

ETHNOLOGY

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EIGHTEENTH CENTURY TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF BURYAT CLOTHING*

On the basis of literary and archival materials, the article describes social and local ethnic differences in the traditional Buryat costume. Specific features such as the use of leather and fabric in the clothing of different ethnic groups are identified. The article calls attention to the regulation of clothing among the aristocracy and to the significance of Russian-Chinese trade links in the development of the Buryat material culture. Through the example of clothing the ethnic and cultural ties of the Buryats with the peoples of Central Asia and Southern Siberia are explored.

Keywords: *Ethnography, Buryats, material culture, culture of sustenance, national clothing.*

Introduction

The period following the inclusion of the Baikal region into the Russian State, expanding eastward at the time, is marked by the formation of a new Buryat ethnic group in the area. All Buryat lands are officially recognized as having entered into the Russian ethnic and political space by 1659. This date marks the starting point of radically new ethnically consolidating processes. The history of the Buryat ethnic community covers the period from the end of the 17th to the 20th centuries, or, more precisely, the 18th–19th centuries, when a common ethnic identity and cultural traits emerged. During this time, all components of the Buryat traditional culture, both spiritual and material underwent transformation and modernization. This transformation also involved changes in the Buryat national costume and reflects both interior processes related to the search and elaboration of ethnic markers, and exterior processes triggered by the impact

of different cultures. In this regard, the 18th century is especially interesting because it represents a stage when the processes indicated above were only beginning to emerge, and the clothing of the Buryats still preserved its old appearance.

Scarcity of information remains a constraining factor in the study of the Buryat national costume. Researchers possess fragmentary data from a few archival and literary sources only. This explains why until now, there has been no ethnographic work giving a reconstruction of Buryat clothing in the 18th century. The published studies of Russian scholars mostly cover the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when the traditional Buryat costume had already taken shape as a cultural phenomenon. This is not to say that modern ethnographers have not addressed data from the 18th century at all; the study of R.D. Badmaeva (1987) is a successful example of using 18th century sources to determine the genesis and typology of Buryat clothing in the second half of the 19th and the early 20th centuries.

The present study intends to identify main trends in the development of Buryat clothing in the 18th century. In achieving this objective, both published and

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unpublished documentary sources of the period are used, as well as ethnographic studies of the Buryat people.

Historical reconstruction of Buryat clothing

According to information provided by E.Y. Ides, who traveled to China in 1692–1695, border trade between Russia and China at the end of the 17th century was still largely underdeveloped. The textiles mentioned by the scholar (red Hamburg woolen cloth, Persian twisted silk of different colors) as used by the Buryats for making clothes, were likely European and Central Asian goods which were resold or exchanged by Russian merchants for livestock (Ides, Brand, 1967: 133). Indeed, the long wars of the 17th century between the Mongolian (Dzhungarian and Eastern Mongolian) Khans, peasant war and unrest, and the Manchu aggression that followed completely changed traditional Chinese trade patterns with the Central Asian and Southern Siberian peoples. Traditional Buryat trade ties which in the pre-Russian period were mainly directed towards the north (buying furs from the Evenks) and the south (buying textiles and metal goods of Chinese and the Central Asian production), were disrupted (Zalkind, 1970: 86). At the same time, Bukhara merchants ceased their journeys to the Baikal area, a result of the civil strife in Mongolia. The Buryats were forced to satisfy their textile needs at the expense of imported textiles from Central Asia and Europe through Western Siberia.

The Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689 put an end to the Russian-Chinese military confrontation of the 1680s through the regulation of free trade for Chinese and Russian subjects. This contributed to resuming trade relations. E.Y. Ides arrived in China with a trading caravan together with merchants and servicemen from various Siberian towns. Such caravans were usually organized once a year. Initially, the selection of Chinese textiles which were delivered to the Baikal area was small and included damask and *kitaika* or nankeen – thick cotton fabric, usually blue, sometimes red or other colors (Khamarkhanov, 1988: 42). At that time, the imported goods from China did not entirely meet the needs of the Buryats; shipments transported through the territory of the Baikal region were mostly delivered to Western Siberian towns and further west. The Treaty of Kyakhta in 1727, which established the border between Qing China and the Russian Empire, and the regulation of Russian-Chinese trade, removed any final constraints to bilateral trade. The fact that a wide range of Chinese textiles entered the Russian market, and, in particular, went to the Buryats, is confirmed by documents of the Siberian Prikaz (central governmental authority) from the mid 18th century (Russian State Archives of Ancient

Documents (RSAAD). F. 24, Inv. 1, D. 9–1, fols. 26–28v; F. 24, Inv. 1, D. 21–19). The inventory of various types of Chinese textiles mention, for example, *goleya*, half-*goleya*, *kanfa*, satin, paper-muslin, *fanza*, silk (raw and twisted), *kitaika*, *tunkhai*, *kamyi*, etc. (RSAAD. F. 24, Inv. 1, D. 9–1, fols. 26–28v). The work of M. Tatarinov testifies to the return of the former role of Chinese imported goods (through the mediation of the Mongols) in the life of the Buryats. Tatarinov mentions various Chinese textiles as sewing material: damask, *magnut*, *solomenka*, etc. (RSAAD. F. 24, Inv. 1, D. 70, fol. 12). It should be noted that in the first half of the 18th century, *kitaika* was a means of tribute payment among the Buryats. In accordance with the “Instruction for Border Patrolman Firsov” from 1728, which confirmed the earlier decree of the Emperor from June 27, 1727, the tribute from the Buryats was taken in furs as well as in *kitaika*, money, and even bulls (RSAAD. F. 24, D. 1423, fol. 135). Subsequently, this fabric ceased to be taken by the treasury as the equivalent of furs and money.

In the 19th century, expensive and cheaper varieties of Chinese textiles (silk, brocade, satin *kanfa*, cotton *dalemba*, *daba*, etc.) were widely used by tailors. Russian and European textiles (corduroy, woolen cloth, chintz, calico, coarse calico, etc.) were brought to the Baikal region and were readily bought by the Buryat population. With this diversity of textiles, the tradition of combining several types of woven fabric emerged in Buryat clothing: the outer layer of festive and everyday outer garments or headwear was usually made of fabrics produced in China (wealthy Buryats used silk, brocade, and satin, and the poorer Buryats used *kitaika* and other cotton fabrics); the lining and inner garments were mostly made of Russian fabrics (chintz, calico, etc.).

The selection of textiles used for clothing depended not only on the social, but also on the inner ethnic identification of the Buryats. In places where hunting and animal breeding were the main sources of material (hides and skin) for making clothes for the family, the Buryats used textiles to a lesser degree. After all, the tradition of making outer garments predominantly from leather and fur was continued in the culture of certain groups of Baikal and Sayan Buryats until the 20th century. At the same time, elements of garments made from leather and fur gradually changed from being a part of common, everyday clothing to being used in the clothing of workers and poorer peasants.

At the end of the 17th century, sheepskin was the main material used in making winter outer garments; for the poorest Buryats horse leather and the skins of wild animals were used (Girchenko, 1939: 39). In the subsequent century, tanned animal skins retained their value. The sources mention not only sheep skin and horse skin, but also goat, stag, wolf, fox, and musk deer skins (RSAAD. F. 24, Inv. 1, D. 70, fol. 12). The ancient

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