Socio-cultural Adaptation of Migrants: Theoretical and Methodological Aspect

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Abstract: Development of the Russian Far East over the entire history was influenced by different specific social factors among which one of the determinant places belongs to migration processes. Migration to other socio-cultural communities generates the necessity to reconstruct social and personal space of the subjects of migration, i.e. the migrants and population of the hosting social environment. Observation of real social practices shows that migration in polyethnic region along with the positive effects is accompanied by aggravation of antagonism in the hosting society. Therefore, in this work we presented an attempt to theoretically understand the phenomenon of socio-cultural and psychological adaptation of migrants and revealed and highlighted the peculiarities of migrants’ adaptation and integration in the subcultural space of the region.

Key words: Far East • Migrants • Ethno-cultural environment • Adaptation

INTRODUCTION

The problem of migrants’ adaptation in different ethno-cultural environment, despite the large number of empirical works, is one of the most complicated ones, since migration into socio-cultural communities generates the necessity to redesign social and personal space not only for the migrants but for the population of the hosting social environment.

Lack of systemic theoretical base necessary for uniting objective social conditions of polyethnic socium and results of subjective personal interpretation of social reality by the adaptation subjects are negatively reflected on the required constructive stability in the polyethnic space of the hosting region. As a result, the adaptation subjects (ethnic migrants and hosting population) do not have an opportunity, first, to build up an identification model of contrasts “Us-Them” and secondly, using the interpretative strategies of social adaptation, to construct the consistent images of social reality for themselves and others.

In this respect the elaboration of theoretical bases for migration subjects’ adaptation to regional polycultural reality becomes especially topical.

The Main Part: Recognition of the polyvalent character of problems related to research methodology generates the necessity to use a complex interdisciplinary approach combining the ethno-cultural and ethno-psychological knowledge and general theory of adaptation. Among them first of all we distinguish three main theoretical approaches to the understanding of “ethnos”: primordialism, constructivism and instrumentalism.

The representatives of primordial orientation (P. van Berg [1], A. Smith [2], K. Girtz [3], VU. V. Bromley [4], L.N. Gumilev [5], S.M. Shirokogorov [6]), understanding ethnos as real socio-biological phenomenon pay special attention to investigation of the nature of such historical and cultural image and study its changes at the interaction with environment within the frameworks of the idea of “ethnical processes”.

The supporters of constructive and instrumental approaches (S.A. Arutyunov [7], B. Anderson [8], E. Hobsbaum [9], E. Gellner [10], V.A. Tishkov [11]), interpreting ethnos as conceptual and artificial construction focus their attention on investigation of specific manifestations of ethnicity in any social form.
The methodology of modern sociology of knowledge implies the assessment of the role of consciousness in the process of ethnos and nation functioning. To designate and explain this dialectics the concept of “identity” is widely used.

As applied to our investigation, authors understand the ethnic identity as a realization of the existing set of objective and subjective features of ethnicity, according to which every person is attributed to specific ethnic community, where this individual objectively realizes his or her potential. Subjective ethnic identity of an individual is, first of all, the result of cognitive and emotional acknowledgement of the person as a representative of a specific ethnos, a certain degree of self-identification in this ethnos and separation from another ethnos on the basis of auto- and hetero-stereotypes. Part of the substance of subjective ethnicity is ethnic unconsciousness, including the ethnic constants (material suppressed or displaced by the majority of people from the given ethnic group sharing every generation with the following one, i.e. the entire historical experience of ethnos).

The basis for ethnic self-identification is objective ethno-differentiating indicators, such as ethnonims, language, territory, religion and economic and cultural features [12].

The unity of subjective and objective ethnic identity forms the boundary “Us and Them”; although being very flexible and subjected to constant changes it helps saving the individual in social world.

The methodologically important here is the analysis of the phenomenon of social adaptation of an individual.

In modern domestic and foreign sociological and socio-philosophical literature different theoretical and methodological orientations provide different understanding of the ontology of social adaptation of an individual: 1) as a process of organism adaptation to different changes of environment; 2) condition of homeostatic dynamic equilibrium between the organism and environment; 3) adequate productive effectiveness. At the same time, the entire diversity of explications of “social adaptation” in literature may be reduced to the normative (structural and functional) or interpretative theoretical and methodological approach according to the scheme of adaptive interaction “subject-object” [13].

Within the frameworks of the normative approach (N. Wiener, T. Parsons) social adaptation of a person is determined as a process of continuous social control over the conformity of human behavior with some norms and values prevailing in society and “imposed” during socialization and at the same time, it is a system of social activities aiming at overcoming adaptive barriers that slow down or impede this adaptation in any adaptive situation [13].

According to the interpretative approach (M. Weber, J.G. Mead, I. Hoffman, A. Schutz), social adaptation is an informative and communicative ideological construction of the essences of being and strategies of personal activities during uninterrupted interpretation of self-identity and symbolical social contexts in terms of their compliance with consistent understanding of social reality that is purposefully formed or spontaneously adopted during socialization. As a result of this process, the adaptation subject can, first, fix, refine and reconstruct his identity and secondly, using the interpretative strategies of social adaptation, to construct the consistent ideal images of social reality for himself and others [13].

To combine the structure (time-space and process-result features of adaptation) and the meaningful (subjective interpretation of social reality) context of adaption process it is necessary to use the complementary normative and interpretative approach to understanding of “social adaptation” phenomenon. As a result, the ontology of social adaptation of a person is a derivative of objective social conditions and results of their subjective and personal interpretations [13].

At the same time, the subject of social adaptation is not only adapted in the given natural and social conditions, but changes and adapts these conditions being components of social environment.

For ethno-cultural adaptation the world science uses the term “acculturation”. American anthropologists R. Redfield, R. Linton and M. Herskovits designated this phenomenon as “an aggregate of phenomena arising from the fact that the groups, belonging to different culture, come into direct and long-term contact leading to changes in initial cultural patterns of one or both groups [14].

In this definition the authors distinguish the recipient group, whose initial culture undergoes changes and the donor group, from whose culture new images and behavior schemes are drawn.

The authors also distinguished three main results of acculturation: 1) perception - mastering most of a different culture and adoption of behavioral stereotypes and values of a new culture; 2) adaptation - combination of initial and imported elements in a harmonic integer or preservation of contradictory understandings, interacting in daily behavior according to the circumstances; and 3) reaction - appearance of a variety of counter-acculturation movements and bringing psychological factors to the forefront.
American anthropologists M. Mead studied the acculturation processes among immigrants based on the concept of intergenerational relations. Analyzing the relations between generations she distinguished three types of cultures: postfigurative, where children, first of all, learn from their parents and adult community members; configurative, where both children and adults learn from the people of the same age; and prefigurative, where adults in addition learn from their children. M. Mead believed that the mechanisms of migrants’ acculturation as a rule agree with configurative and prefigurative types of cultures [15].

Canadian psychologist J. Berry reduced acculturation to two main problems: commitment to proper culture (i.e. to what extent the proper cultural identity is preserved) and participation in intercultural contacts (degree of inclusion in a different culture). According to J. Berry, to determine individual orientations for acculturation it is necessary to clarify the opinion of the person on two main questions. The first question “Is it important to maintain your cultural self-identity?” is related to the attitude to proper culture, its value for the person and necessity to preserve and develop the ethno-cultural identity. The second question “Is it important to contact to other ethnic groups?” is formulated to determine the relation of a person to the contact group: to what extent interaction with the members of this group is valuable and desirable for an individual [16].

S. Bockner was one of the first researchers who distinguished the models of identity transformations (acculturation strategies) of migrants during their adaptation to new culture:

- Integration, i.e. the group of migrants’ preserves cultural identity simultaneously adapting some elements of cultural identity of the dominating group;
- Assimilation, that is a gradual voluntary or forced loss of cultural identity and in return, adoption of norms and value of the dominating group up to the full dissolving;
- Segregation or orientation to separate group development;
- Genocide, i.e. orientation to deliberate destruction of the group [17].

As applied to our approach, the acculturation is understood as a process and result of migrants’ adaptation and assimilation of different ethno-differentiating features of new ethno-cultural environment at preserving the language, culture, traditions, self-consciousness of their ethnic belonging. At that it is assumed that the successfullness of acculturation is effected by social and cultural adaptation as a complex accommodation in objective socio-economic, political and cultural conditions of environment, understanding of problems and adaptive situation by the migrant, interpretation of adaptation process and formation of adaptive space and identity on this basis.

Conventionally, we may distinguish three stages of migrants’ adaptation: penetration into culture, evaluation and integration.

At the first stage of adaptation the migrants experience all main effects of cultural shock. Resettlement breaks the dynamic equilibrium between the internal and external environment: the original ideas, rules and behavioral models are often inadequate for the conditions and requirements of new environment. The consequence of social roles reconstruction and self-identification is a feeling of inferiority or inability to master new ethno-cultural environment.

The analysis of opinions resulted from the test of Kun-Makpartlend “Who I am” shows that even testing itself becomes difficult. Trying to protect the former identity under new conditions the migrants are afraid of this question. 90% of surveyed migrants gave only one answer to each question and some of them did not provide a response at all. The “self-notion” loses integrity and identity “goes to pieces”: “Who I am” and “What I can do” are the questions that are difficult to answer at the stage of entering new environment. The internal and external dissimilarity with local population develops the feeling of “foreigners”, “unnecessary” people of the second grade.

During searching for new identity in identification matrix of migrants the professional identity starts dominating (63% of respondents opted for a category “worker”, “businessman”, “construction worker”). However, part of migrants loses this only method of self-identification since they have to use their qualification potential inefficiently or only partially. The professional status of about one third of migrants decreases compared with the one before migration. The migrants’ focus on labor and work is also proved by their overload. 59% of surveyed migrants pointed out that they devote all their time to work (working for 16-18 hours a day without days off), 30 % of migrants mentioned normal load (12 hours a day and 6-day work week), 2% told about minimal load and 9% found difficulties in replying. 43% migrants answered that they would work
better at higher salary or if employed within their specialty. The investigation results have shown that the migrants who arrived to work in the territory of the region mainly work in construction (objects for APEC Summit), trade, consumer services and agriculture.

One of the important factors conditioning the character of migrants’ adaptation process and construction of positive identity is housing. Analysis of housing conditions has demonstrated that more than a half of migrants do not have their own homes: 48% live in hostels, rent an apartment, house or room and 14% more stay with their relatives or friends. Thus, 53.7% of respondents pointed out the necessary improvement of their housing conditions and considered their current accommodation as temporary; 23.9% of respondents were not satisfied with their accommodation even despite it was a temporary one; and 22.2% of migrants were satisfied with their housing.

The study has shown that solving the housing problem the migrants rely only on themselves (“Hope to build a house or purchase an apartment” - 56.2%). At the same time there were quite a few people who showed themselves completely helpless (“no opportunities at all” - 32%).

Migrants’ assessment of the level of their family income turned out to be one of the factors that impact on coping with the crisis identity and success of ethnic migrants’ integration into polyethnic environment of the Far East region.

Survey of migrants living in the territory of Far East has shown that their income is as a rule low, income of 60% of respondents covers only basic products, 24% - products, medicines and cloths and only 16% do not experience difficulties. Two thirds of respondents think that their situation will improve in future.

At the second stage of adaptation the most important factor aggravating the crisis of orientation in life is migrants’ relationships with local population.

Having arrived to new socio-cultural environment often foreign and malevolent, the majority of migrants find themselves in full isolation from local people. Their contacts are short-term and episodic and often they are limited only by communication with law-enforcement and public agencies and employers. Only a few migrants have close friends among local people.

On the level of ethno-social comfort we may judge on the answers to the question: “What is the local population attitude to you?” 40.2% of respondents note tolerance of the local people. Almost half of migrants, 50.5% assess the attitude as indifferent. 4.3% of surveyed suffer from bad attitude. Thus, the common feature in the interactions of native people and migrants is “indifference”, that determined the social and psychological atmosphere of ethnic migrants’ adaptation.

This is proved by the data of another interview. Answering the questions: “Is it important to keep in touch with your ethnic group and other ethnic communities?”, 70% of respondents emphasize the importance of their ethnic identity and at the same time, quite a few of them neglect any relationships with other groups (41.9%).

Apart from important socio-psychological reasons, namely, increase of competitiveness in the labor market conditioned by appearance of a plenty of cheap workforce, there are also a number of psychological reasons why migrants and hosting communities experience difficulties in understanding and interaction. The friendly relations and efficient contacts between migrants and local people are impeded by the differences in values, orientations, behavior, traditions, customs and bilateral rejection resulting from all mentioned above. Only about half of migrants (42.3%) and local people (39.7%) are partially aware of customs, traditions and behavior of each other. Others do not have any idea about it.

In this respect the most important objective of investigation was to compare the ideas on proper group (in-group) and on another external (out-group) among migrants and hosting communities. The notions “Us” and “Them” are the most important indicators of interrelations between two contacting subjects of migration and thus, the indicators of success or failure in forming ethnic identity according to the “normal” type.

According to the results obtained with the modified methodology of Katz and Braly, in migrants’ auto-stereotypes there is clear prevalence of positive features (75% respondents noted: hospitable, helpful, friendly, modest and responsive) and some negative ones (24.9% noted: lazy, weak, sly, heavy drinkers, resentful).

Prevalence of positive in-group self-assessment is an impressive proof of the fact that the surveyed migrants have a well-developed feeling of “Us” aiming at forming the positive identity of its members.

In migrants’ assessment of native population there are both negative (50.2% - greedy, lazy, scandalous, stubborn, disunited, not knowing their own culture, aggressive) and positive characteristics (49.8% - hospitable, smart, responsive, tolerant, cheery and sociable).
Evaluation of the transformation level of ethnic identity and accordingly, of the intensity of any of its type in our investigation is based on total points obtained from calculations of the overall number of all positive replies of respondents on the following questions of the questionnaire “What is your attitude to probable marriage of your close relative (son, daughter, brother, sister) with the person of another nationality?”.

In the groups of migrants living in the Far East region the dominating is the orientation to the mixed marriage manifested in the preparedness to accept a person of different nationality as a spouse and as a spouse of a child. So, 46.2% believe that nationality is not relevant in terms of a marriage; 29.9% of the surveyed migrants would prefer a person of the same nationality but would not object if it is a choice.

1.8% of respondents agree with the opposite orientations, namely, they are indifferent to the partner’s nationality at the condition of his or her observance of the customs and traditions of another partner’s nation.

10.2% of migrants demonstrate the pronounced ethno-isolation in interethnic communication and object to the marriage with a person of another nationality. 12% of respondents believe that possible interethnic marriage of the close relatives depends on the nationality of the chosen one.

Thus, the comparative analysis of the transformation of respondents’ ethnic identity has shown that among the ethnic migrants arrived to the Far East, the undoubtedly dominating is positive ethnic identity. Orientation of migrants on proper ethno-cultural environment at simultaneous openness for other ethnic groups predetermined the high points (54.8%) for this type of ethnic identity on a scale of ethnicity indicators.

At the same time at general prevalence of ethnic identity formed on the type of “a norm”, the vectors of identity transformation for a group of migrants turn out to be directed to different poles of the ethnic scale. So, in the course of analysis of ethnic identity transformation it was found out that the vector of ethnic identity of 13.5% of surveyed is directed towards hypo-identical purposes (aiming at grading proper ethnic identity), whereas 31.5% demonstrated a trend to ethnicity accentuation resulting in the increasing importance of hyper-identical purposes. This is proved by the migrants’ answers to the question “Is there anything that local people can learn from you?” The absolute majority of migrants were unanimous answering positively: “Diligence”, “High quality of work”, “Respect to elderly people” and “Help to each other”. At the same time, ethnic migrants neglected influence of local culture: “There is nothing to learn from them!”

In migration, high significance of ethno-affiliating trends reflecting the growing demand in proper ethnic identity is an indicator of ethnic identity formation on ethno-isolationism type. When ethnic identity takes different forms of hyper-identity (ethno-isolationism, ethno-egoism or national fanaticism), it stops performing its adaptive role for the person coming to a new ethno-cultural environment.

These results are proved by the survey of local people. For instance, despite the good contacts with the hosting community only 17% of respondents perceive the migrants as “friends”, others pointed out that perceive the migrant as a “foreigner” and objected to the marriage with the person of different nationality.

Rejection by the hosting community results in isolationism of migrants and orientation on “friends”, i.e. hyper-identity formation. The grouping of migrants often accelerates and strengthens negative social attitude that furthers development of migrant-phobia among the hosting population. In the people’s minds in the Far East region there is a deeply enrooted idea of treating migrants as a cheap labor force that may be used for the hardest and dirtiest labor.

The third stage of adaptation, integration, is characterized by full assimilation of a migrant in the hosting community.

The main objective at the stage of migrants’ integration is to reach such adaptive result, which strengthens and restores their identity and construct the consistent adaptive space acceptable socially and psychologically. Main condition for successful completion of social adaptation of migrants is development of proper productive models of social behavior based on individual resources. The investigation results proved that despite the remaining cultural differences between ethnic migrants and hosting population, the migrants are included in the region’s life and are integrated into its culture. During adaptation migrants reappraise proper system of values refusing from non-adaptive behavior conventional in their previous lives. So, among the respondents we have found up to 39.2% who fully adapted themselves to new conditions and 21% who were determined to stay. This stage takes from 3 to 5 years.
CONCLUSION

Thus, we may conclude that at the conditions of economic growth and simultaneous depopulation in the Far East region the only source for replenishing the economically active population is migration. At the same time despite the obvious pluses, the migration is a factor destabilizing the polycultural environment in the region. The reasons of destabilization are the increased migrant-phobia among the hosting population, lack of effective migration policy directed at migrants' integration in a different ethnic environment in the region forming clear adaptation purposes for migrants and increase of the overall level of culture in adaptive environment. In this respect the most important and expedient objective of the governments is development of a single concept of effective regional migration policy intended for maximal adaptation of all subjects of migration (immigrants and hosting population). Main trends of the regional policy related to migrants should be, first of all, the development of human potential by creating favorable conditions for adaptation of the arriving Russian-speaking migrants and improvement of the legal base regulating illegal and illegitimate migration.

REFERENCES