

NININS 2020**International Scientific Forum «National Interest, National Identity and National Security»****OPEN BORDER AND TRANSFORMATION OF RUSSIAN FAR EAST REGIONAL IDENTITY IN 1990S**

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Abstract

In the late Soviet period, the economy of the Russian Far East was integrated into the all-Union one, and the military-industrial sector dominated the GRP structure. Not only the external borders of the region, but also certain border regions and port cities were “closed” The positive identity of the Far East at that time was focused on the importance of the region as a military outpost of Russia, as well as on regional benefits and advantages: high salaries, early retirement benefits, free travel to the European part of Russia, etc. Reforms of the 1990s brought the Far Eastern economy into a state of deep crisis The destruction of production ties with the European part of Russia forced Far Eastern enterprises and economically active citizens to reorient themselves from the domestic Russian market to the Asia-Pacific markets. The “open border” has become a major factor in the enrichment of the elites, the formation of the middle class and the survival of the majority of the population, which transformed both the real daily life of the Far East and regional identity. Consumer goods from China and Korea, right-hand drive Japanese cars firmly entered the everyday life of the Far East and became part of the regional image. The opening of borders contributed to the inclusion of the Far East in global religious and cultural processes. The Far East has become positioned as a “window to the Asia-Pacific region”, a multicultural region with developed logistics, attractive for international tourism.

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1. Introduction

The reforms of the 1990s changed not only economic conditions and everyday practices, but also affected the identity of Russians. Studies show that the contemporary identity of the inhabitants of the border regions of Russia has its own specifics (Zadorin, 2018), but the sources and main factors of the formation of these differences have not been sufficiently studied.

2. Problem Statement

The transformation of the regional identity of the Far East is analyzed by the authors of the article in connection with the key changes that occurred during the period of market reforms of the 1990s. The focus of the study is the opening of borders, which radically changed the economic and political situation, affecting everyday practices and the everyday consciousness of most Far Easterners. The article summarizes the results of the work of researchers whose scientific interests usually do not overlap. The positive and negative aspects of opening borders for the image of the region and the identity of the Far East are revealed at the junction of the history of elites, everyday life, the shadow economy, culture and religion.

3. Research Questions

The “open border” is seen as a trigger for changes in everyday life and regional identity in two main areas:

- i. In the economy, both at the elite level (international trade in natural resources), and at the level of small and medium-sized businesses (shuttles and businesses related to the import and usage of used Japanese cars);
- ii. In the cultural (religious) sphere

4. Purpose of the Study

To consider the influence of the “open border” factor on the transformation of everyday practices and the regional identity of the Far Easterners

5. Research Methods

The article is based on materials obtained by anthropological methods, i.e. on the results of field studies, including in-depth interviews with informants, the study of inner texts of local communities

6. Findings

In the Soviet period, the positive identity of the Far Easterners was focused on the importance of the region as a military outpost of Russia, as well as on regional benefits and advantages. Reforms of the 1990s brought the Far Eastern economy and the labor sector into a state of deep crisis. In general, in

1993–1999, the number of people employed in the region’s economy decreased by 518.7 thousand people. In 1998, GRP was less than half of the 1990 level (Prokapalo, 2003). The destruction of production ties with the European part of Russia and the increase in railway tariffs (more than 10 times) forced Far Eastern enterprises and economically active citizens to reorient themselves from the domestic Russian market to the markets of the Asia-Pacific region (APR). The border position of the Far East, along with rich natural resources, were the few competitive advantages of the region and they were used.

The greatest opportunities open borders created for the Far Eastern elites. “The exchange of power for money” (Kryshtanovskaya, 2004, p. 14) began even before the actual collapse of the USSR and was characteristic of the entire territory of the country. But in the border areas of the Far East, it had its own characteristics. This was facilitated both by the natural strategy for finding access to foreign markets in this region, which is characteristic of all subjects of the region, and the objective opportunity and desire of representatives of the local elite to become more independent with the help of this strategy, less dependent on the Center, and use power resources for personal enrichment.

In Soviet times, the economy of the Far East was to a certain extent connected with the exploitation of the richest natural resources (forest, biological resources of the oceans, minerals), and in the 1990s a similar trend naturally persisted. According to experts, these industries have always been the most criminalized. The elite, having access to them, chose the shadow sector to realize their economic interests in order to obtain maximum economic benefits. “Export Resources” is its motto in the “dashing nineties.”

Comparison of absolute indicators of cross-border interaction between the Russian Far East (RFE) and the Asia-Pacific Region (APR) for 1990–2017 allows us to generally determine its dynamics as active growth. Over this period, the trade turnover between the RFE and the Asia-Pacific Region in real terms increased by more than 2.1 times, which was ensured by the rapid growth (5.9 times) of exports, with a decrease in imports. The influx of direct Asian and Pacific investments to the RFE has sharply increased: from 1990–2017, their annual revenue increased at least 375 times. The migration interaction between the RFE and its APR neighbors increased approximately 30 times over the study period (Kireev, 2019).

An indicator of the financial effectiveness of this activity is the fact that the most influential representatives of the elite, who began their careers in the 1990s, by 2000 had multimillion-dollar capital. Thus, open borders played a decisive role in the formation of the Far Eastern elite as a social stratum of large owners, while the raw material nature of the Far Eastern economy was not only not overcome, but even strengthened.

In the 1990s the opening of borders and high international prices for some natural resources, combined with job cuts in the legal sector of the Far East economy, have influenced the growth of shadow practices, including poaching and smuggling. Representatives of the elite, law enforcement agencies, and crime, as well as ordinary citizens, were involved in these processes.

In the first post-Soviet years, hunting, fishing, extraction of marine biological resources, medicinal herbs for a certain category of the population from a hobby and type of leisure turns into a way of working and generating commercial income. External demand for marine biological resources, derivatives of plants and animals of the Far Eastern taiga contributed to the growth of shadow employment.

In the nineties, according to indirect data, in many regions about 20 % of urban hunting lovers and from 30 to 80 % of rural hunters hunted without a hunting ticket and licenses. Far Eastern forest poachers were preyed by Red Book birds (gyrfalcons for illegal supply to the Arab black market) and animals—tiger, musk deer, Himalayan or brown bears (Poaching in Russia began to take on the scale of a national catastrophe, 2013). In neighboring China, the derivatives of these animals are in demand: paws of bears, musk gland of musk deer, antlers of deer and so on. Far Eastern ginseng occupies a special place in the export structure. According to expert estimates, since 1991, the export of ginseng roots from Primorye to China has reached up to 1000 kg per year. The volume of illegal trade in musk gland of musk deer in 1999–2000 amounted to 400–450 kg, which is 5 times higher than the volume of legal trade (Lyapustin, 2008). Dried trepang was exported to China by kilograms. Moreover, the poachers were Russian citizens, and the smugglers were Chinese citizens.

The shadow practices of cross-border trade have affected not only economic and everyday life, but also the image of the region. In the 1990s, the image of the region with inexhaustible natural resources and with total criminalization and corruption has developed in the Far Eastern border territories.

If the elites were enriched by the export of natural resources—forests, fish, minerals—then the citizens of the Far East, who did not have an administrative resource, took advantage of the opportunities of cross-border trade with China, South Korea and Japan for the import of consumer goods, computer equipment and cars (Blyacher, 2011).

Both former Soviet speculators and new segments of the population joined the shuttle business. The crisis of the Soviet economic system brought the brink of survival for workers, engineers, doctors and teachers. In January 1992 alone, prices rose by 352 %, and by the end of 1992, by an average of 2600%. Low salaries, which have not been paid for months, the lack of food and clothing in state trade, and other problems forced people to look for other ways to earn money. According to some estimates, in Russia in the mid-1990s, shuttle business accounted for a third of all imports and employed about 10 million people (Yakovlev et al., 2007). While in the European part of Russia Turkish direction dominated in the shuttle business, in the Far East it was Chinese, Korean and Japanese direction.

In an interview, T.K., a former shuttle trader and former teacher at a school in Vladivostok, recalls that she started her business in 1991 when her husband was sent on a business trip to China. From friends they learned that China requires electric irons, kettles, single burners, duralumin buckets. Taking with him these goods to China in the amount of about 500 rubles, T.K.'s husband exchanged them for two leather jackets, which in Vladivostok were sold for 4 thousand rubles. Thus, the initial capital appeared. The family couple engaged in “Chinese” business for less than two years: it soon became unprofitable, and T.K. switched to more expensive Korean and Japanese products. Russian citizens had the right to transport up to 35 kg of goods duty-free across the border. According to the customs service, by the beginning of the 2000s “shuttles” imported about 90 tons of goods per day, both for Far Eastern consumption and for other regions of Russia (Kovalevskaya & Krushanova, 2013).

A specific Far Eastern type of cross-border trade was the import of Japanese used right-hand drive cars. The first such cars appeared in Vladivostok in the late 1970s, however, the mass “Japanization” of the region began in the late 1980s, when sailors received permission for duty-free import of cars, however, exclusively for personal use—without the right to sell. But a solution was found: the legal

owner wrote out a power of attorney to the buyer to drive the vehicle, received money and gave the keys (fortunately, transport tax did not exist at that time).

In 1993, the new Customs Code of the Russian Federation was adopted, followed by a government decree allowing all citizens of the Russian Federation to import foreign cars subject to payment of customs duties. However, pilots, sailors and other citizens who had worked abroad for at least six months could “clear” the car for free. In local newspapers and on fences, advertisements immediately appeared: “I am issuing a seaman's passport ...”, and this service became so popular that soon they had to introduce a fee (albeit a preferential one) for these categories of citizens.

Recalling the nineties, the lyrical heroine of the seaside novelist Beloivan (2012) admits: “I, the ex-husband, and almost all my friends, and friends of my friends, and friends of friends of friends, were at least casually engaged in the trade of Japanese cars” (p. 145; p. 146). The sale of second-hand Japanese cars in the Far East has become an important survival tool for large segments of the population, has formed an entire industry (from customs clearance, transportation and registration of cars to repair, maintenance, trade in spare parts and consumables), provided employment for a huge number of people and tangible revenue to the state budget. “Right-hand drive, Chinese clothes, choco pies and anti-cockroach sticks—these were the things that worked for the paralyzed empire in the 1990s, like a spare battery or artificial respiration apparatus,” writes Vladivostok writer Avchenko (2012, p. 301). And although there are no adequate statistics for the entire industry of interest to us, the extent of the “right-hand drive” business can be judged by indirect data.

In 1985, in terms of personal cars, the ratio was 40.8 per 1 thousand population of the Soviet Far East (Vaschuk, 1998); in 1990 this figure rose to 57.2, and in 1995 it was already 130, as a result of which the Far East rose from fifth place in the RSFSR/RF to the first one. In 2000, the number of own cars per thousand people in the region reached 160.6. Thus, over 15 years the figure has grown by almost 4 times (GSK, 2011). Considering that these years cannot be called prosperous in terms of the well-being of wide sections of the population (rather, on the contrary), it becomes obvious that the main reason for this jump was the import of used Japanese cars.

In 2000, according to the Far Eastern Customs Administration, about 100 thousand cars were imported into Russia through the region's customs (most of them were Japanese ones). And in 2005, according to the Japanese news agency Kaiji Press, Russia came out on top in the world in importing used cars produced in the Land of the Rising Sun (more than 268 thousand cars), leaving New Zealand and the UAE far behind their “rivals” (DROM, 2006).

At the dawn of the “right-hand drive” era, when there were not so many Japanese foreign cars in the Far East, the car could easily be exchanged for an apartment—such ads were abundant in local newspapers. Soviet motorists, not spoiled by automatic transmissions, power steering, air conditioning, power accessories and other “bells and whistles” (not to mention a fundamentally different level of engine reliability and suspension), experienced a real cultural shock. “Then, the Japanese cars were perceived as spaceships from science fiction films,” comments Avchenko (2012, p. 20). In the post-Soviet period, the formation of a consumer society in the Russian Far East has incredibly accelerated, and we must admit that the chic overseas cars that became available to the general population made a serious contribution to this process.

Already in the early 1990s, the import of used cars from Japan for an ordinary citizen turns, according to one of the car owners, into a “terrible attraction” that threatens not only a wallet, but often health and life, and for a criminal community—into a highly profitable industry. There were often cases when a sailor lost his car before he could even set foot on the shore. Criminal schemes in the Far Eastern ports and on the hauls (the Japanese cars actively migrated to other regions) were worked out to be automatic, the most dangerous cities among the drivers were Ussuriysk and Khabarovsk, and the Khabarovsk–Chita highway was the riskiest section. But potential car owners were ready to overcome any obstacles for the sake of the coveted Japanese car.

In the post-Soviet period, the right-hand drive causes a persistent negative reaction in the federal center (for reasons of protectionism), but it becomes an important component of regional identity and creates a special cultural and worldview layer. Far Eastern folklore is replete with thematic maxims (“A wife should be Russian, and a car should be Japanese”, “A good steering wheel would not be left one”, “Ban right-steering-wheel cars and you will get the Far Eastern Republic”, etc.), Vladivostok rocker Ivan Panfilov in a song declares his love to Japanese Toyota Celica, breaking the applause, and the seaside poet Ivan Shepeta (2017) succinctly states: “The wheel is on the right, the heart is on the left, / where the passport and license are” (2017, p. 17). Add that, starting in the 2000s, in Vladivostok, calls have repeatedly been made to erect a monument to the right-hand drive or a used Japanese car, which have always received public support.

Through open borders to the Far East in the 1990s not only goods moved, but also new people and ideas. Particularly active in this direction were the missionaries of various religious movements (traditional and new), hoping to use the resulting ideological vacuum in their favor. For the Far East, the consequences of the “perestroika” years were more negative than for the central regions of the country. The policy pursued by Moscow in those years with respect to the Far East formed in the minds of its inhabitants a sense of uselessness to the federal center and, as a result, set the Far East the task of finding a new pillar of its existence (“if you need a helping hand, you will find one at the end of your arm”).

In the Primorsky and Khabarovsk territories in the 1990s, at least 30-40 churches and religious movements were engaged in active missionary work. Among them were Catholics, various areas of Protestantism, Aum Senrikyo, Ananda Marg, Association of the Holy Spirit for the Unification of World Christianity (Munites), White Brotherhood YUSMALOS, followers of Sri Chinmoy, New Age supporters, Church of the Last Testament of Christ Wissarion Minusinsky, Jesus Church Latter-day Saints Christ (Mormons), International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Bahai Faith, Church of Scientology (Dianetics), Transcendental Meditation, Agni Yoga (Living Ethics Doctrine), Divine Light Mission, Joy (follower and Dusi Marchenko), Native Faith, Christ Church (Boston Movement), etc.

Protestant churches and new religious movements created with the assistance of foreign missionaries became attractive to the Far Easterners in the 1990s not only because of the satisfaction of their religious needs, but also for pragmatic reasons (Omelyanchuk, 2003). These organizations conducted various non-religious activities: they provided financial assistance to their parishioners; patronized orphanages, nursing homes and hospitals; worked with prisoners; organized free English and Korean language courses, free overseas trips for parishioners in South Korea and other countries; provided material assistance to the poor, gifted children and small peoples of the Far East; over the years,

practiced the distribution of clothing and food; conducted free lunches and provided hairdressing services to low-income residents, etc. (Vysotskaya, 2001).

The significance of religious charity for the daily survival of the Far East is reflected in the interview: “Well, here we are with this guy, he looked around to see where we could eat, and this is what I wanted to tell. A completely unexpected course of survival strategy: he got a job, enrolled in a school, a missionary school to study the gospel. Some Korean Baptists or Protestants, there was a throng of them in Khabarovsk, so they organized seminars where they paid scholarships, where they fed, and they fed very well” (AOSPI, 2012).

Interest in non-traditional religions among the Far East has declined along with overcoming the socio-economic crisis, by the beginning of the 2000s traditional religious identities (Orthodox, Muslim, etc.) prevailed in the region. Moreover, traditional faiths were perceived precisely as a sign of ethno-national and cultural identity. The results of sociological studies show that many "Orthodox" were unbelievers: for example, in the Amur Region in 1999, 58.5 % of unbelievers considered themselves Orthodox; in the Khabarovsk Territory in the early 2000s 38.6 % of respondents considered themselves Orthodox, but only 3.3% were “religious believers” (Dudarenok, 2015).

7. Conclusion

Thus, it can be argued that in the 1990s, the role of the border in the regional identity of the Far East has changed dramatically. The military-political concept of the outpost has been replaced in a more peaceful way by the “window to the Asia-Pacific Region”, a logistics center and a tourist center. Massive daily practices of cross-border trade in natural resources, shuttle business, the import of right-hand drive cars from Japan, and border tourism have formed a new, specific image of the region. Chinese, Korean and Japanese goods have accelerated the formation of a consumer society, they have become part of the lifestyle of the Far East and the image of the region. Positive regional identity has transformed toward greater openness, cultural and religious pluralism. The negative side of identity emphasized isolation from the federal center, deprivation of regional benefits, high unemployment, and the spread of criminal and corruption practices. Religious pluralism in the 1990s initially intensified the cosmopolitan trend in the consciousness of the Far East, but by the beginning of the 2000s, it was replaced by a request for an all-Russian national-cultural identity.

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