Ethnic Language Identity and the Present Day Oirad-Kalmyks

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The paper represents an analyses of the Oirad-Kalmyk language functioning in various historical, social, geographical, economico-political conditions. Nowadays the Oirad-Kalmyks live in different regions of the world (Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, the USA etc.). The Kalmyk language belongs to the west branch of Mongolian languages (Altaic language family). The Old-Kalmyk writing “Todo bichg” (Clear writing) was worked out in 1648. The UNESCO “Red book of endangered languages” identifies Kalmyk as language in danger of extinction.

Language and culture assimilation occurs under the influence of social factors such as heteroethnic environment, demographic factor of the ethnos in the given society. The article is aimed to find out the evolution of the language identity of its native speakers, to define whether the language is able to develop in heteroethnic environment, to specify the role of demographic capacity, communicative capacity of the language and language vitality.

**Key words:** ethnic, identity, minority, Mongolian, ethnos

In modern world social and economic transformations more often cause need of the ethnos for stability, it is usually found in ethnic identity. Mother tongue is one of determining components of ethnic identity.

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For the last decades ethno-language factor is getting more and more urgent. Previously studies of ethno-language processes considered mainly social, historical, cultural problems and recent studies include also such psychological parameters as language prestige, language preferences of ethnos etc. As a rule, the category “native language” is included into programs of population census as a factor characterizing language identification of the ethnic group. Therefore ethnic identity and native language are the main notions in ethnos characteristics. In this context it is interesting to analyze language identity of the ethnos that is scattered in small groups dispersedly in various socio-communicative systems. This article considers the role of mother tongue in ethnic identity of the present-day Oirad-Kalmyks.

The Oirad-Kalmyks are a Mongolian speaking ethnos. Nowadays for socio-historical reasons the Oirad-Kalmyks live in different parts of the world. The main part of the Oirad-Kalmyks live in Russia (Republic of Kalmykia, 155 thousand), compactly they live in China (Xinjiang Province, 166 thousand), in Kyrgyzstan near the Issyk-Kul Lake (about 5 thousand), in small groups Kalmyks live in West Europe (Germany, France, Canada) and the USA (about 2 thousand). At the present time attempts to form new ethnic identity of the Oirad-Kalmyk ethnos prove the necessity to revive ethno-political and ethno-cultural spheres of the ethnos lost in the cause of socio-political transformations.

The Oirad-Kalmyks are native speakers of the Oirad-Kalmyk language. The Oirad-Kalmyk language belongs to the west branch of Mongolian languages (Altaic language family). It is an old-written language, the old-Kalmyk writing “Todo bichg” (Clear writing) was worked out in 1648 by the Oirad scholar Zaya Pandita.

The Kalmyks in the Republic of Kalmykia (Russia)

The Kalmyks who live in the south-east part of Russia represent the only Mongolian ethnos of Buddhist religion in Europe. Only Kalmyks of the Russian Federation have separate autonomous territory — The Republic of Kalmykia. The head of the Republic is President, Kalmykia