

**M.M. Boronova**

*Buryat State University,  
Smolina 24a, Ulan-Ude, 670000, Russia  
E-mail: mboronova@yandex.ru*

## **The Buryats: Ethno-Social Development and Post-Soviet Transformations (Based on the 2017 Opinion Polls Among the Young People of Buryatia, the Irkutsk Region, and the Trans-Baikal Region)**

*On the basis of the summer 2017 opinion poll among the young Buryat residents of Buryatia, the Irkutsk Region, and the Trans-Baikal Region, post-Soviet tendencies in Buryat ethnic identity and social mobility are examined. Changes in the traditional lifestyle are analyzed with regard to ethnic consolidation and assimilation. The effects of growing ethnic diversity, social and territorial mobility on identity, language competence, attitudes to religion, and participation in religious ceremonies are discussed. Principal post-Soviet tendencies include ethnic consolidation based on common Buryat identity and the decline of subethnic identities following the collapse of tribal structure. Religion is becoming the key consolidating factor, as evidenced by the rising number of believers among the young people. However, opposite tendencies, such as growing ethnic assimilation and language shift, triggered by social and territorial mobility among the young Buryats, are becoming a threat. Young people are potentially ready to abandon their traditional ethnic milieu, live in a multiethnic society, and marry outside of their ethnicity. The growth of assimilative tendencies results in the erosion of ethnicity, forming a challenge which the Buryat people must face. It is concluded that a new model of Buryat ethnicity is needed at the present stage.*

**Keywords:** *Ethnicity, ethnic identity, consolidation, assimilation, mobility, transformation.*

### **Introduction**

The collapse of the Soviet Union has drastically changed the life of the Buryats, as well as other peoples that were members of a multinational state. Among other problems, racial and interethnic tensions became more acute in the post-Soviet period under severe crisis conditions. Nowadays, few doubt that the ethnic factor is critical to public processes, and can be a catalyst for many social upheavals. The increase in its significance in modern life is inspiring the interest of researchers in issues of the development of ethnic groups.

Many theories of the ethnic phenomenon are presented in the scientific literature. They usually differ

in their approaches as to whether it should be interpreted objectively or subjectively. The *ethnic group* concept and everything related to it are considered from the standpoint of a primordialist approach in studies by Y.V. Bromley (1983), V.I. Kozlov (1982), and other Soviet scholars. The instrumentalist approach to the understanding of this concept has been reflected in the papers by Y.V. Arutyunyan, L.M. Drobizheva (2014), M.N. Guboglo (1998), who make extensive use of sociological research methods. The constructivist approach to ethnicity is based on denial of an objective basis for ethnic identity, and puts its subjective determinant exclusively to the forefront. V.A. Tishkov (2003) is the most ardent supporter of this approach in

modern ethnology. Notably, despite the difference in views, the majority of modern researchers suppose that further development of methodological foundations for studying the ethnic phenomenon should be carried out with regard to the unity of objective and subjective components. Sharing this methodological approach in general, we consider that studying the ethnosocial development processes among the Buryats at the present stage is most advantageous from the standpoint of the primordialist concept, which is evidenced by the data of our study.

The Buryat ethnic system has been forming in the course of the historical evolution of Mongolian-speaking tribes within the boundaries of the Russian state since the 17th century. At the early stages of its history, the Mongolian-speaking tribes integrated into the Russian State did not form a single ethnic community, and their self-identification was determined by the tribal and territorial affiliations. The main ethnic formations were such groups as the Ekhirits, Bulagats, Khoris, and Khongodors, all of which occupied the Trans-Baikal and Cis-Baikal regions. With time, the process of the consolidation of the Mongolian-speaking tribes and the formation of a new ethnosocial community was initiated under the influence of Russian administration's policy. At the same time, the territorial and geographical features, as well as the specifics of economic and sociocultural development, caused the separation into two subethnic formations known as the "western" and "eastern" Buryats.

The problems of the Buryat ethnic group and ethnic identity were studied by many scholars. Studies by T.M. Mikhailov (1996; 1998), D.D. Nimaev (1988), B.R. Zoriktuev (2011), R.P. Sydenova (2003), and V.S. Khankharaev (2000) threw light on various aspects of the ethnosocial development of the Buryat people in terms of the primordial concept. The state of Buryat ethnicity from the viewpoint of the constructivist approach was considered in the context of sociocultural modernization by T.D. Skrynnikova, S.D. Batomunkuev, P.K. Varnavsky (2004), D.D. Amogolonova and I.E. Elaeva (2005). Using the methods of sociological analysis, the issues of Buryat identity in the wide field of interethnic communication were studied by D.L. Khilkanov (2005), M.S. Vasilieva, T.T. Dugarova (2007), and other authors.

Undoubtedly, the complication of social-political processes and the growing role of the ethnic factor in the modern world increase the need for application-specific studies. This article makes an attempt to reveal the main transformations in the spiritual and social life of the Buryats during the post-Soviet period.

This paper is based on the summer 2017 opinion poll held in three administrative and territorial subjects of the Russian Federation, compactly inhabited by the Buryats; namely, in Buryatia, the Irkutsk Region, and the Trans-Baikal Region. This study was conducted among the young Buryats aged from 20 to 35 years, since this age group is the most active, socially mobile part of the ethnic group, which is responsive to social innovations: in particular, those in the ethnic sphere.

The following documents were developed to conduct the study: a) a questionnaire that included questions concerning self-identification, religious confession, interethnic relations, ethnocultural development, and social behavior; b) a question-list for in-depth study of the qualitative parameters of ethnic characteristics under consideration. Historical-comparative, historical-genetic, structural, abstract-logical, and sociological methods were used in the course of analysis. Each of them had its own role in data processing, systematization, and generalization. The main empirical data for preparation of this article were obtained as a result of questionnaire survey of 350 respondents: 100 persons in Ulan-Ude, 150 persons in rural areas of the Republic of Buryatia, 50 persons in the Irkutsk Region, and 50 persons in the Trans-Baikal Region.

Among people surveyed, men amounted to 52.55 %, and women to 47.45 %. The proportion of respondents aged 20–25 years was 58.16 %; 26–30 years 28.93 %; 31–35 years 12.91 %. 57.06 % of the surveyed people lived in rural areas, and 42.94 % of them lived in cities. People with secondary-level education amounted to 27.93 %, technical school graduates to 28.83 %, and college graduates to 43.24 %. In terms of occupation, the respondents were distributed as follows: public sector workers 42.95 %, self-employed entrepreneurs 13.51 %, unemployed persons 4.80 %, students in a higher professional education system 35.44 %, students in a secondary vocational education system 12.31 %. Notably, some of them combined their work activities with education in higher or specialized secondary educational establishments.

### **Socio-demographic changes**

The break-up of the Soviet social-political system and the transition to a new model of social structure have dramatically changed the living-conditions of the ethnic group. The policy of "shock capitalization" and frontal, one-time transition to a market economy entailed a global crisis in the Russian economy. Of

238 industrial enterprises that operated in Buryatia before the collapse of the USSR, only a few were able to stay afloat (Khalbaeva-Boronova, 2005: 88). As a result, the industrial and agricultural complex of the Republic, which had been created over many decades, was actually paralyzed.

The transition to a market economy was accompanied by dramatic drop in the standard of living, which caused degradation of the demographic situation in the region. A decline in population became the predominant tendency in demographic processes in Buryatia in the 1990 and 2000s. It is important to note that unfavorable demographic trends in the post-Soviet period affected the Buryat ethnic group to a lesser degree. Unlike the Russian population, the number of Buryats in the Republic continued to grow, despite a reduction in their rate of natural increase. The All-Russian Population Census 2010 recorded an increase in the number of Buryats in the Republic by 37,314 people, or 14.9 %, as compared to the data of the 1989 census. The proportion of representatives of the titular nation (the Buryats) has increased from 24 to 29.5 % (calculated from data in (Naseleniye Respubliki Buryatiya..., 2015: 17)). To a large extent, this was provided by high fertility among the Buryats, especially in rural regions, and by the inflow of ethnic Buryats from the adjacent regions—primarily from the Irkutsk Region and the Trans-Baikal Region—to Buryatia.

The most important trait of the social and economic development of the Buryats in the early 21st century is an increase in the number of urban residents within the ethnic group. The agricultural crisis after the destruction of the collective-farming system entailed an outflow of population from the country to the cities. This is evidenced by the materials of population censuses: while the proportion of city people in the Buryat ethnic group was 45 % in 1989 and 48.5 % in 2002, it reached 51.3 % in 2010 (Buryaty..., 1996: 10; Khankharaev, 2016: 87). Thus, evolving under the “catch-up modernization” model, for the first time in its history, the Buryat ethnic group has become an urban nation.

### **Ethnic identity**

The ethnic self-identification of the Buryats has a hierarchic structure: tribal, subethnic, and common ethnic levels. Different levels of ethnic self-identification prevailed at different stages of their historical evolution. Researchers point out that in

the post-Soviet period, the ethnic factor has a greater influence on the self-identification of the Buryats than religious, civil, or regional considerations (Mezhnatsionalnye i konfessionalnye voprosy Buryatii..., 2008: 22).

The strengthening of the role of the ethnic factor in the formation of Buryat self-identification is associated with the specifics of the issue of the ethnic group's survival under conditions of sweeping social changes. After the collapse of the USSR, the common ethnic level of Buryat self-identity has increased, according to data from opinion polls in three members of the Russian Federation. When asked: “Who do you consider yourself to be, in the first place?”, 57.36 % of respondents answered “I am Buryat”, 19.82 % “I am a representative of my tribe (Ekhirit, Bulagat, Khori, etc.)”, 22.52 % “I am a Russian national”, and 0.3 % were undecided.

The common Buryat identity prevails in the answers of respondents from all three territories of the RF: the Republic of Buryatia, the Irkutsk Region, and the Trans-Baikal Region. This is indicative of further consolidation of the Buryat people, the gradual overcoming of subethnic differences, and the destruction of the traditional tribal structure of consciousness. At the same time, the preservation of certain differences in the development rates of these tendencies among the Buryats living in the Irkutsk Region and the Trans-Baikal Region is noteworthy. In the Irkutsk Region, where modernization processes proceeded more intensely owing to historical circumstances, the ethnic self-identity of Buryats experienced greater transformation as compared to their co-brothers in the Trans-Baikal. In the latter region, in view of the slighter impact of industrial culture on the local Buryat population, the ethnic forms of existence and consciousness were destroyed to a lesser extent. Therefore, the young Buryats in the Trans-Baikal Region select the tribal identity more often (2.10 %) than in the Irkutsk Region (0.60 %). This proves that eastern Buryats are bearers of the traditional ethnicity to a greater degree. Western Buryats were under the influence of deeper and more extensive acculturation and deethnization. Notably, owing to the rise of Buryat national identity, there were attempts to construct new ethnicity concepts based on cultural-genetic relations between the Buryats and Mongolian peoples. For example, S.B. Chimitdorzhiev, a known specialist in Mongolian studies, suggested returning to the Buryat people their historical name “Buryat-Mongols” (2004: 65). Reversion to the historical ethnonym, as was correctly noted by

D.D. Amogolonova, did not presuppose revival of the panmongolism and spreading of separatist sentiments (2006: 137). The attempts to construct a new Buryat ethnicity on a pan-Mongolian basis did not receive official state support. This prevented the intellectual elite from conveying their ideas to the general public and having a significant impact on the ethnic self-identity of the Buryats.

Thus, while preserving certain territorial differences, the present-day Buryats view themselves primarily as representatives of a single ethnic group. In our opinion, at present, it can be stated that the tribal centralism in Buryat ethnic identity has been overcome. The Buryats did not cease to identify themselves with their clans and tribes; however, the tribal differences do not play any major role either in their world-view or in the social practices of the ethnic group.

During the post-Soviet period, the intra-ethnic relations between the Buryats living in various areas have substantially intensified. The Republic of Buryatia and its capital Ulan-Ude have become the center of ethnic consolidation. This is the place where the main ethnocultural centers and social-political institutions of the Buryat people are concentrated. Largely thanks to activities of the People's Khural of the Republic of Buryatia, the All-Buryat Association for the Development of Culture, the Central Spiritual Board of Buddhists of Russia, and other organizations, the Buryats living in the Irkutsk Region and the Trans-Baikal Region started their active participation in common Buryat events. The international All-Buryat "Altargana" festival has become one of the most popular events, where Buryats living not only in Russia, but also in China, Mongolia, and other countries meet together.

Thus, today, the Republic of Buryatia and its capital constitute a zone of ethnic comfort and a center of common Buryat consolidation. The main migration flows of Buryat population are directed here. The most favorable environment for ethnic group development has been objectively established in the Republic. Here, as already mentioned, the main sociocultural establishments (theaters, museums, higher educational institutions, religious centers, etc.) are concentrated, which promote the development of the culture, language, religion, and traditions of the Buryat people. In the adjacent areas, where the Buryats do not have autonomy, the ethnic assimilation and acculturation processes are facilitated by the system of administrative and economic management, educational institutions, and mass media organizations that operate only in Russian.

The ethnic consolidation triggers elimination of subethnic differences in the conscience of Buryats. The opinion poll findings testify that the majority of young people in the Republic of Buryatia and two former Buryat national districts\* do not divide their ethnic group into eastern and western Buryats: 76.88 % of respondents consider the Buryats to be one people. Meanwhile, this indicator in the Irkutsk Region and the Trans-Baikal Region is above the average, and amounts to 87.50 % and 87.23 %, respectively. As can be seen, subethnic differences, as well as the tribal differentiation, in Buryat ethnic identity recede into the past, giving place to the common ethnic identification. As with many other peoples of Russia, kinship ties are of crucial importance in the determination of ethnic identity among the Buryats. For example, when asked: "Why do you consider yourself to be Buryat?", 51.65 % of respondents answered that their ethnic nationality was determined by their parents, i.e. by the kinship; 20.72 % by upbringing; and 30.93 % by self-identification. Many of the surveyed people selected more than one marker defining their ethnic identity. For instance, along with the kinship, they mentioned the upbringing system, which in turn has a great influence on the self-identification of a person. Thus, unlike the population of many countries of Western Europe and North America, where ethnicity turned to some speculative construct owing to intensive interethnic contacts and widespread intermarriages, among the Buryats it is largely determined in the sense of traditional primordialism.

### **Linguistic situation**

The most important factor of self-identification is the linguistic (speech) community. According to a number of scholars, the preservation and development of a nation is associated primarily with preservation and functioning of its language (Oshorov, 1996: 117). Sharing this point of view, we have to state that unfortunately the Buryat language is not a factor of ethnic consolidation nowadays. In 2002, by the UNESCO decision, it was listed in the Red Book of Endangered Languages.

---

\*The Ust-Orda Buryat Autonomous Okrug was integrated with the Irkutsk Region on January 1, 2008, the Agin-Buryat Autonomous Okrug was integrated with the Chita Region on March 1, 2008 to form a new territorial subject of the RF, the Trans-Baikal Region.



The current situation with the Buryat language is inherited from the recent Soviet past, when it was actually forced out of public communications. In the beginning of the 1970s, the language of tuition in all Buryat schools was switched to Russian. Simultaneously, a reduction in publication of newspapers, magazines and books, radio and television broadcasts in the Buryat language took place.

Over decades of language acculturation, more than one generation has grown up of so called Russian-speaking Buryats, who speak very badly or have no command of their native language at all. As a result of the reduction in practical significance of the Buryat language in the everyday life, some Buryats, especially young people, have lost their mother tongue. Striving to be successful in the Russian-language state, the Buryats tried to have a good command of Russian from childhood, often to the detriment of the native language. Wishing for their children to have no difficulties with the teaching or entry into higher educational institutions and to succeed in modern Russian society in general, parents, including inhabitants of rural areas, voluntarily switched to the use of Russian in the family circle. As a result, modern young Buryats often feel uncomfortable or even lame owing to their ignorance or poor knowledge of their mother tongue. Not coincidentally, many Buryat families are familiar with the situation where grownup children fault their parents for not teaching them the native language in childhood.

Under conditions of democratization of society and rising of Buryat self-identity in the post-Soviet period, the State made efforts to improve the linguistic situation in the Republic. In 1992, the Law on Language was adopted, according to which there were two official languages in the Republic, Russian and Buryat. This creates more favorable conditions for a revival of the Buryat language and for extending the area of its functioning and application. Since 1987, children learn the Buryat language at schools. For the popularization and raising of the prestige of the Buryat language in society, media organizations and publishing houses have been involved. In 1991, the Faculty of Buryat Philology was opened at the Buryat State University for training teaching staff.

A heightened interest in the native language is evidenced by a high competition for admission to educational institutions with advanced study of the Buryat language and culture. One such institution is the Republican Buryat National Lyceum Boarding School, where at least 8 candidates have applied for

each place for more than 10–15 years (Vasilieva, Dugarova, 2007: 79). People of the senior generation who send their children to such educational institutions strive to correct the mistakes they have made and to improve the language competence of young people.

So far, the efforts made have been insufficient to recover the social status of the Buryat language. According to the findings of applied sociological studies conducted in 2005 and 2007, 17.4 % of the Buryats use their native tongue at work or in learning institutions, 10.8 % in public spaces (shops, hospitals, etc.), 46.9 % in the family circle, and 32.7 % when communicating with their friends and acquaintances. At the same time, as emphasized by researchers, 58.1 % of the Buryats communicate only in Russian (Mezhnatsionalnye i konfessionalnye voprosy Buryatii..., 2008: 33–34).

Thus, despite the official bilingualism, the Buryat language is still out of mass social communication. The difficult linguistic situation is confirmed by the data of an opinion poll held in three subjects of the RF. When asked about their command of the Buryat language, 30.33 % of respondents answered: “I can understand and speak”, 30.03 % “I can understand, speak, and read”, 20.72 % “I can understand but cannot speak”, and 18.92 % “I am lacking in knowledge”. Among those who have no command of their native language, 12.61 % live in cities and 6.31 % live in rural areas; i.e. this indicator is nearly 2 times higher among the young city dwellers. Among the respondents who do not speak their native language, the inhabitants of the Republic of Buryatia amounted to 95.24 %; people living in the Irkutsk Region 4.76 %; and no such people were revealed in the Trans-Baikal Region. This suggests that the urban residents of the Republic of Buryatia were exposed to the greatest language acculturation, while the rural Buryat population of the Trans-Baikal Region was affected to the smallest extent.

Analysis of the language competence level allows the conclusion to be drawn that a considerable proportion of the young Buryats lack, or have poor knowledge of, the Buryat language, primarily of the literary language. During the Soviet period, it was actually excluded from the sphere of education; thus, a considerable part of the modern Buryats who have a good command of Russian reading and writing can neither read nor write their native language. Thus, the survey findings testify that despite the institutional support of the Buryat language in present-day Russia, its functioning is still extremely limited. The language acculturation process keeps developing. Overcoming its consequences requires more intense efforts from

the State, and especially from the ethnic group itself that realizes the importance of native language for the preservation and development of the nation.

### Religious renaissance

An increase in the role of the religious factor is a new trend of post-Soviet development. After decades of atheism and persecution, religion not only returns to the social life, but becomes a spiritual mainstay of Buryat ethnic identity. Under conditions of mass linguistic Russianization, the traditional Buryat religions (Shamanism and Buddhism) take on significance as the main ethno-consolidating factor.

The Republic of Buryatia is one of the historical centers of Buddhism in Russia. Apart from Buddhism, the local religious complex is based upon Shamanism and Orthodox Christianity. During the post-Soviet period, other religious associations, especially Protestant ones, became noticeably active. This was largely facilitated by the political situation, owing to unprecedented openness of Russia to the West in the 1990s to the early 2000s. Despite the fact that even governmental authorities engaged in ecclesiastical affairs lack accurate data on the number of neophyte believers, active proselytism of these organizations, as noted by some researchers, obviously cannot but pose a potential threat to traditional confessions (Badmaev et al., 2006: 122–123). Though we generally share this opinion, we should note that nowadays the Buryats mainly remain followers of the Buddhist and Shamanic traditions. According to opinion poll results, the majority of respondents from among the Buryat young people consider themselves religious: 73.87 % of them profess Buddhism, 22.52 % Shamanism. 5.41 % of young Buryats called themselves atheists, 1.80 % of them were undecided in defining their confession. The number of believing Buddhists is great in the Republic of Buryatia and the Trans-Baikal Region: 58.86 % and 13.51 %, respectively.

The greatest proportion of believing Shamanists is observed in the Irkutsk Region (11.11 %); only 1.50 % of people in the survey consider themselves Buddhists. This is explained by the fact that historically Buddhism did not have enough time to become widespread in Western Buryatia; therefore, traditional Shamanism has preserved its influence in the region. 9.61 % of believers profess Shamanism in the Republic of Buryatia, and 1.80 % in the Trans-Baikal Region.

Notably, some respondents identify themselves as followers of both Buddhism and Shamanism. Such

syncretism of religious conscience is typical for those Buryats whose ancestors migrated to Buryatia from the adjacent regions, primarily from the Irkutsk Region. As noted by respondents, being believing Buddhists, they do not renounce Shamanism, the belief of their ancestors. The existence of such “dual belief system” is largely explained by the position of Buddhist community, which, unlike other confessions, is characterized by a high degree of tolerance to different churches, if their attitude towards the religious and philosophical teaching of the Buddha is not hostile. Moreover, there is a notion among the Buddhist monks that believers who are descended from shamans should not forget the religion of their ancestors.

Thus, the rising number of believers among the young people points to the growing role of religion at the modern stage. Religion becomes an active participant of social processes, forms new cultural and social traditions, and turns into psychospiritual support for people in their everyday life. Young people living in rural areas attend places of worship more often than their peers in cities. As for gender differences, women are more religious both in the cities and in the country.

However, in our view, the degree and depth of religious feelings of the young generation should not be exaggerated. As shown by the results of conducted study, young people are characterized mainly by an utilitarian-pragmatic approach to religion. Thus, when asked: “Are you religious in everyday life?”, 26.73 % of respondents replied in the negative, 33.33 % gave a positive answer, 0.6 % were undecided, and 39.34 % recognized that they only thought about religion when they had problems in life. Obviously, desecularization of public conscience in the post-Soviet period did not lead to widespread implementation of religious ethics into the everyday worldly practices. The majority of the population, including young people, have an extremely slender knowledge of the dogmatic fundamentals of faith, cannot always explain the sense of ceremonial rituals, and demonstrate a simplistic consumer attitude to religion. At the same time, it should be emphasized that the growing role of a religious factor in the social life facilitates the formation of tolerance of the beliefs of other peoples, which is one of the bases of social stability in a multicultural society. In our opinion, today we may speak of a certain convergence of the population’s religious behavior, especially in the Republic of Buryatia. Here, local Russians attend Lamaist temples and Shamanic centers, while Buryats observe the main Orthodox Calendar holidays, such as the Nativity, Epiphany, and Easter. People of both confessions consider that religion plays a positive part

in the formation of a tolerant and kind attitude to each other in family and in society (Mezhnatsionalnye i konfessionalnye voprosy Buryatii..., 2008: 64).

### **Social and territorial mobility**

The sweeping social changes of the post-Soviet period have had a profound influence on all aspects of ethnic existence. Having passed through collectivization, industrialization, and urbanization in the Soviet period, the Buryat people have plenty of experience in adapting to the non-traditional forms of social practices, and currently rapidly master the market economy and market relations. Being the most active part of the ethnic group, young Buryats demonstrate new trends in social mobility.

The results of the conducted study show the potential readiness of young people to conduct their own business and be independent of the State. This suggests deep transformations in the public consciousness that will be followed by practical changes. When asked: “How do you see yourself in future?”, 34.23 % of respondents replied: “an employee of the public sector”, 25.53 % “a businessman”, 21.02 % “an employee in a private company”, 18.02 % “a government officer”, and 1.20 % were undecided.

In general, a new pattern of social behavior is formed in the ethnic group during transition to a market economy. In view of this, noteworthy is an increasing migration mobility of young people. In the 21st century, unlike the early 20th century, the Buryats are no longer afraid of the outside world, they are ready to integrate themselves actively into society, to master new social practices, to adapt themselves and develop in a nonethnic milieu. A high educational level of the Buryat population provides an objective basis for this. According to the statistical data, the Buryats, along with the Ossetians, were in second place as regards their proportion of college graduates among the peoples of Russia, being inferior only to the Jews (<http://burstat.gks.ru>, press-release “The Level of Education Among Certain Ethnic Nationalities in the Republic of Buryatia”).

Migration sentiments among young people are evidenced by findings of the opinion survey. When asked: “Where would you like to live in future?”, 35.44 % of respondents answered: “in my little motherland”, 48.05 % “in any region of the RF”, 15.92 % “beyond the RF boundaries”, and 0.59 % were undecided. Rural dwellers (35.74 %), who have suffered especially from the collapse of Soviet

agriculture, the lack of work opportunities, and the resulting fall of living standards, are among those who are ready to leave their current places of residence.

The reasons for the potential migration of young people are a wish to get an education in the leading universities and colleges within the country and abroad (19.22 %), a search for higher-paying jobs (38.14 %), and a desire to be independent and acquire new life experience (39.04 %); 3.6 % of people in the survey did not indicate the reason for their desire to shift their places of residence. High migration mobility forms new traits in the mentality of young Buryats. The process of destruction of traditional tribal structure of consciousness enhances itself, devotion to the historical small motherland weakens itself, and orientation to interethnic communication deepens itself.

While selecting their life strategy, the majority of young Buryats rely mainly on themselves and their own strengths and capabilities, and not on the support of influential relatives and landmen. When asked: “Is the support of influential landmen necessary to you for a successful business career?”, 59.76 % of participants gave a negative answer, 39.64 % answered in the affirmative, 0.6 % were undecided. As can be seen, dependence on clan relations is gradually receding into the past, and ambitious young Buryats strive to make their own life and career.

A high degree of ethnic tolerance among young people, their readiness to abandon their traditional ethnic milieu and live in a multiethnic society is evidenced by potential readiness to marry outside of their ethnicity. The ethnic nationality of their spouse is of no importance for 73.87 % of respondents, 0.3 % of them were undecided, and only 25.83 % recognized that they feel more comfortable with representatives of their own ethnic group.

The inclusion of Buryats in the nonethnic environment speeds up the process of ethnicity transformation. We can see the appearance of a new type of a “modernized” Buryat, who combines the traditional mentality with a modern world view in his/her mind. Generally, these are well-educated young professionals, highly competitive not only at the all-Russian but also at the international level.

As is known, a multiethnic environment spurs the process of assimilation and deethnization. At the same time, as noted by some scholars, living in a foreign milieu is often accompanied by the activation of ethnic identity and the actualization of clan relations beyond the limits of the ethnic area (Skrynnikova, Batomunkuev, Varnavsky, 2004: 14). Such centers and communities actually appear wherever Buryat

diasporas exist. They become “islets” of a small motherland, places for ethnic communication and the transmission of cultural heritage to the new generations. Thus, far from the historical homeland, not only does assimilation of the ethnic group take place, but also formation of the modern Buryat identity that comes into being not as a result of inclusion into the ethnic community, but because of territorial mobility and exclusion from the national milieu (Vasilieva, Dugarova, 2007: 76).

## Conclusion

The findings of the study testify that the processes of ethnosocial development of the Buryats in the post-Soviet Russia are determined by the tendencies of growing common ethnic consolidation, with simultaneously increasing threats of further ethnic assimilation. Their development and interaction determine the basic vector of ethnocultural modernization of the Buryats at the modern stage.

In the post-Soviet period, further formation of ethnic identity on a nationwide scale takes place, the role of religious factor considerably increases, and social and territorial mobility is activated. At the same time, there are a lot of problems to be solved in the sociocultural development of the ethnic group. One of the most complex challenges is recovering the language competence of the Buryats, especially of the young generation. This requires not only support from the State, but the efforts of the ethnic group itself, realizing the importance of native language for preservation and development of the nation.

As indicated by the practice, modern young Buryats select an active life strategy. The Buryats integrate themselves into the modern world and take part in market relations. At the same time, they still remain “Asians” who have not lost their ethnocultural identity.

At the beginning of the 21st century, as in the early 20th century, the Buryats have to fit into a new sociocultural system, and master new forms of social life and economic practice. For them, this is another historical challenge, which requires internal mobilization and formulation of a new strategy for their ethnic development. In our opinion, this strategy should combine two opposite paradigms: modernization and tradition. Their practical implementation requires dialectic interaction of traditional and modern forms of ethnic existence, which will allow the ethnos to preserve its identity and develop successfully in the rapidly changing environment.

## Acknowledgements

This study was supported by the grant for independent scientific research of the Buryat State University in 2017, No. 16-09-4401. Students of the Buryat State University, as well as employees of the Department of History, Ethnology and Sociology of the Institute for Mongolian, Buddhist and Tibetan Studies of the Buryat Scientific Center of the SB RAS, participated in data collection and processing; specialists of the “Eidos” sociological service rendered assistance in preparation of working materials. The author expresses her gratitude to everybody who took part in carrying out this study.

## References

- Amogolonova D.D. 2006**  
Buryatskaya identichnost v usloviyakh perekhodnogo perioda v Rossii. In *Istoriya i kultura narodov Sibiri, stran Tsentraloy i Vostochnoy Azii: Batuyevskiy chteniya: Materialy II Mezhdunar. nauch.-prakt. konf.* Ulan-Ude: pp. 136–142.
- Amogolonova D.D., Elaeva I.E., Skrynnikova T.D. 2005**  
Buryatskaya etnichnost v kontekste sotsiokulturnoy modernizatsii (postsovetitskiy period). Irkutsk: Radian.
- Arutyunyan Y.V., Drobizheva L.M. 2014**  
Proidenniy puti i nekotorye problemy sovremennoy etnosotsiologii. *Sotsiologicheskiye issledovaniya*, No. 7: 102–112.
- Badmaev A.A., Adygbai C.O., Burnakov V.A., Mansheev D.M. 2006**  
Protestantizm i narody Yuzhnoy Sibiri: Istoriya i sovremennost. Novosibirsk: RITs Novosib. Gos. Univ.
- Bromley Y.V. 1983**  
Ocherki teorii etnosa. Moscow: Nauka.
- Buryaty v zerkale statistiki. 1996**  
Ulan-Ude: Goskomstat RB.
- Chimtdorzhiev S.B. 2004**  
Kto my, buryat-mongoly? Ulan-Ude: Buryat. kn. izd.
- Drobizheva L.M. 2013**  
Etnichnost v sotsialno-politicheskom prostranstve Rossiyskoy Federatsii. Opyt 20 let. Moscow: Noviy khronograf.
- Gubglo M.N. 1998**  
Yazyki etnicheskoy mobilizatsii. Moscow: Yazyki slavyanskoy kultury.
- Khalbaeva-Boronova M.M. 2005**  
Buryatiya: Problemy kompleksnogo razvitiya regiona (istoricheskiy opyt issledovaniya). 1960–1990 gg. Ulan-Ude: Izd. Buryat. Gos. Univ.
- Khankharaev V.S. 2000**  
Buryaty v XVII–XVIII vv.: Demograficheskaya istoriya i etnicheskiye protsessy. Ulan-Ude: Izd. BNC SO RAN.
- Khankharaev V.S. 2016**  
Etnodemograficheskiye protsessy v Buryatii. Ulan-Ude: Izd. Buryat. Gos. Univ.
- Khilkhanov D.L. 2005**  
Etnicheskaya identichnost i etnosotsialniye protsessy v Buryatii: Istoriya i sovremennost. Ulan-Ude: Izd.-poligraf. kompleks Vost.-Sib. Gos. Akad. Kultury i Iskusstv.
- Kozlov V.I. 1982**  
Natsionalnosti SSSR. Moscow: Finansy i statistika.



**Mezhnatsionalnye i konfessionalnye voprosy Buryatii v svete obshchestvennogo mneniya (po materialam prikladnykh sotsiologicheskikh issledovaniy 2005 g. i 2007 g.). 2008**

T.B. Budaeva, N.T. Khanturgaeva, D.T. Budaeva et al. Ulan-Ude: Izd. Buryat. Gos. Univ.

**Mikhailov T.M. 1996**

Natsionalnoye samosoznaniye i mentalitet buryat. In *Sovremennoye polozheniye buryatskogo naroda i perspektivy yego razvitiya: Materialy nauch.-prakt. konf.* Ulan-Ude: pp. 18–26.

**Mikhailov T.M. 1998**

Buryatskiy etnos v svete sovremennykh sotsialnykh izmeneniy. In *Respublika Buryatiya – gosudarstvo v sostave Rossiyskoy Federatsii (k 75-letiyu obrazovaniya)*. Ulan-Ude: Izd. BNC SO RAN, pp. 130–145.

**Naseleniye Respubliki Buryatiya v zerkale statistiki:**

**Ot perepisi k perepisi: Statisticheskiy sbornik. 2015**

Ulan-Ude: Buryatstat.

**Nimaev D.D. 1988**

Problemy etnogeneza buryat. Novosibirsk: Nauka.

**Oshorov D. 1996**

Yazyk nash rodnoy... In *Sovremennoye polozheniye buryatskogo naroda i perspektivy yego razvitiya: Materialy nauch.-praktich. konf.* Ulan-Ude: pp. 117–120.

**Skrynnikova T.D., Batomunkuev S.D.,**

**Varnavsky P.K. 2004**

Buryatskaya etnichnost v kontekste sotsiokulturnoy modernizatsii (sovetskiy period). Ulan-Ude: Izd. BNC SO RAN.

**Sydenova R.P. 2003**

Ulusnaya obshchina zapadnykh buryat (vtoraya polovina XIX – nachalo XX v.). Ulan-Ude: Izd. BNC SO RAN.

**Tishkov V.A. 2003**

Rekviyem po etnosu: Issledovaniya po sotsialno-kulturnoy antropologii. Moscow: Nauka.

**Vasilieva M.S., Dugarova T.T. 2007**

Buryaty v novom stoletii: Sotsialno-ekologicheskiy aspekt. Ulan-Ude: Izd. Buryat. Gos. Univ.

**Zoriktuev B.R. 2011**

Aktualniye problemy etnicheskoy istorii mongolov i buryat. Moscow: Vost. lit.

Received May 4, 2018.

Received in revised form July 2, 2018.