

remove all the fat and it was unpleasant to taste stiffened fat when eating berries. According to the Selkups that were interviewed, their former name “Ostyaks-Samoyeds” (actually “Syroyeds”) is due to the fact that they used to eat food products without heat treatment (for example, yukola, slices of frozen fish, or meat served cold, berries preserved in fat, etc).

Traditional clothes are no longer used by Selkups in their daily life as this tradition has been completely lost. In the summer time, the most popular clothes in Farkovo are “entsefalitkas”, i.e. khaki suits (trousers and jackets) protecting them from insects. Nevertheless, the Selkups keep their traditional clothes in their memory. They remember their parents of the older generation wearing traditional clothes and living in chumas. According to Selkups, their traditional clothes were very beautiful, were made from cervine skin, and were decorated with fur and beads. Clothes usually consisted of two layers: the underclothes included the skins of deer or polar foxes, meanwhile the top layer of clothing included materials embroidered with beads. During the period when it was difficult to come by beads, clothes were decorated with drawings from fur pieces of different colors. According to the representatives of this ethnos, traditional Selkup clothes are malitsies and parkis. Parkis were so warm that, when wrapped in such clothes, one could sleep right on top of the snow. Speaking of national footwear, Selkups mentioned bakaris, fur boots, and high boots. Bakaris, according to the locals, are some sort of fur stockings. Traditional shoes and boots were most often manufactured out cervine kamus, which, when correctly treated, was not subject to fading or loss of its fluff over time. Selkups made high boots out of burbots skins and manufactured them in a special way. These were not meant for wearing.

Traditional medicine is not practiced as often as traditional cuisine, but it is still quite popular to treat people with infused herbs. During earlier times, the Selkups used different components of animal origin (for example, bear bile) as drugs. One more substance of animal origin (according to the Selkups, the best substance) used to treat Barlow’s disease was the following: when a bear was killed, its blood had to be collected, the contents of its stomach had to be removed, and these were mixed with the collected blood and eaten. According to Selkups, one of the strongest and most effective medicines of vegetable origin is maromchanka (aconite, monkshood), which helps to treat all diseases. The main thing is to know is precisely what dosage to use, since most species are extremely poisonous. The same plant was used by shamans as a strong narcotic.

The traditional religion of indigenous peoples of the North, including the Selkups, is shamanism. The fact that some of their ancestors are shamans is a matter of particular pride for Selkups. They regularly mention this fact during interviews, although now there are practically no shamans. According to Selkups, shamans used sacred dolls, the most remarkable shamanism-related reminiscences, to fulfill their wishes and protective functions. Selkups state that such dolls are closely associated with offering up sacrifices to the elements for success in hunting and traveling. In former times, there were sacred fields where shamans placed dolls that people could dress in order to put forward pleas for well-being. These places with idols are still available far in forests, however there is no access and taking anything from those places is also forbidden. In forests are also sacred trees where they tie different rags together or leave other small items.

The Selkups’ customs and rituals still survive in the form of shamanism. First of all, they are associated with traditional types of crafts, such as hunting and fishing. The customs whose purpose is to affect weather conditions are rather widespread. For example, if they want to have frosty weather, they will need to throw salt on a fire. For the same purposes, they catch a snow hare and flog it with a twig.

The Selkups appease the spirits of the forest, fire, and water: food, and matches, cigarettes are put into hollows and under trees or thrown into the fire or water. Selkup daily life activities that are not associated with traditional crafts is also characterized by shaman rituals. For example, they still put a knife near the doorway in order to prevent many deaths. This is done in order to keep evil spirits away.

Traditional holidays are directly related to the Selkups' main crafts, fishing in particular. These are the Day of the River and Fisherman's Day. On the Day of the River, taking place during a river ice breakup, the Selkups throw bread crumbs into the river to help them have a good catch of fish. On the same day, poetry contests are held and participants compose poems and verses and associate them with the river. Children wearing national (or similar) clothes perform national dances. Most often these are stylized dances since there are few people who remember original national dances. As a part of the same holiday, people participate in different competitions, including sled ramps. The Fisherman's Day is celebrated in July. Celebrations include fishing contests and races on "branches" (traditional boats, log canoes).

Folklore and Original Artworks

The Selkups regard improvisational songs as one of their main traditional folklore genres: a singer sings what he sees, for example – how a teapot boils in the furnace or what he sees behind the window and how the weather changes. The Selkups say that they have traditional fairy tales, stories, and legends. Such fairy tales were told by representatives of the older generation, but the Selkups could not remember any such folklore stories. In Farkovo, we met V.S. Terin, a modern Selkup poet. His verses are recognized by the locals and published in local newspapers. The residents of the settlement are very proud of him. He writes verses in Russian only, although he speaks the Selkup language fluently. His verses are generally dedicated to hunting.

The Selkup language is used among Selkups who are engaged in traditional crafts. The middle-aged parents of many Selkups spoke their language fluently and used it at home as well as on business. Middle aged Selkups can be divided into three groups: the first is those who usually know only certain words (the whole population knows the word "ul" (vodka)); others speak the language, but don't actually use it, preferring to speak Russian at home, with friends, and at work; while the third group is those who are usually engaged in traditional crafts, they not only speak their native language fluently, but also actively use it both during traditional types of activities as well as in the settlement among themselves. The Selkups say that in the forest and in the village it is customary to speak the native language as, according to them, "it is spoken by itself".

The reason why middle-aged people, except those engaged in traditional crafts, do not know their native language was, according to the Selkups, education acquired in boarding schools during the Soviet period. Children were taken from all the settlements to be taught in boarding schools, they were removed from their native language environment, and they were also prohibited to speak their native language and reeducated, since some children who spent the first years of their lives with their parents in chumes did not speak Russian. According to some Selkups who attended boarding schools, the prohibition against using their native language was periodically followed by actions of violence, therefore, the children spoke the language very quietly, hiding in cellars, under tables, or went far away from boarding schools, however, if this fact was discovered by a teacher, these children were severely punished.

Some of the younger generation knows certain words from the Selkup language and the principles of its structure as it is learnt at school. But this way of teaching it could not revive the language among children and teenagers, since they actually never used it (except those who were actively engaged with their parents in traditional crafts). The Selkups complain that their children attending school do not learn the local dialect of the Selkup language: so, according to the residents of Farkovo, there are three dialects of the Selkup language: Turukhansky, Tazovsky, and Baishinsky; the Tazovsky dialect is generally learnt at school rather than the local Turukhasky one. In this regard, many adults do not want their children to learn Selkup at school as it is a difficult process in itself and is not a native language in that is fully understood. The younger generation does not want to learn the Selkup language, as many parents do not want to teach their children this language, and the reasons are more than just the fact that Selkup taught at school is not a native dialect for the local Selkups – it is also that it is more important to speak Russian, English, or any other foreign language because it is more promising.

The Selkups' traditional decorative and applied arts have practically disappeared. There remain only memories on how traditional clothes are decorated with beads and fur. The only decorative and applied arts trend that has been developed in Farkovo is the processing of large pike heads (shaping, drying, tint coating, lacquering) like the heads of animals as hunting trophies used to decorate interiors. A school teacher from Farkovo learned the processing skill during his military service. Now, he imparts this ability to students.

Social Problems

In addition to the fact that the Selkups' traditional lifestyle is vanishing, the Selkups complain that there is a number of problems to which they pay special attention. In particular, they address material security: it is very difficult to live under conditions of little financial security while a lot of funds are having to be spent on food, clothes, and home improvement. Most informants complain that almost all their funds are being spent on food. The Selkups complain that the state's support is provided only to those residents who are engaged in traditional types of activities, while other people living under the same difficult climatic conditions and far from large centers, which affects the prices of food, but are not engaged in original crafts, get no state support under the support programs intended for ISNPN, although sometimes they have to take care of the children of hunters who live in forests for several months.

The Selkups' traditional lifestyle is vanishing. The following two factors are considered as the main reasons for this phenomenon: switching to a sedentary lifestyle and children being taught about ISNPN in boarding schools during the Soviet period. Now, various traditions are often being restored according to books. For example, a teacher giving Selkup culture lessons to children in Farkovo does so relying on materials obtained from the Internet, sometimes requesting help from the remaining old Selkup residents.

5. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the Selkups' traditional economy shows that their economy currently remains more traditional as it is closely associated with the traditions and customs being fostered. As for the future economic development of all northern peoples, one can predict that these ethnoses will not be threatened by extinction as long as they use their native language. A minimum of support of traditional crafts (hunting,

fishing), traditional food, traditional medicine, and holidays confirms that these values are foundational to the traditional economy. Along with that, the globalization processes and inevitable penetration of the current trends of social development into the culture of the indigenous peoples of Siberia characterize the modern traditional economy of these ethnoses as transitional and changing. In particular, this is shown in the disappearance or reduction of the role of certain original practices of indigenous peoples, such as, for example, reindeer breeding, making and wearing traditional clothes, and traditional folklore. Furthermore, those types of activities which still live on among indigenous peoples of Siberia are currently undergoing changes. Thus, hunters' weapons and living conditions change over time, original creative activities take place in folklore practices, and people are becoming more aware of greater opportunities and the importance of Russian, English, or other foreign languages rather than their native one. Under the influence of the globalized world, the residents of Farkovo, nevertheless, associate their economic future with the development of certain trends: the introduction of additional lessons (for learning their native language, the Turukhansky dialect) to school curriculums; support for families engaged in traditional types of activities (since products made in the North are of great value in the consumer market); the revival of folklore basics and decorative and applied arts and economic support for original art for the purposes of preserving and developing the unique northern culture for the modern interethnic and intercultural society.

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