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**ETHNIC ADAPTATION AS SOCIOCULTURAL PHENOMENON  
OF WORLD HISTORY**

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*Abstract*

The environment and ethnic groups serve as fundamental factors of peaceful history creating it through the interaction and communication processes. Social and cultural phenomena played a special role in the historical development of relations between peoples and environment. The study of these phenomena is relevant due to the fact that peoples from the point of view of their genesis are currently socially structured in more than 250 independent states and approximately 5,000 large and small ethnic communities. The environment includes natural and anthropogenic components. At the same time the natural landscape and the environment belong to different categories. The environment is a result of activities of individuals and the entire nations. The nature acts as an inert element in the environment providing possibility that is either implemented or not. A person, being a representative of an ethnic community, a carrier of certain ethnic culture and psychology, serves as its active element, a host of possibilities. However, this is not about the anthropocentrism in the history. It is studied from the standpoint of ecological history, in the context of which an appeal to the phenomenon of ethnoadaptation allows observing that nature and man act as full-fledged co-authors of the historical process. The ability of peoples to adapt to the environment is a sign of their sustainable development and, conversely, the loss of such ability is the main historical reason for their transformation into relict ethnic groups. The method of studying the problem is primarily an ecological and historical method.

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## 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of ethnoadaptation is a multifaceted phenomenon. It can be ranked using such attributes as “productivity” or “anti-productivity” when analyzing the process of human interaction with the natural and social environment. On this basis it is advisable to define two types of ethnoadaptation, i.e. positive (productive) and negative (anti-productive).

Positive ethnoadaptation acts as an “adapter” in the interaction of ethnic communities with the natural and social environment. It is a form of human interaction, societies and nature, where the traditions of nations, models and stereotypes of their social and cultural, as well as psychological behavior are developed. This type of ethnoadaptation acts as a non-violent means of forming productive structures. It creates a new cultural reality, i.e. the ethnic and national cultures. Besides, it promotes their convergence and mutual enrichment.

Negative ethnoadaptation serves as a form of interaction between humans, societies and nature, characterized by a violation of biological and demographic equilibrium. Sometimes, during a long-term adaptation of an ethnic group to a changed natural landscape the environmental disasters occur. Moreover, if the social landscape also changes, for example, due to migration or invasion of ethnic groups into other ethnic groups, then this ethnic group loses its usual living conditions. There is observed such fact as imposition of selfish interests of any ethnic group on another ethnic group represented as common political, economic, religious and other interests. This type of ethnoadaptation acts as a violent means of forming anti-productive structures. Under these conditions the ethnic groups begin to decrease rapidly and their premature disappearance is possible.

## 2. Problem Statement

The interaction of ethnic groups with the environment in their historical panorama includes various aspects. This paper will focus on the following:

- Division of people into ethnic groups is one of the ways people adapt to the natural landscape. Each ethnos is born and develops in certain geographical conditions. The reconstruction of historical reality in which nations exist involves a scientific understanding of overall natural factors that determine the dynamics of ethnic identification.

- Ethnic groups act not only as a biophysical phenomenon within a certain natural landscape, but at the same time they have one or another social structure. Identification of ethnic specific nature of the interaction of peoples with the environment involves the analysis of their specific space-time continuum, as well as the characteristics of social and cultural arrangement.

- The interrelation of a person as a representative of ethnic community and nature in time and space is one of the types of relationships between culture and natural environment in the past. The factors of development of cultural values of nations are the adoption and assimilation of other cultural skills and experience. Borrowings from other cultures relate to both the material objects and the spiritual life, i.e. norms and stereotypes of behavior, traditions, and customs of ethnic groups.

- When referring to the spatial-temporal characteristics of ethnic dynamics, the culture is considered as the main way of peoples’ adaptation to natural and social conditions of their existence (Semenova &

Semenov, 2015). The social and cultural space of this ethnos ambiguously responds to the interaction with the representatives of foreign ethnic culture. It can expand its influence on other nations (positive ethnoadaptation). Besides, it can significantly transform and even be lost (negative ethnoadaptation).

### **3. Research Questions**

Historical experience indicates that ethnic adaptation is the universal law of interaction between peoples and the environment (Povod, 2001). With this in mind, we proposed the following questions for study as the subject of this paper:

- Identification of means of ethnic adaptation. The interaction with the environment is carried out with the help of these phenomena. At the same time the attention is paid to the ways of peoples; adaptation to the external environment, and hence to the nature of their interaction with it;
- Consideration of mechanisms of ethnic adaptation. When raising this question, it is important to discuss how the acquisition of new knowledge and skills contributes to the change in the ethnic organisms and the outside world (Tavadov, 2011);
- Identification of the results of ethnoadaptation. Their analysis involves the discovery of new ethnic traits or social and cultural transformations in ethnic communities.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The main idea of this paper is to uncover the phenomenon of ethnoadaptation in the context of historical dynamics of peoples. The implementation of this idea involves the solution of the following research tasks:

- Analysis of specific historical conditions of ethnoadaptation dynamics;
- Establishment of relationships between positive (productive) and negative (anti-productive) ethnoadaptation;
- Justification of conclusion that negative ethnoadaptation does not always mean a negative historical experience;
- Disclosure of phenomenon of ethnoadaptation, not only as a process of adaptation of peoples to the natural and social landscape, but also of the specified landscapes to ethnic group.

### **5. Research Methods**

Understanding the question of the interaction of ethnic groups with the environment is impossible without addressing a number of theories that have emerged in the history of social and humanitarian thought in the 20th and early 21st centuries. Since the turn of the 20th century, the concept of geographical determinism has been dominating in humanitaristics. It was based on the ancient idea of the influence of nature on man (Gumilev, 1993). Nature was seen as a set of stimuli, irritants, and the behavior of man and peoples as a whole (only as a set of reactions to them). Since the 1920s the concept of geographic nihilism prevailed, where a man and society were made absolute. They were considered to be completely independent of the nature, and in particular, the nature was declared inert, and peoples and ethnic communities as active elements in the environment. Since the 1970s an interdisciplinary scientific field

such as ecological history began to emerge (Alexandrov, Bruggemayer, & Maius, 2008). Its task was to free modern humanities from deterministic distortions and indeterministic mistakes of the past. In fact, in the theoretical and methodological respect, the dynamics of the noted views indicate that the earlier conceptual models are included into the later ones; however only partially (Bao, 2018).

The method of studying the problem is primarily an ecological and historical method, the implementation of which involves the establishment of interconnections and interdependencies between nature and society in their historical dynamics. Its particular manifestation is systematic arrangement of means, methods, mechanisms and results of ethnic adaptation as a specific historical process (Povod, 2001).

## 6. Findings

The typical example of negative ethnoadaptation was the adaptation of European colonists to natural environment and social landscapes of the American continent that took place at the end of the 15th-16th centuries and led to a change in the primary anthroposphere and primary biocenosis.

The change in the primary anthroposphere was due to the barbaric extermination of Europeans by a significant number of local people. By the time when the Europeans (Spanish conquistadors) showed up in America, more than 20 million Indians lived there. As a result of Spanish conquest of America, its indigenous population had declined by a factor of 20. The demographic disaster occurred under the influence of a number of factors associated with the processes of ethnoadaptation.

First of all, the material culture of indigenous population of pre-Columbian America was extremely primitive. At that time the Indians did not possess any state-of-the-art metallurgical technologies. They did not have any knowledge about the production of steel. They worked only light metals, i.e. gold, copper, and bronze. They did not have any modern ground communications, sea communications and armaments at the end of the 15th-16th centuries. They were not familiar with the wheel and the sail; had no equestrian troops and no enemy cavalry battles (initially there were no horses in the New World). The Indians fought using only piercing and cutting weapons made of stone, i.e. spears, axes, and arrows. However, the Spaniards had one of the best weapons in the world for the middle of the 16th century, i.e. steel blades, hackbut (firearms with lead bullets), and centuries-old experience of battles with cavalry (Daymond, 2016).

The Spaniards had another type of weapon, the most genuine weapon of mass destruction, which came along with the conquerors to the regions of the New World, i.e. the infectious diseases, in particular, the smallpox. If the immunity of Europeans over the preceding centuries was adapted to this disease, the smallpox for Indians who did not have any immunity to its virus proved to be a deadly disease. The smallpox pandemic had virtually devastated the continent with the incredible speed.

Not only was the primary anthroposphere changed, but also the primary biocenosis of the American continent due to the predatory development of a rich uninhabited territory by Europeans. Thus, the inclusion by Europeans of new areas of North America in the area of economic activity took place from East to West. In the eastern North America, the subtropical forests stretched to the Mississippi River, which the Europeans began to actively cut down, clearing the land for cotton plantations. The cotton grown here was transported to England, where cotton fabrics were produced from it and they were traded all over the world. This type of activity served as one of the sources of enrichment for Europeans. However, as a result of the

development of monocultural farming, the primary landscape was destroyed for about two hundred years, i.e. the subtropical forests were changed with sand dunes.

The western part of North America from the Mississippi River up to the rocky mountains of the Cordillera was occupied by prairies, which from the 19th century were actively mastered by Europeans. The main element of the biocenosis was the buffalo the closest North American relative of auroch. The growth of this most numerous species of large animals on the continent was previously limited solely to epidemics, since the hunt of Indians armed with bows and arrows had practically no effect on the number of buffalo. However, upon the arrival of Europeans, who were eager to hunt for buffalo skins (as one of the sources of enrichment) these animals were almost completely exterminated during the 1830-1880s. In the 19th century, the number of buffaloes declined from 30,000,000 to 1,000 heads (Golubchikov, 2003).

Having exterminated buffalo the European colonists began to breed cattle, i.e. cows. One of the consequences of this type of economic activity was the emergence of a new sub-ethnic community — cowboys as a central figure in the prairies among Americans. However, the nature somehow demonstrated the feedback to the extermination of buffalo by the fact that rodents became an important element in the biocenosis. The numerous populations had gone to unprecedented size, which in turn led to a reduction in pastures (rodents actively ate grass) and to a reduction in the number of cows (they had to be slaughtered because of the broken legs: Burrows were dug by rodents).

Finally, the European settlers ensured the cultivation of agricultural crops, i.e. maize and wheat, for which they actively plowed up prairies, which in turn caused severe dust storms. A strong wind blowing from the west from the Cordillera mountains covered with sand and dust fields to the eastern part of North America the Great Plains of which were deserted.

On unpretentious soils a good harvest could be obtained by growing only appropriate crops, in particular, potatoes. Its biological homeland was South America (potatoes discovered by the ancient Incas, i.e. the ancestors of modern Peruvians). Under the conditions of fundamental change in the biocenosis on the continent this plant was brought to North America. The fields of potato had extended to the Cordillera. There lived beetles on the Colorado Plateau, which adapted to the changed biocenosis and eat potato tops. The Colorado beetles multiplied, spread across the continent and got across to Europe.

As a result of fundamental change in the primary anthroposphere and natural landscape, the environment of pre-Columbian America lost stability, which turned into a demographic and environmental disaster. The consequence of anti-productive ethno-adaptation was a change in the social and cultural code of indigenous population. However, at the same time, a mechanism was launched to achieve stability in modified environment, which was the downside of negative ethnoadaptation. This mechanism was called the “Columbian exchange” which was associated with the movement of peoples and their gene pool, technology, domesticated animals, crops from the Old to the New World and vice versa. The “Columbus exchange” was like an intermediate link in the process of emergence of the second, positive type of ethnoadaptation.

Positive ethnoadaptation acts as a kind of “adapter” in the interaction of ethnic communities with the natural and social environment. It is a form of human interaction, societies and nature, in which the traditions of nations, models and stereotypes of their social, cultural and psychological behavior are developed. This type of ethnoadaptation serves as a non-violent means of developing productive structures

(Lebedev, 2018), which generates a new cultural form, i.e. ethnic and national cultures, and promotes their convergence and mutual enrichment.

In the course of the “Columbian exchange” the Spaniards brought about a dozen species of domesticated animals to the American continent. Goats, sheep, pigs, cows, horses, donkeys, and other large-scale herbivorous mammals tamed by humans (Crosby, 1986) were transferred from Europe to America, since America, namely South America, was the birthplace of only one domestic animal, i.e. the llama. More than 40 types of crops, including rye, wheat, carrots, cucumbers, olives and other plants, came from the Old to the New World. However, more than 20 types of plant products, previously unknown to the peoples of Eurasia and Africa, as well as animals such as turkey, llama, and alpaca were delivered.

It is more important that the waves of immigrants rushed from Europe to the American continent. It was not by chance that two of six sub-regions of America, i.e. the North (Canada and the USA) and the Southeast (Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay) became sub-regions whose population was of European origin. In some countries of other sub-regions, for example, in Costa Rica, the white population also prevailed. The peoples and culture of America continued their change as a result of constant waves of immigrants, including immigrants from Africa and Asia.

The new waves of immigrants, moving to a different geographical landscape, were forced to change the stereotype of behavior, i.e. they actually created a new ethnos. Thus, the population groups that migrated to the territory of the United States could not but experience the influence, at least indirectly, of the peculiarities of its mountainous landscape, the Appalachia in the east and the Cordillera in the west. They stretched parallel to each other, and thus kept the population of the country in between. This can explain the uniqueness of the United States of America among the large countries, which consists in the fact that they do not have a so-called titular nation (Lozansky, 2004) and their inhabitants unite more than 250 ethnic groups and 170 Native American tribes; however, the United States is a single country.

The specific nature of the mountainous landscape of the United States left a certain imprint on the behavior of ethnic groups in the United States. They have the same psychological attitudes (Sukharev & Sukharev, 2000), namely: self-confidence, lack of respect for everything non-American, exaggerated understanding of their abilities and strength, desire to be the masters of the world (Krysko, 2002).

Positive ethnoadaptation can be presented by the influence of the mountain landscape on the development of national character, for example, of the Chinese. There are two features of the mountain landscape of China. On the one hand, all the mountain ranges of China are formed in the Himalayas, and on the other hand, the mountain systems of the country diverge like the rays from the sun and they are not interconnected. This specific nature of the mountainous space of the country has found a peculiar reflection in the national psychological characteristics of the country’s population. Millions of Chinese live outside their homeland, but even after a alternation of several generation they recognize themselves as Chinese and do not lose their sense of connection with the origins of national culture. At the same time the Chinese can be represented as if they are the sand grains poured into a cup, i.e. they are always together, but they have a soft spot for each other.

Positive ethnoadaptation is characterized not only by the adaptation of peoples to the natural landscape. It also manifests itself in adapting the landscape to an ethnic group (Shumsky & Topalova, 2001). So, Japan is practically a country with a monotonous, mountainous landscape 70% of the territory

of which is covered by mountains. The most popular mountain is Fuji. This explains the fact that high solidity is inherent in the Japanese people and they are distinguished by high efficiency. An adaptation of landscape to ethnos is manifested in the veneration of stones symbolizing the mountains. The Japanese along with the Chinese are considered the initiators of landscape style. The landscape design has always been an art for them. The rock garden is one of the symbolic gardens of Japan.

## 7. Conclusion

Ethnoadaptation is a complex phenomenon that arises in the process of interaction and mutual influence of fundamental factors of human life: nature, and society. The essence of ethnoadaptation lies in the mutual adaptation of peoples and geographical and social environment. Its mechanisms are determined by specific historical conditions. Therefore, it (mutual adaptation) is the result of both the history of people and the history of nature. It is impossible to appeal to the phenomenon of ethnoadaptation living out its historical dynamics within the framework of which both the positive and the negative experiences are revealed. To learn about the experience, it is necessary to study the history of interaction between ethnic groups and nature. Some of them include:

- In the process of adaptation of the ethnic groups to the natural landscape, their behavioral stereotypes, traditions and psychological makeup are developed;
- The interaction of man, society and nature can often be accompanied by the violation of biological and demographic balance. In the course of a long-term adaptation of ethnos to a changed natural landscape, ecological disasters occur, the consequence of which is a rapid reduction of peoples and their possible premature disappearance (negative ethnoadaptation);
- Negative ethnoadaptation is not always a negative historical experience. Its downside is the so-called phenomenon of “Columbian exchange”;
- Positive ethnoadaptation is expressed not only in the adaptation of the peoples to the natural landscape, but also of the landscape to ethnos and therefore it serves as a kind of “adapter” in the interaction of ethnic communities and natural environment.

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