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The “New World” in the Evenk Writers’ Works

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The article considers the works by such Evenk writers as G. Chinkov and G. Keptuke, who created them in the earliest years of the Evenk literature (1930-s) and at the end of the XX century, respectively. In their works these authors artistically depict the changes the Evenks, who had traditionally been nomads with their own way of life, experienced when they got involved into the Soviet community. The Soviet period is viewed in the article as the ‘new world’. The dramatic changes in the social and cultural spheres of life determined by a new civilization were interpreted by the aforesaid authors in different ways. In his works of the early decades of the twentieth century, G. Chinkov welcomes the radical transformation in the Evenks’ life. By contrast, in the late XX century G. Keptuke demonstrates a critical viewpoint on the ‘new world’s’ influence on the Evenk people’s mentality. This article compares the works by the Evenk writers of the early and late periods of the Evenk literature and reveals the evolution of the Evenks’ life perception throughout the XX century.

Keywords: Evenk literature, the Evenk ethnos, the Evenks’ mentality, the Soviet period in the Evenk literature, the ‘new world’, traditional way of life, artistic interpretation of social and cultural reality.

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The twentieth century in the fate of the Evenk ethnic group is marked by transformations in the socio-cultural sphere. What made them peculiar is the fact that they had to fundamentally change the life of the Evenks, often in radical forms. It is not surprising that the Evenk authors referred to the artistic interpretation of the “new world” in their creative work. This “new world” implies the realities imposed on the ethnic group’s life by the Soviet authorities. In this regard, the works created in the 20th century but separated by

decades are of great interest. Grigorii Chinkov wrote his poems in the 30s, whereas Galina Keptuke became known in literature in the 80s. Before giving them a detailed consideration, it is worth while mentioning some historically important facts in the Evenk people’s fate.

In the pre-revolutionary period the local groups of the Evenks were engaged in reindeer and cattle breeding, fishing and hunting. They united into tribal and geographically neighboring communities, collective use of land, equitable

distribution of production (except fur), and private ownership of deer and tools being their characteristic features (Vasil'ev et al., 1987). Their public relations were regulated by the customary law. For example, the Evenks tried to strictly follow the tradition of mutual aid ("nimat") as well as customs of hospitality and custody (Uvachan, 2001).

The situation began to change after the Soviet power had been established in the regions of the North, Siberia and the Far East (1920). Like other ethnic groups, the Evenks had to join a new progressive Soviet community. According to A.S. Skachko, these ethnic groups' transition from the tribal system to socialism in record time would confirm the correctness of the national policy of the RCP(b) with its important principle of the provision of equal rights to all peoples of the USSR as opposed to the capitalist countries' colonial policy (Skachko, 1923). Economic and cultural "alignment" of "backward" peoples, their involvement in the industrial society was one of the important tasks for the state. This task was carried out due to educational policy, collectivization, struggle against the shamans and the so-called "kulaks", the Evenk reindeer herders' transition to the settled life.

G.M. Vasilevich, an outstanding scholar who studied the Tungus people, suggested a reduced impact variant of changes, and namely the assistance in the form of organizing schools, horticulture, pig-breeding, reindeer and fishing artels (farms) so that they could go over to other forms of economic activity by their own. So, for example, G.M. Vasilevich noticed that logging in the areas of the Evenks' settlement would deprive them of fishing, the change of activity in order to survive would not be equivalent to the old, traditional one, as they were not ready for innovations (Vasilevich, 1931).

In 1925 the Committee of the Peoples of Northern regions (the Committee of the North)

recognized the cultural communities (kultbazy) as the most effective form of management in the regions of the North (Zelenin, 1938). It should be noted that at the initial stage of the Soviet power in the North the authorities took the local population's ethnic peculiarities into account. For example, "Vremennoe polozhenie ob upravlenii tuzemnykh narodnostei i plemen severnykh okrain RSFSR" ("Temporary Regulations on Management of Native Nations and Tribes of the Northern Regions of the RSFSR") (1926) provided for the establishment of tribal meetings, tribal councils, "tuzriks" (native regional executive committees) (Nikul'shin, 1939). The implementation of the transition to the settled life was accompanied by the construction of small settlements with a school, first-aid station, shop, and houses for reindeer breeders and hunters.

Soviet power should be given due credit, regarding educational policy. Campaigns for abolishing illiteracy were initiated, schools and technical schools were opened locally (Khabarovsk, Khanty-Mansiisk, etc.). The workers' faculties of Leningrad educational institutions, and namely of the Leningrad Institute of Living Oriental Languages (1926/27), the Department of the North of the Leningrad Institute of the East (1927/28), the Institute of Peoples of the North (1930), the Northern branch of the Herzen State Pedagogical University (1936), taught the specialists from the North. The students, who studied in Leningrad, participated in the development of regulations and legislative acts concerning the organization of the Northern territories. For example, they came up with the proposals for the establishment of national districts, introduction of compulsory primary education, regulation of economic activity, cultural and health services, etc., directing them in the form of orders to the plenary meetings of the Committee of the North.

Ia.P. Koshkin, G.M. Vasilevich and M.G. Voskoboinikov, the scholars studying the Tungus people in the 20-30-s, contributed to the formation of the Evenk literature while involving the Evenk students in social activities and creation of writing. Small notes on the people’s life and culture, autobiographical stories, recordings of folklore and ethnographic material were published in the “Taiga and Tundra” journal, ABC books and books to read, as well as in some collections of works.

The first Evenk poets were students of the Institute of Peoples of the North. It was the room of an unfledged writer where their creative work started. Grigorii Chinkov-Edian from Sakhalin was among them. One of the peculiar features of his work is glorification of the Soviet reality. Its poetic representation in Chinkov’s works, as well as in the works by other authors, contributed to the emergence of a new layer of culture in the history of this people. A different reality was coming into the Evenks’ life. The poems “U nikh. U nas” (At Theirs. At Ours), “Zhenshchina severa” (“The Woman of the North”), “Stalinskaia konstitutsiia” (“Stalin Constitution”), “Kolkhozniki” (“The Collective-Farmers”), “Prezhde i teper” (“Before and Now”) embody the “new” Soviet reality. Using the antithesis technique, the author expresses his attitude to the pre-revolutionary life and the events that took place during the Soviet era. Contrasting the old and the new world order is an important feature of the poems mentioned. For example, “Prezhde i teper” (“Before and Now”) poem (1938) presents the kinsfolk’s bitter lot in the following way:

Baiasal bintsesityn / In the time of the rich
Amiialty, enielty, / Our mothers and fathers
Urgepchuet khavaldianal / Worked hard
Mutsnendenel bidentskityn / And lived in sufferings
(Chinkov, 1938, p. 24).

But a different, happy mood characterizes the world view of the Evenks, living in the Soviet era. It is due to the fact that wooden villages sprang up in the taiga, schools and hospitals opened, the children got an opportunity to study in schools.

Dolbor tegeelin / The peoples of the North
Omaktaldu diulduvar / In their new villages
Sevdeepchut bidenel / Live happily
Khavaialvar khavaldiara / And work
(Chinkov, 1938: 25).

Adoption of the “new world” in the Evenk author’s creative work is primarily due to the fact of his witnessing of profound changes in the Evenks’ life. The autobiographical genre has always been fundamental in the Evenk literature. Artistic understanding of the world is manifested through the prism of his personal experience.

G. Chinkov was an orphan from early childhood, yet he had an opportunity to receive education in elementary school and then enter the Pedagogical Department of the Institute of Peoples of the North. A young man, who came from distant Sakhalin to study in Leningrad, fell in love for reading and theater. The Institute had various clubs; the life of the students was supervised by the teachers. Under the guidance of G.M. Vasilevich a young author wrote his first poems here and recorded the stories by his memories. These poems and stories were published later. All this could not fail to exert a positive influence on the young author. In the poem “Leningrad” the poet writes:

Tuntsnaiadu antsnanildu / During five years of studies
Alaguvdiatkar bidene / I mastered the knowledge
Savuialva gadianaia / And got educated.
Nonoptyldu antsnanildu / In previous years,
Tegemeril bintsesityn / When the tsars ruled,

Ergechinme binieve / Such life
Edetsnkiv dialdare / Could not be imagined
(Chinkov, 1938, p. 22).

G. Chinkov's poems mentioned above were written in the line with socialist realism. According to A.B. Esin, "... the heroic pathos – the pathos of transformation of the reality, overcoming and elimination of any obstacles on the path to the socialist ideal – becomes the leading pathos of socialist ideal" (Esin, 2003, p. 140). Therefore, such concept symbols of the new era as socialism, pioneers, the Komsomol members, school, and collective farms became organic parts of his creative work.

In Chinkov's "Rodnaia zemlia" ("The Native Land") collection of poems (1938) the poem "Leningrad" conveys the lyrical hero's feelings and impressions from the meeting with a big city. News about Leningrad in distant Sakhalin is figuratively expressed in the first quatrain. It's structurally and rhythmically similar to the formula used in the beginnings of the folk heroic songs – *nimngakany*.

Buga nekemi muemedukin / At the most remote place of the country,

Dunne nekemi sitkimedukin / At the most distant place of the earth

Sen-da mudandiv sendadentskiv / I heard by the tips of the ears

Leningradkan binieven / About the life of Leningrad.

The lyrical hero was stunned and struck by the noise and lights of the city. His amazement and perplexity are revealed in the following lines:

Erken-de iltchana / Standing like this

Teritykiken ichetchehev. / I was looking around.

Baldydiak-bugaialvav / My motherland

Umnemet-te echen urere. / Was totally different

(Chinkov, 1938, p. 19).

In his perception a strange place is associated with the scenes of his native land.

"Agi urelin" – gunchenev / "The mountains of the taiga", I said, -

"Delomikur diul olla". / "Stood like stone houses".

Irinek diugachinin, / Like an anthill,

Beekekur khiuidechetyn / the current of people seethed

Tulieli ugevdanel / In waves along the street.

Beekekur ulgenivdechetyn / The people moved in endless succession.

Dylacha garpagachinin / Like sunbeams

Togol seelbutchechetyn. / the lights sparkled

(Chinkov, 1938, pp. 20-21).

At the end of the poem the lyrical hero confesses that he visualized the city as his small motherland.

These examples of G. Chinkov's creative work evidence the lyric hero's harmonious entry to the "new world". Simplicity, artlessness and descriptiveness inherent to the Evenk poet's works do not diminish their aesthetic value. It is expressed in the reflection of positive attitude towards socio-cultural realities that took place in the fate of the Evenk ethnic group in the early 20th century.

Another artistic interpretation of the heroes' relations with the "new world" is presented in "Imeiushchaia svoe imia, Dzheltula-reka" (Dzheltula River, the river with its own name", Galina Keptuke's story. This story was first published in 1989. Its folklore motives relate to the key moral issue of the story, the issue being the Evenks' preservation or non-preservation of "threads of life" connecting a man with Buga, the god of the sky, deities and the world around. How can this ethnic group exist in new social conditions?

The family serves as the basis of the traditional model of being. Artistic images of father Ivan, mother Keteri, an old man Cherikte embody the principles of the traditional world outlook and attitude towards life. They are wise, honest and noble. Thanks to these qualities they manage to survive in difficult situations. The features of folk poetic consciousness make themselves evident in the fact that everything is alive and everything has a soul. This results in their careful and reverent attitude to trees, places, and humans. The family life is full of rituals, demonstrating entire closeness of a human and nature in the traditional worldview. However, the taiga, the Evenks' foster-mother, grudgingly shares with them already, which is due to the fact that there appeared "a lot of foreign smell in it" (Keptuke, 1991, p. 30). Roaming in the endless taiga nurtured the Evenks' love to a vast space. Thus, a wooden house, which Keteri's family has to live in, seems a trap to her. The woman is as if short of air; she is depressed because she cannot hear the sounds of trees and rivers, and the sun is only visible in the window.

The "new world" is determined by the destruction of the traditional pattern of behavior, destruction of the family and disregard for the customs. The taiga got empty without the Evenks who left for the collective farms. G. Keptuke shows that over the decades of the former nomads' settled life there had been dramatic changes in their worldview. One of the heroines of the story – Keteri – describes the Evenk collective farmers capaciously and correctly: "... Only few people have real families in the collective farms. Is it a family if the husband is in the taiga, the wife is in the village, and the children are in the boarding school?" (Keptuke, 1991, p. 108). The fate of Maia-the-Roe, who refused to kindle the family hearth, serves a good example of this. This young woman said about herself that she had lost touch with her family origins while wandering

through the gold mines. Her words seemed to sadly make a summing up of the civilization stage that the ethnic group had passed through: "Join a collective farm, send children to a boarding school and live as you want. If you want to drink, do this; if you want to go on a bat, do this as well" (Keptuke, 1991, p. 107).

Maia's death is symbolic in this piece of work. The owl Keteri meets on an evening path is a messenger of misfortunes. A frightened woman realizes that the bird has appeared for a reason. "A rough spiny ball" that troubled her before is growing in her chest. On the eve of her death Maia comes to Keteri's raw-hide tent as if coming back to her native taiga. They recall the past before going to sleep, and at this moment their hearts get filled with warmth. Their memories carry them back to times when they were young, and they thought life would be kind to them in future. But the reality turned out to be harsh.

Maia settles scores with life in a scary place. Being neutral concepts of ordinary life, a thicket, a dense forest, acquires a different meaning in the story. The author actualizes the mythopoetic semantics of this image. The Evenks believed that Sugi-the-Whirlwind, a messenger of misfortunes, dwells in the thicket. This place is described in the work the following way: "a tree with a broken top stood high in the dense thicket. On the one side a branch, which was thick and long like kharga's crooked arm, grew far sideways" (Keptuke, 1991, p. 115). Maia chooses a terrible death. According to the Evenks' traditional beliefs, she dooms the kheian-soul to wander around the earth like a ghost as it cannot leave for the world of the dead.

Thus, G. Chinkov's and G. Keptuke's works, created in different years of the previous century, evidence the evolution of the "new world" perception. As it was mentioned above, the Evenk authors' creative work is autobiographical. This is important for understanding of the socio-cultural processes peculiar to the ethnic group's history in

the course of the 20th century. The fundamental transformations in the ethnic group’s historic fate served as an inspiring source in G. Chinkov’s poetry. Correlation of the “truth” of life with the artistic “truth” in G. Chinkov’s poems can definitely show that they diverge to a large extent. The ethnic group’s transition from the patriarchal community to the Soviet one caused the Evenks’ mixed response as not everyone understood and accepted social innovations. Yet, this complex and largely dramatic process that affected every Evenk family was not artistically realized by the Evenk authors. Firstly, ideological dissension was not allowed in the years of the Soviet power. Secondly, the poet’s conviction that the Evenks’ life transformation was needed for the sake of promising future should be also taken into account.

G. Keptuke’s story presents a different interpretation of the revolutionary events that greatly influenced the Evenks’ world view. Her character Keteri says: “Is it good when a man changes everything at once? He becomes a different man.

And who knows whether the new one is better than the one before” (Keptuke, 1991, p. 106). The Evenk writer made a name for herself as an author in the late 80-s of the 20th century. It is known that public discussion of pressing social, political and cultural problems in our country started at that time. The traditional way of life was no longer attractive for the Evenk younger generation. The Evenk language began gradually losing its communicative function; many customs and traditional moral norms were consigned to oblivion.

Currently, the possibility of the young Evenks’ inclusion to their ancestors’ culture is preserved notwithstanding the fact that many of the traditional culture elements seem to be lost. This requires a systematic approach to the implementation of the programs aimed at preservation of the Evenks’ ethnic identity, language and cultural traditions. The Evenk society started realizing that the ethnic component is an essential value which is opposed in its existence to the unification of culture characterized by a unifying and yet devastating origin.

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«Новый мир» в творчестве эвенкийских авторов

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В статье рассматриваются произведения эвенкийских авторов Г. Чинкова и Г. Кэптукэ, относящиеся к разным этапам истории эвенкийской литературы – первой трети и концу двадцатого века соответственно. В творчестве названных авторов младописьменной эвенкийской литературы художественно осмысляется, как этнос, ведущий традиционный образ жизни, оказался вовлеченным в новую советскую общность. Советский период в истории эвенков определяется нами как «новый мир». Цивилизационные изменения в социокультурной сфере, оказавшие радикальное влияние на мировоззрение эвенков, получили различную интерпретацию в произведениях указанных литераторов. В начале 20 века коренные преобразования в судьбе этноса с воодушевлением были восприняты Г. Чинковым. В конце прошлого века писательница Г. Кэптукэ критически оценивает влияние «нового мира» на мировосприятие своего народа. Сравнение произведений авторов раннего и позднего периодов эвенкийской литературы, предпринятое в настоящей статье, позволяет обнаружить эволюцию мировосприятия эвенков в 20 веке.

Ключевые слова: эвенкийская литература, эвенкийский этнос, мировосприятие эвенков, советский период в эвенкийской литературе, «новый мир», традиционный образ жизни, художественное осмысление социокультурных реалий.

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