

Resettlement and Adaptation of Asian Tribes on the Territory of Northern Eurasia

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Abstract

The earliest evidence of human presence in the Far North of Asia refers to the Upper Paleolithic, when the climate changes, caused by global warming of the Atlantic climate period, opened for the inhabitants of the southern territories way to the North. The warm period allowed the ancient man to move up to the subarctic zone, but where were the initial migration areas? Science does not yet have unequivocal information, only rare findings allow us to construct some working hypotheses. Our hypothesis is based on possible connections between the modern indigenous population of the North of Eurasia and the peoples of southern China and South-East Asia. It has been established that the Ob-Irtysh anthropological type of the West Siberian race can indeed have roots in Southeast Asia. The ornaments of the North demonstrate clear links with the ethnographical samples from Japan, southern China, Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia. The inhabitants of the taiga zone of Northern Asia were primarily hunters, not farmers, so analogies should be sought not in agricultural areas, but in regions with similar type of economy, in the mountains inhabited by small nations, self-isolated for thousands years, who preserved ancient features of their culture. Over the past millenniums, the agricultural civilization gradually erased the traits of hunters and gatherers, but some grains of relict features preserved in the cultures of small nations and they could indicate the objectivity of the ideas about the formation of the Paleo-Asiatic tribes of northern Eurasia in Southeast Asia. Ethnogenesis of Asian peoples of Siberia is an important question that requires serious interdisciplinary archaeological and ethnographic research. At present, the problems of ethnogenesis of Asian peoples of the Far North can be solved only by complex and interdisciplinary methods and on a broad chronological and territorial background. The existing materials allow only formulating the problem and outlining directions for research in the long-term perspective.

Keywords

Northern Eurasia, Southeast Asia, Migration, Resettlement, Adaptation

1. Introduction

Natural and climatic changes in the north of Eurasia at the turn of the late Pleistocene and Holocene launched the mechanisms of large-scale transformations, such as natural (changes in the vegetation, the area of glaciations, the level of the World Ocean and the hydrography of the region in general), and also social, primarily, increasing the mobility of population groups in comparison with the upper Paleolithic. Migration processes and adaptation to the new living conditions radically changed the way of life of the ancient man, also the whole range of food resources, which in some cases can be traced on archaeological materials of this period.

The first Russian discoverers of Siberia appeared in the North of Asia in the 11th-12th centuries, fully mastered this territory by the 17th century. They encountered the Selkups, Kets, Evenks, Yukagirs, Eskimos and other indigenous peoples who lived there (Figure 1). During the coexistence with Russian originally agricultural culture, everyday life, customs and diet of Asian tribes were greatly transformed, many national features were erased. There are only some



Figure 1. Indigenous peoples of the North Siberia, Far East of Russian Federation and their possible connection in Asia.

relict features that are interesting for special research. For example, the Yamal Nenets chum called “neneymya”—“real dwelling” is not an ancient form of residential construction and is formed at the time of appearance of appropriate imported iron tools—in particular, carpenter’s axes, purchased from Russians. According to archaeological research, the ancestors of the Nenets or closely related peoples originally used frame dwellings like yaranga or peat-turf structures.

Another example of transformation is connected with physiology. Excavations of the Nadymkygorodok, the residence of the leader of the military-political association of several territorial communities that existed since the end of the 12th century till 1731, where the ancestors of modern Khanty, tundra and forest Nenets lived, showed that the diet before the arrival of Russian settlers was characterized by an extremely low carbohydrate content. It is known that the daily norm of carbohydrates, which is necessary for the normal functioning of the human body, is about 100 gr. and comes first of all, from plant foods (Dobrovolskaya, 2005: p. 280). Carbohydrate starvation can be an explanation for a sedentary lifestyle and the predominance of technologies that required minimal labor. Part of the carbohydrates, obviously, came with meat food, but it was insufficient for active living. Collection of wild plants and berries also constituted an insignificant part in the diet, for example, cranberries growing on the banks of rivers and on upper marshes, as well as pine nuts, were not picked at all. Special harvesting of wild plants in the system of economy of this period did not exist. The additional confirmation of this fact is the absence in the material culture of containers for collecting, transporting and storing berries and nuts (special baskets, shoulder bags or sacks, barrels of birch bark) (Kardash, 2009: p. 282-283). In this connection, it is entirely unclear how the constant need for carbohydrates that provide the basic energy for human body was compensated. Human body is more adapted to the excess, than to the lack of this component in the diet (Dobrovolskaya, 2005: p. 28-29). It can be assumed that only in the period of Russian colonization, the aborigines began to get bread. The facts of plundering grain stocks are well known from written sources, but it is very unlikely that it provided a systematic feed (Kardash, 2009: p. 282-283). Thus, we see that the northerners did not have carbohydrate food, only protein, which forced the body to adapt. The diet changed only with the arrival of Russian settlers.

In general, the territory of the whole Western Siberia or Western Asia from the upper reaches of the Ob and Yenisei rivers to the Kara Sea of the Arctic Ocean was the zone of settlement of Asian peoples, here took place the first contacts with the conventional Caucasoid race and the processes of formation of new racial types. In ancient times, some of the Asian peoples settled down up to the Scandinavian Peninsula in the North or the Northern Black Sea coast in the south and were very transformed. In this regard, some indigenous peoples of Europe have Asian features, and in Western Siberia-European, and there is always a confusion connected with their external perception from the philistine (unprepared) point of view. For example, who are the Khants-aboriginal Asians

or European Finnic peoples? If they are settled from the west, then when and why, and if they were local, then from what part of East or South-East Asia they settled and when?

In archeology, the processes of forming of the Asian tribes of northern Russia have been studied very little. The settlement of man on this area occurred already in the Upper Paleolithic-the Early Neolithic, when climatic changes caused by the global warming of the Atlantic climatic period opened to the inhabitants the way to the north. This process was very long and there were several waves of migrations, but modern archaeological data show that traces of human economic activity are found both on Novaya Zemlya and ZhokhovIsland (Makeev & Pitulko, 1991). According to thepaleoecologists and dendrochronologists, in the early Neolithic the middle and polar Ural was characterized by larch forests and a climate that enabled man to settle down in this region (Putenikhin, 2003: p. 22). Warm periods allowed ancient tribes to migrate right up to the subarctic zone, but as for the initial points of migration, science does not yet have any data.

2. Hypothesis

Early materials of the northern cultures were extremely rare, ceramics was poorly ornamented, mainly, the bone tools from peat bogs were the markers of cultural differences. Now the new materials have appeared, with the expansion of research it is possible to put new sites on the map of Northern Siberia. Nowadays the investigations of remarkable sites such as Ust-Poluy, Poluiskeygorodok, Nadymkygorodok, Bukhta Nakhodka demonstrate a huge collection of wooden, birch bark tools, textiles that fully reflect all aspects culture of ancient Asian tribes of the North.

The Ob-Irtysh Mongoloid anthropological type of the West Siberian race, which include Khanty, Mansi and other indigenous peoples of Russian Asia may have roots in Southeast Asia (Bagashev, 2011: p. 294). Ornaments and geometric compositions, present in modern small nations (for example, a rhombic braid, found both on Hainan and in the north of Eurasia) demonstrate the possible links between Vietnam and southern China with the north of Siberia. Analogies can also be found in anthropomorphic sculpture (Varenov, 2017: p. 18-20), in ceremonies associated with the “sacred pillars”, also in the pictorial tradition. Can it possible that the ancient population of Southeast Asia traveled such a long way and settled down in the north of Eurasia? While the archaeological evidences of this hypothesis are rare, moreover, there is no information about the advancement of ancient tribes through the intermediate territory of modern China, but nevertheless, some rudiments testifying the possible migrations of Asian peoples are present in the material culture of all aboriginal peoples of Northwest Siberia, which can mark the optional resettlement of the Asian population.

The stated hypothesis is based on the more investigated problem of settling the New World by ancient man (Vasiliev et al., 2015). Unfortunately, at the

moment there are no similar general works about the questions of settling up the north of Eurasia. The settlement of America went along the ocean coast, but now the archaeological sites are flooded with the rise of the World Ocean level, but same groups of ancient people that settled to the North America could, judging by the Ust-Ishim man, who is located only 350 km from the Nadymkygorodok, migrate to North Asia. Diaphysis needle bars represent an example of the preservation and transmission of information on a large chronological period, beginning in the Upper Paleolithic and ending with nowadays ethnography. A fragment of the Upper Paleolithic diaphysis needle bar and needle itself was found in Denisova cave (Shunkov et al., 2016: p. 222). Such needles and needle bars are found among the finds of the already mentioned ancient settlement of Western Siberia-Nadymkygorodok. In such a conservative sphere as female needlework, practically nothing has changed until the ethnographic modernity, that means that the information about certain technologies, methods, was transmitted on a gender basis and remained unchanged for centuries. Among women of Nadymkygorodok with a certain Asian component, and among the Eskimos, Paleo-Asiatics, the diaphysis needle bars from the numerous bones had the same ornament, representing horizontal compositions or zigzag belts (Kardash 2009: p. 231). They copy wicker ornaments also on cases for sewing accessories (ibid: 242-243). These copies were also found on Ust-Poluy site, where the bark scratched materials were absolutely identical to the wicker ornaments. And this is the IVth century BC.

The same basket for handicraft and needlework was found in the Saygatinsky III burial ground of the 13th-14th centuries (Figure 2, (1 - 2), (4 - 5)), where it was put in the women's burial next to the needle-beds and needles. These patterns exactly repeat the ornaments of the south of East Asia, for example, on the details of the woven belts for stretching a hand loom that have a unique gender identity of li nation of Hainan island (Figure 2 (3)). Baskets from aborigines of northern Borneo also have an identical ornament, it has a sacred function, it was used not for decoration, but to protect the owner. No one could see it, because it was sewn above the basket from the back side. So it is the same ornamentation on hunting bags (on Hainan), women's baskets (on the North of Siberia) or the walls or shutters of the house (in Vietnam). In all these cases it was more important to have that protective ornamentation, rather than to demonstrate it. Khanty ornaments on birch bark are scraped, represent geometric patterns, they probably imitate wicker ornaments. We again find analogies on Hainan Island of li nation, where the geometric ornament repeats the weaving, and this geometrism is transferred to other materials and forms. Now weaving in its traditional form is preserved mainly in the culture of archaic small peoples of Southeast Asia, moreover, it is observed on different materials from houses to clothes. At the same time, there are some objects and ornaments that unite all these small peoples of Southeast Asia from the Okhotsk Sea to South China (from Sakhalin and Hokkaido to Kalimantan: Ainu, Miao, Li, Bahnar, etc.). There are several



Figure 2. The analogies of wicker ornaments in Saygatinsky III burial ground (1 - 2, 4 - 5) and Li village of Hainan island (3).

variants of geometric ornaments; concentric rhombuses, spirals and zigzags. Such wares with woven geometric patterns were also discovered during the excavation of archaeological sites of aboriginal peoples of the Far North.

We can state that, at least from the 1st cent. BC to the middle of the XVIII cent. The peoples of the Far North had some kitchen ware with ornaments that in technology, a color scheme are identical to a group of small peoples of Southeast Asia. Whether this similarity is convergent or divergent, it is necessary to learn by the methods of science. Ceramics of QuỳnhVăn culture (Vietnam) is one of the earliest samples of ceramic production, is dated 9 - 8 thousand BC. Today it is one of the earliest centers of ceramic production, which is assumed to be convergent to the rest, because it belonged to the culture of seaside hunters and gatherers.

But this is only a hypothesis. According to the form, the QuỳnhVănceramic are spherical, with pointed bottom. The first thing that the potter reproduces while making a vessel is a form, therefore it is primary to the ornament. Specific ornament on the QuỳnhVănpottery is most likely absent. But the form is differ-

ent from other ceramics that is widely distributed in the Neolithic of Southeast Asia spherical and round-bottomed. In the north-west of Siberia, a range of archaeological cultures dating back to 6000 - 5000 BC was found, the distinguishing feature of them is the spheroconic pointed bottom. Ornaments are different and specific and do not find parallels in Southeast Asia. However, if we look at the synchronous Jōmon culture, the ancestors of modern Ainu, we will find a number of common ornamental elements and compositions. Therefore, this can mean that the technology and the original form of ceramic ware crossed the territory of East Asia from the South to the North and they were transformed with the formation of new cultures in the process of settlement and racial development.

3. Conclusion

We are interested in an attempt of a comprehensive study of the aboriginal peoples of Southeast Asia, where the elements of the pre-farming economy, the cultural-economic type of the primary Asian community have preserved. Their descendants could settle throughout North Asia and take part in the formation of the West Siberian race, including the well-known Paleo-Asiatic peoples, for example, the Yukagirs and the Eskimos. Over the past millennium, economically more developed agricultural civilizations have been gradually erasing the archaic features of hunters and gatherers. The grains of relict features preserved in cultures of small peoples and it could serve as the basis for studies of the connections of the Paleo-Asiatic tribes of the north of Eurasia and Southeast Asia. The inhabitants of the taiga zone of Northern Asia are primarily hunters, not farmers, so analogies should be sought not in the agricultural areas of China, but in the regions with a similar type of economy, in the mountains inhabited by small people. In the self-isolation, they could have preserved for thousands of years some ancient features of their culture. This article does not present any unambiguous conclusions. The hypotheses should be supported by data of natural science, primarily anthropology and DNA analysis. In the North of Asia, there are very few sources for any kind of research, so the investigations of the ethnogenesis of the Asian people of the Far North of Asia are possible only through complex and interdisciplinary methods, and on a broad chronological and territorial background. The existing materials allow us only to formulate the question and outline directions for a long-term research.

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