

State of the Russia's Indigenous People: the Case of Siberian Aboriginal Nation - Khakas People

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Abstract — The purpose of this research is to discuss the status of Russia's Indigenous people and the perspectives of use the traditional economic activities for socioeconomic development Indigenous community. This study aims to analyze the traditional economic activity with the help of the questionnaire of 1500 respondents (from different ethnic groups) in different parts of the Siberian region - Khakasia. The results of empirical research have shown that in Khakas communities, traditional kinds of activity are extended and they are of great importance for people as earlier. The research demonstrates that traditional economic systems of Indigenous people are very stability. It has to be considered at realization of a government policy.

Keywords — Indigenous People, Socioeconomic Development, Government Policy, Traditional Economic Activities, Indigenous Economy.

I. Introduction

There are more than 100 ethnic groups in the Russian Federation. Of these, 41 are legally recognised as “indigenous, small-numbered peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East”. The small-numbered indigenous peoples number approximately 250 thousand individuals and thus make up less than 0.2% of Russia's population. This status is conditional upon a people having no more than 50 thousand members, maintaining a traditional way of life, inhabiting certain remote regions of Russia and identifying itself as a distinct ethnic community. A definition of “indigenous” without the numerical qualification does not exist in Russian legislation. Therefore the special government policy is absent to the ethnic group which peoples number more than 50 thousands members. Actually, number of members of Russian indigenous ethnic group is about 19.7 million. From them 9.5 million indigenous people live in rural areas and more than 2.3 million individuals maintain traditional lifestyle.

The current socioeconomic circumstances of the Indigenous people in Russia are complicated. For example, according to the 2010 census compared with the 2002 census, the populations of 24 indigenous peoples have declined and only ten have seen positive growth. In 19 out of the 26 indigenous regions, the indigenous population is showing a numerical decline. The loss is particularly significant in the republics of Tyva (Tuva), Komi and Karelia [1].

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According to the Goscomstat, unemployment among indigenous peoples is 1.5-2 times the Russian average, with 24.5% unemployment among the indigenous peoples of Yamal-Nenets okrug and 47.8% among the indigenous population of Amur oblast [2]. Incomes of indigenous peoples are 2-3 times lower than the Russian national average. Infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, a typical indicator of extreme poverty, cause 60 deaths per 100 thousand, which is almost three times the national average of 23 per 100 thousands [3]. Furthermore, maternal deaths and child mortality are significantly above the national average. Indigenous people, while at the same time often damaging the traditional economy, leaving communities less self-reliant and therefore worse off than before.

The purpose of this research is to discuss the status of Russia's Indigenous people and the perspectives of use the traditional economic activities for socio-economic development Indigenous community. The research describes socioeconomic conditions of the Indigenous people in Russia on the case of Siberian aboriginal nation - Khakas people. This study aims to analyze the traditional economic activity with the help of the questionnaire of 1500 respondents (from different ethnic groups: Khakas and Russian) in different parts of Khakasia and suggests to use traditional economic systems as the instrument of development indigenous regions.

The structure of the paper is as follows: The second section presents the problems of definition «Indigenous people» and shows some estimates of the indigenous world population. The third section presents the research framework about traditional kinds of activity of Khakas people and the last section is the conclusion.

II. Indigenous people: problems of definition

A. World's Indigenous People

Indigenous people maintain the traditional economic practices and the cultural peculiarities of outlook in spite of strong influence of the globalization impact. There is no universal and unambiguous definition of the concept of “indigenous peoples”, but there are a number of criteria by which indigenous peoples globally can be identified and from which each group can be characterised.

The most widespread approaches are those proposed in the International Labour Organization [4] Convention No.169. According to this convention, indigenous people are

descendants of those who lived in the area before colonization and have maintained their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions since colonization and the establishment of new states.

The United Nations system has developed a modern understanding of this term based on: self-identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member; historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies; strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources; distinct social, economic or political systems; distinct language, culture and beliefs; form non-dominant groups of society; and resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities [5].

In the documents of European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, the term “Indigenous Peoples” is used in a technical sense to refer to a social and cultural minority group, distinct from dominant groups within national societies, possessing the following characteristics in various degrees [6]:

- self-identification as members of a distinct indigenous ethnic or cultural group and recognition of this identity by others;
- collective attachment to geographically distinct habitats, traditional lands or ancestral territories in the project area and to the natural resources in these habitats and territories;
- descent from populations who have traditionally pursued non-wage (and often nomadic/transhumant) subsistence strategies and whose status is regulated by their own customs or traditions or by special law or regulations;
- customary cultural, economic, social or political institutions that are separate from those of the dominant society or culture;
- a distinct language or dialect, often different from the official language or dialect of the country or region.

While definitions of «indigenous» may vary from institution to institution, they generally contain three core elements:

- descent from populations inhabiting a region prior to later inhabitants;
- geographical, political, and/or economic domination by late inhabitants or immigrants;
- maintenance of some distinctive social-cultural norms and institutions.

Depending on the definition employed, estimates of the indigenous world population vary. Rough estimates suggest that there are more than 5 000 different groups living in more than 70 countries. It has been further estimated that there are approximately 250-350 million indigenous peoples worldwide, representing 5 percent of the world’s population [1]. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues estimated that up to 15 percent of the world’s poor, and up to

one-third of the rural poor, are indigenous [5]. Table 1 captures three versions of the indigenous population estimates.

TABLE 1: Indigenous Population by region (millions)

Region	First version [7]	Second version [8]	Third version (own estimates by regions) [9]
China	91.00	105.23	106.40
South Asia	60.00	94.90	94.90
Former Soviet Union	28.00	0.40	0.40
Southeast Asia	26.50	29.84	29.84
South America	16.00	19.53	16.00
Africa	14.20	21.98	21.98
Central America/Mexico	12.70	19.07	12.70
Arabia	5.00	15.41	15.41
USA/Canada	2.70	3.29	3.29
Japan/Pacific Island	0.80	0.00	0.80
Australia/New Zealand	0.60	0.46	0.60
Greenland/Scandinavia	0.12	0.10	0.12
Total	257.62	310.21	302.45

Regardless of the definition or estimates of size, one must begin by acknowledging the remarkable diversity of the world’s indigenous peoples. Their communities are distributed throughout the continents of the earth, and their members range from traditional hunter-gatherers and subsistence farmers to the expert professionals recognized in industrialised nations. Some indigenous populations have remained essentially the same for hundreds of years, even into the modern era, while others have been highly integrated into the dominant cultural and economic society [10].

B. Russia’s Indigenous People

The economy of indigenous people of the Russian Federation at the beginning of the XX century included set of traditional types of extensive economy such as different combinations agriculture, cattle breeding, hunting, fishery, gathering wild-growing plants, crafts and trade. There are some types of traditional economy in the territory of the Russia and estimate of the Indigenous Russia’s population (Tabl. 2).

TABLE 2: Types of indigenous economy in the Russian territory

Type of indigenous economy	Ethnic group	Indigenous population estimate (thousand)*
Reindeer husbandry	Nenets, part of Komi people, Chukchi people, North group of Yakuts, Koryaks, Sami people	63.7
“Taiga type” of cattle husbandry	Yakuts	284.1
“Steppe type” of nomadic herding	Tuvans, Buryats, Altayans, Khakas people, Kalmyks, Bashkirs, Kazakhs	1907.8
Traditional sea hunting	Eskimo people, part of Chukchi people, Aleuts	3.4
Reindeer hunting	Nganasans, Enets, Evenks, Evens, part of Khants and Mansi, Selkups, Dolgans, Tofalars	68.0
“North taiga type” of hunting and	Teleuts, Orochs	1.7

gathering economy		
Traditional fishing economy	Part of Khants, Chulyms, Kets, Ulchs, Udege, Nivkh people	15.8
Traditional agriculture with hunting and gathering	Veps, Karelians	28.2
<i>Total</i>		<i>2372.2</i>

*according to the 2010 census

Some of these types of indigenous economy practically disappeared today or were cardinally transformed, such as traditional sea hunting, reindeer hunting, “north taiga type” of hunting and gathering economy, traditional fishing economy. Others, on the contrary, revived in the period of a long economic crisis of the 1990th and now make essential impact on economy of national regions and territories, for example, reindeer husbandry, “taiga type” of cattle husbandry, “steppe type” of nomadic herding, traditional agriculture with hunting and gathering.

Thus, the indigenous people number living in the territory of Russia makes about 2.4 million. Indigenous economic system is part of a socioeconomic totality that connects and governs the lives of Russia’s Indigenous community. Unfortunately, the indigenous economy is not capable to exist in the conditions of the modern market without the state support. Articles 3 and 20 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people would therefore be important rallying points to push for the recognition of indigenous economic systems. However, Russia has not ratified ILO Convention 169 and abstained from voting in the UN General Assembly on the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

III. The Case of the Khakas People

This part of article describes economic and social situation of one of Siberian ethnic group – the Khakas people. Khakas is an aboriginal ethnos of Southern Siberia which traditional employment are nomadic cattle breeding, hunting and gathering of forest product.

A. *Khakas people background*

In 1991 the territory populated by Khakas people got the status of a republic. The title ethnos (Khakas) makes 12% of population of Khakasia or 65.4 thousand persons. The contemporary ethnic composition of Khakasia has been formed rather recently. In 1910 Khakas people made 98% of the region population. The results of the First Russian Population census in 1926 showed Khakas had made 53% (44.2 thousand persons) of all inhabitants of the territory. Population had sharply increased (3.1 times) from 1926 to 1939. It continued to improve further because of inflow of labor migrants from other parts of Russia. This influx of the Russian-speaking migrants has provoked the acceleration of assimilation of the autochthonic population. The government policy on industrialization of Siberia from 1960 to 1980 has

strongly destroyed habitual life of the aboriginal people and has not offered any other alternatives of employment. Later physical and mental health of Khakas people have been dramatically decreasing in the Russian reforms of the end of the 20th century. Khakas people have poorly adapted to the new socio-economy institutes and the alien means of generating livelihoods. Social problems, including alcoholism and suicide behavior, are prevalent in the Khakas communities. In this connection, Khakas communities are characterized by the lowest level of economic improvement and the life quality.

Khakas people have long development of indigenous economy to govern their societies. Their traditional economic systems ensured sustainable utilization of resources, social responsibility and harmonious relationships through cooperation.

The government decisions of the period of a planned economy on agro-industrial development of Siberia have negatively affected the environment of Khakasia.

Firstly, there was a campaign for tilling virgin soil in 1956-1961 when 46% of farmland of the Republic had been ploughed. Such scale-plowed land without local agro climatic features has led to heavy ecological consequences. The steppe territories underwent the strongest wind erosion and soon the arable land has been destroyed. To this day 85% of an arable land are subject to a wind erosion and about 30% are carried in the category of poor (having 1.5-2% of a humus) [11]. The area of pastures was reduced therefore by many collective farms (collective farms and soviet farms) which have been compelled to overtake cattle for grazing in summertime in a taiga. As a result of hundred springs and the wood rivers have been trampled and have disappeared. Many rare species of plants have stopped to exist.

Secondly, there was a campaign for development of light industry in the 1960th when several powerful industrial complexes had been constructed. It was necessary to increase a livestock of sheep for maintenance complexes of raw materials (wool). The livestock of sheep has increased 3.3 times in republic for 30 years and has got about 1.5 mln in the 1990 (Table 3). The cattle breeding was still extensive, therefore loading on pastures was excessive and by the end of the 1990th, it made 5 times more scientifically proved norm. It has caused a deep and scale degradation of the steppe territory of Khakasia.

TABLE 3: Livestock dynamics in Khakasia

	Livestock of everything (thousand)						
	1880-92	1917	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010
Equines	73.3	70.9	28.2	24.7	14.7	14.3	31.9
Cattle	75.1	113.8	257.8	179.1	134.3	139.2	169.4
Sheep	168.8	277.2	1488.8	543.7	156.8	78	175.0

Thus various government policies that aim to modernize, standardize, and scale up rural production as well as increase manufacturing demand destroyed the system of traditional knowledge which was existing for many hundreds years in the Khakas territory. For generations, Khakas have lived in natural ecosystems in which they have developed and practiced lifestyles and belief systems that draw upon their deep knowledge about local plants, wildlife, and ecology. They used different strategies for maintaining livelihoods including hunting, gathering, nomadic grazing, fishing, and intensive agriculture. This variety of strategy provided preservation of ecological system [12, 13].

B. Stability of Traditional Economic Activities of Khakas People

The purpose of this abstract is to prove that traditional economic activities of Khakas people remains in local communities on the contrary to assimilation and negative state policy consequences for ethnoses. This study aims to analyze traditional economic activity of Khakas with the help of the questionnaire of 1500 respondents (Russian and Khakas) in different parts of Khakasia.

The results of empirical research have shown that in Khakas holdings the cattle breeding still prevails (Figure 1). The livestock of Khakas holdings is about 25-50 % more than of Russian holdings.

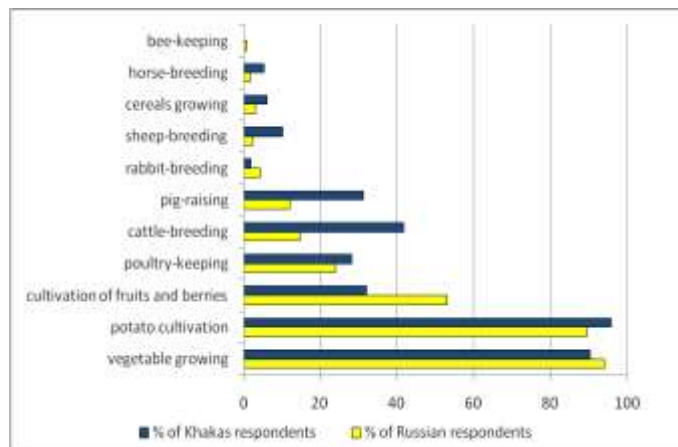


Figure 1: Shares of household economy are involved in traditional agricultural activity

The visible land-user differences exist between Khakas and Russian holdings. The Khakas people are using the smaller area of the land as fields and gardens than the Russian and greater part of land as haymaking and pastures.

Traditional wildlife management takes a significant place in maintaining livelihoods inhabitants of Siberia. For example, about 40% citizens of Khakasia are involved in to gathering. Figure 2 describes that more Khakas people than Russian, which are involved into gathering.

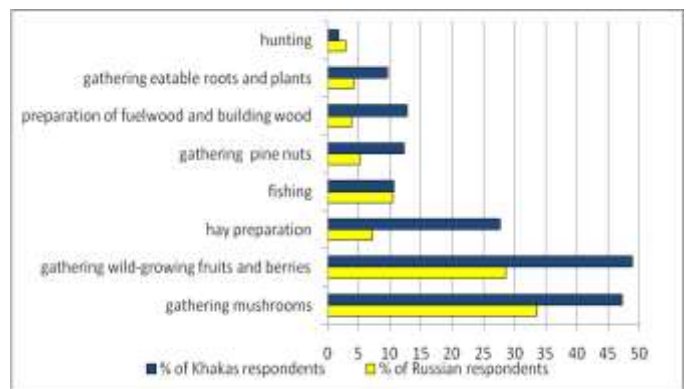


Figure 2: Shares of household economy are involved in traditional wildlife management

Thus, despite strong influence of the Russian migrants on indigenous people, in Khakas communities traditional kinds of activity are extended and they are of great importance for people as earlier [14].

Stability of economic activity of Khakas people allows assuming that indigenous economic development governs the way of life of Khakas community. The guiding principles of national policies on indigenous economic development could recognize the rights of indigenous people to establish traditional economic activity. Besides such rights have to be at not only “indigenous, small-numbered peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East” and at all indigenous people of the Russian Federation.

IV. Conclusions

The major points covered by this paper may be summarized as follows, the traditional economic systems of indigenous people are very stability. The territory of Siberia was attached to the Russian Empire in the 18th century. Since then traditional economic institutions of Khakas people passed a difficult way of evolution. There were some important periods of transformation such as imperial policy of resettlement of peasants from the Central Russia to Siberia (1890-1913th), revolution and military communism (1917-1920th), Stalin collectivization and repressions (1929-1938th), Soviet planned economy (1940-1990th), market reforms (1990-2000th). The results of empirical research have shown that in Khakas communities traditional kinds of activity are extended and they are of great importance for people as earlier. Therefore, stability of traditional economic systems has to be considered at realization of a government policy.

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