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## The Shenekhen Buryat Diaspora in the Socio-Political Discussions of Modern Buryatia

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*Relationships of the diaspora with the historic homeland can dynamically change over time and take a variety of forms. Sometimes there are situations when the diaspora plot goes into the center of the social life of the society that lets it go, becoming an important factor in its development. Most often, the diaspora is an occasion, a starting point, a symbol for understanding and discussing one's own problems. And then the study of disputes and discussions of diaspora problems can become a tool for understanding important processes in this society. The research object of the article is the socio-political discussion around the play *The Wind of the Past Times* of the Buryat drama theater. Transferring the event from a cultural field into a political field allows revealing the important processes of the social and political life of modern Buryatia in the case-study format. The main attention of the authors is focused not on the Shenekhen Buryats themselves, but on revealing the problem of the correlation of cultural, ideological and political components through the attitude to them, to the fate of their symbolic figures, complex, contradictory and often underlying processes of nation-building.*

*Keywords: diaspora, Shenekhen Buryats, historical homeland, Buryatia, performance, Urzhin Garmaev.*

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The most important function of a diaspora is relationship with its historic homeland. As a matter of fact, it is an indispensable condition for its existence as a special type of social relations and connections, self-identification of its members, their life strategies and everyday practices. Historical homeland may relate to this differently – starting from the complete disregard of the existence of the diaspora and ending with keen interest in it and, especially, a pragmatic desire to use its resources for economic, political and geopolitical purposes (Sootechestvenniki, 2004; Shain, Barth, 2015). This relationship may change dynamically over time. Taking into account the uncertainty of the very concept of “historical homeland”, which is subjective, often mythological, including the territory, the state, and the people (again, in the meanings of the word that are very diverse and sometimes difficult to define), the attitude to the diaspora can be built on different grounds and take different forms.

In any case, the fact of the existence of a diaspora and the intensity of relations with it are hardly as important for their historical homeland as for the second subject of this inseparable bond. However, there are situations when the diaspora plot comes to the center of the social or political life of the country of origin and becomes an important factor in its development. In this case, most often the diaspora is the occasion, the starting point, the symbol for understanding and discussing its own problems. Metaphorically speaking, the diaspora can become the mirror that the society of the historical homeland looks into in the next attempt to learn something new about itself, something to understand, and perhaps even change. And then the study of disputes and discussions of diaspora problems can become a tool for understanding important processes in this society.

That is why the authors, not being theater experts or literary critics, ventured to select the scandal that has developed into a sharp social and political debate around the performance *The Wind of Past Times* of the Buryat drama theater (directed by Sayan Zhambalov) as an object for their research. The basis for such a choice is given by the nature of the discussion, which focuses not on the actual theatrical event – the performance, but on the plot that gave rise to it. It was not the merits or demerits of the play and its literary basis that were discussed, but the fate of the Shenekhen Buryats, the significance of their choice, and most importantly, the evaluation of this choice by our contemporaries. Here several motives came together. This is the “continuation of the civil war”, the desire to gain independence, to build a historical tradition through another attempt to take the side of “the red” or “the white”, including through an attitude towards anti-Soviet emigration. This is the nature of the relationship between

creative people and cultural institutions with the state, the state monopoly of historical knowledge, which is being vigorously discussed now, and reactions of professional communities to it.

It is an instant and very nervous transfer of the event from the cultural field into the political field that allows identifying very important processes of the social and political life of modern Buryatia in the case-study format, including those processes that are often labeled as “the Buryat national-cultural revival”. Thus, we will be interested here not in the Shenekhen Buryats themselves, but in the complex, contradictory, often underlying processes of nation-building, the problem of the correlation of cultural, ideological and political components in them revealed by the attitude to them, to the fate of their iconic figures, as well as the reaction to this process of the multi-ethnic society of Buryatia.

### **The Odyssey of the Shenekhen Buryat General Urzhin Garmaev**

The acuteness of the discussion is directly related to the assessment of the personality of the Manchukuo Army General Urzhin Garmaev. His difficult fate cannot be understood outside the context of the tragic and incredibly interesting history of the human community, known as “Shenekhen Buryats” (Baldano, Dyatlov, 2008; Boronoeva, 1999).

This is a local ethnocultural group formed by Buryats, who came from Russia in the area of the Shenekhen River, in the Barga region of Inner Mongolia of China, where they fled from the upheavals of the civil war and the cataclysms of socialist transformations in Russia. Participants and supporters of defeated factions, people striving for a peaceful life and security, those who could not get along with the Soviet authorities, whom it considered to be their enemies or made an object of revolutionary experiments, left Siberia and Transbaikalia across the Chinese border. Collectivization was a particularly powerful push factor. The influx of migrants went on up to 1933.

The migrating of families with belongings and livestock was extremely difficult; many could not even reach the border. Lkhama-Tsyren, who lived for seventy-five years in Shenekhen, recalled, *“In the winter of 1931, dozens of Buryat families set up campsites in the Borzinsk steppe. Once, on a frosty night, a man rode a horse and said that Russian soldiers had come from the north and were moving to the Chinese border, and it was necessary to get ahead of them, to urgently move beyond the border line. Hundreds of Buryat had been already arrested. A panic arose in the camp, it was necessary to urgently gather cattle in one herd and drive south. The people were*

*divided into two groups: one of them gathered and drove the cattle, the other one put belongings on carts and followed the first. The latter group included mostly women and children. On the second day, the first cart crossed the Chinese border. But the second group never arrived. Over the year, many Buryats came from the Russian side, but there were no our wives and children among them. Only in the 1950s we learned that the cart had been intercepted, everyone was arrested, put on a freight train and taken away first to Irkutsk and then to Kazakhstan, where the camp of the traitors' wives was located near Semipalatinsk. Many died in the first days. And only in 1959, when the Chinese border was opened, did we have the opportunity to meet with those who survived (Nagasa, 2014).*

The group began with refugees. The refugees, however, took the traditional form of displacement. Such a departure to a new territory – by clan groups, with livestock – automatically led to the reproduction of the traditional social structure, habitual power and other relations, lifestyle and economic structure there. Marginalization and social atomization did not happen; on the contrary, separation from the main ethnic array became an incentive to create a new ethnological group on the basis of the tribal relations and structures brought with them.

The number of Shenekhen Buryats is estimated at between 6 and 9 thousand people. The Chinese authorities created a special administrative unit for them called the Buryat *khoshun* (county), which included four *somons* (provinces). Administrators were appointed from among the immigrants.

Migrants did not encounter hostility or ill will from the old-time population. This can be explained by a close relationship and close historical ties between Buryats and Barguts, as well as the absence of a conflict of interests. Lands allocated to immigrants were “escheated”, empty for more than a hundred years after the epidemic. In addition, subsistence farming and traditional cattle breeding did not require advanced integration, there was neither developed economic cooperation and exchange, nor competition with the neighbors; respectively, there was no need for daily communication with them.

Without receiving impulses for integration from the host society, the community withdrew into itself, having conserved the system of traditions that was vital in this situation. The rallying factor was the Lamaist religion. Traditional holidays and ceremonies were celebrated, national clothes were preserved. Despite the ethnocultural, religious, linguistic kinship with the neighbors, there were almost no intermarriages with them; the tendency to dissolve in the culturally close Mongolian-speaking environment was not manifested. The group's fate was determined by the unique

combination of its complete lack of interest in acculturation (especially assimilation) in the host society with the absence of external pressure from the latter (before the “cultural revolution”).

As a result, a conglomerate of tribal groups and individual refugees formed a single group, which was self-sufficient in terms of economic specialization, culturally disconnected from the host society by the Buryat language, a system of tribal ties, customs, holidays and traditions and large enough to maintain the structure of sociality – from internal marriages to education, language and authority.

One of the pillars of isolation was the memory of the “historical homeland” and the awareness of the group as its “fragment”, as evidenced by carefully preserved myths and folklore works. But what was meant by “historical homeland” – a state, a locality, people or relations? It is unlikely that they were divided in the mind, although the respondents’ answers have “*toonto nyutag*” (small homeland) in the first place, then relatives and, finally, the state of Russia (Boronoeva, 2011). As we see, not the last place in this hierarchy of representations was occupied by the main generic array remaining there, while the dream of return was based on the desire to reunite with relatives.

Being closed allowed solving such a difficult adaptation problem as mastering the language of the host society relatively painlessly: until recently, the Buryat language could serve almost the entire range of language needs of the group. However, the leaders of the community faced with the problem of the language of management and relations with regional authorities. At the time of the Chinese Republic, Manchu was the official language in the province, but Buryat immigrants were allowed to conduct records management using Mongolian writing. Under Manchukuo, Japanese was compulsory at school, if you could speak it, you could make a career in the army and even get a higher education. The authorities of the People’s Republic of China officially refer the Shenekhen Buryats to the Mongols. The Mongolian language with old Mongolian graphics, which is the official language of Inner Mongolia, is taught in schools, used on radio, in print, in paperwork, it is the language of fiction. But this does not pose the problem of choosing between the Buryat and Mongolian languages. All observers unanimously note the popularity of the Chinese language now, the orientation of the majority of schoolchildren in its deep study.

Up until the “cultural revolution”, the authorities of republican China, Manchukuo and the PRC treated the Shenekhen Buryats precisely as a group. In one form or another, to a greater or lesser extent, they were given the right to internal self-government, independent regulation of their life and internal conflicts. Their tribal elite received

authorization for power and integrated into the state structure of the host society. The authorities required only the execution of external duties, namely the payment of taxes, military service, loyalty.

The first two duties did not create insurmountable problems, but it was very difficult to demonstrate political loyalty in the conditions of frequent change and hostility of the dominant political forces. Wrong choice could be fatal. During the events on the Chinese Eastern Railway in 1929, the Shenekhen Buryats were “between the hammer and the anvil”. They were “Soviet spies” for the Chinese authorities and “Chinese spies” for the USSR.

With the formation of Manchukuo, migration almost completely ceased, ties with the historical homeland were cut off for a long time. As subjects of the “empire”, the Shenekhen Buryats were supposed to bear duties common to all, the Japanese language was introduced as a compulsory subject at school, while the khoshun was eliminated. The Japanese authorities imposed exorbitant taxes and constantly carried out cattle requisition.

The arrival of Soviet troops in 1945 was accompanied by repression against those who were accused of collaborating with the Japanese. About 400 people (up to half of the adult male population) were forcibly deported to the USSR and partly repressed. The civil war between the Kuomintang and the Communists (1946–1949) brought great human casualties and enormous material losses.

Serious changes were brought by the proclamation of the People’s Republic of China. Now the Shenekhen Buryats live in the three somons of the Evenk khoshun of the Hulunbuir aimak. Their current number is estimated at 6-7 thousand people. During the “cultural revolution” they were subjected to collectivization and mass repression. The resilience of the community was severely shocked. The closure of schools, the repression against the educated elite who knew Chinese, the arrests of “Soviet spies”, the front-line status of the border with the USSR, collectivization – all this shook the usual way of life.

In the same direction, albeit for other reasons, the vigorous modernization transformations that began with the era of Deng Xiaoping had an impact on the community. There was a chance to return to the usual foundations of life. There are three Buryat schools. Datsans destroyed during the “cultural revolution” were restored. However, economic freedoms and private property, the ability to run their own economy in a market economy, destroy self-isolation, give rise to new opportunities and temptations. Large plots of land have been received for 30-year lease to keep house. You

can use hired labor. Now this is a fairly prosperous group, in which commercial cattle breeding remains the basis of the economy. Nowadays motorcycles, cars, computers, television “dish” are the usual details of life.

Keeping house dictates the need for business operations, well-established business ties. The Chinese language and Chinese culture are becoming “necessities”. No wonder all observers record the rapid process of the formation of Buryat-Chinese bilingualism. Now it is the path to economic prosperity, modern education, urban professions, career. The Shenekhen Buryats have entered a period of fierce competition for resources, education, jobs. They are engaged not only in cattle breeding, but also in medicine, health care, education, and the service sector. Their territorial and social mobility inevitably grows. All this erodes communion and in the future forms a qualitatively different level of integration into Chinese society than before.

The border with Russia opened, the relations with the “historical homeland” were renewed. In the 1990s, about 300 Shenekhen Buryats arrived in Russia. Now there are about 400 of them. The motives for returning were different: nostalgic (“the homeland of ancestors”), economic (search for new opportunities), educational (within the framework of existing preferential programs). In any case, they *returned* to Buryatia, the homeland of their ancestors, to their Buryat compatriots. But they also faced adaptation problems typical for migrants. There was no rapid merger with the “mother ethnos”, which radically changed in the Soviet era. Migrants found specific niches in the economy for themselves, and in social terms, they mainly use internal networks, connections and relationships. They rely on the mainstream group remaining in China, which has in fact become a “national center”, a new “historical homeland” in some ways.

The personality and the fate of the prominent Buryat political and military leader during the Civil War in Russia, Urzhin Garmaev, became the symbol of this entire diaspora “odyssey”. This figure is not forgotten today; quite a lot is written and known about him in Buryatia. There is a small biographical book by B.V. Bazarov, based on the archives of the Federal Security Service of Russia and the court proceedings in Moscow (Bazarov, 2001). Almost all later publications retell or rely on its content. A small essay by A. Solov’ev and A. Tarasov in the “Small Encyclopedia of Transbaikalia” is based on the same source base and introduces additional details into this version of the biography (Solov’ev, Tarasov, 2012).

Urzhin Garmaev was born in 1889 in the village of Makarovo in the Krasnoyarsk Volost of the Nerchinsky district of the Trans-Baikal Region. In 1912 he graduated

from a real school in Chita and passed examinations without attending lectures for the title of national teacher. From 1912 to 1918 he taught Russian, Buryat and Mongolian languages in Buryat schools in Transbaikalia. In 1917–1918 he was in the party of the Social Revolutionaries. He was an active supporter of Ataman G.M. Semenov, played a prominent military and political role in his regime. After graduating from an officer's school in Dauria with the rank of ensign in April 1919, he became a professional soldier. Despite the small rank, he played an important role in the headquarters of G.M. Semenov, coordinating his military-political cooperation with the Buryat-Mongolian National Duma (Burnarduma).

In 1921, he fled with his family to Manchuria, settled in Shenekhen, took Chinese citizenship, and became a cattle-breeding worker. Immediately he became a deputy, and in 1926–1928 a Khoshun chief. He quickly made a big fortune. In 1928, he demonstrated his loyalty to the Chinese authorities by the fact that at the head of the squad formed in the Khoshun he took an active part in suppressing the separatist riot raised by Bargut tribes that were related to the Buryat.

After the formation of Manchukuo (March of 1932), he occupied high administrative and military posts in the empire. In 1933, he was appointed the head of the security forces of the North-Khingan province immediately as a colonel. In 1940–1944 being in the rank of lieutenant-general of the army of Manchukuo, he commanded a military district, and then he headed a military school. He fought at Khalkhin Gol as part of the Japanese forces. He was awarded three orders and seven medals. In August 1945, having surrendered to Soviet troops, he was arrested. By the court session of the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR, he was sentenced to death with confiscation of property. In 1992 he was rehabilitated.

Such is, in the words of Arkady Gaidar, “*an ordinary biography in extraordinary time*”.

### **“Theatrical novel”. Performance and public discussion**

Since the 1990s, this biography along with the entire history of the Shenekhen Buryats have not been only the object of research attention, but also the subject of keen interest of the public. Regular publications in the media, several stories, short stories and plays have been published. A steady tradition has emerged in the evaluation of this experience, which fully fit into the all-Russian discourse of the “*tragedy* of the Civil War and the White emigration”. It is not by chance that in most texts about Urzhin Garmaev (both scientific and artistic), the canonical image of Grigory Melekhov

from *The Quiet Don* immediately appears. The Civil war and subsequent events are perceived and evaluated as a tragedy, a monstrous force of cataclysm that destroyed the lives and destinies of people and put them to the necessity of choosing tragic and obviously fatal, disastrous decisions. At the same time, the crisis of the Soviet socialist idea led to the idealization and glorification of the “white movement” and “white emigration”. These discourses are quite conventional, are now in a complex interaction and, which is important for understanding the situation in question, have become customary and legitimate. Only the attitude towards the representatives of emigration who collaborated with the opponents of the USSR during the Second World War has not become clear.

The play *The Wind of the Past Times*, as well as its literary basis (two plays by the playwright Basaa Valera (Valerii Dabaev) *How Long You've not Been Here* and *The Wind of the Past Times*) did not break out of this tradition. According to the director of the play Sayan Zhambalov, “*the play The Wind of the Past Times was conceived in the summer of 2013. In October 2014, after the expedition to Shenekhen, the premiere came out. This story is about the Buryat people, who in troubled times experienced the same thing that is described in Sholokhov’s novel The Quiet Don, when one was against his own brother and relatives were on opposite sides of the barricades. The performance is based on the real life story of Urzhin Garmaev, a Cossack warrant officer, who found himself in a foreign country in the service of the state of Manchukuo. But the play is not about that; it is about the people, about repressions, about how the time of troubles divided people and families*” (Sayan Zhambalov).

The traditional task, a strong literary basis, a popular plot in the society, the high professionalism of the creators of the play, interesting directorial decisions – all this contributed to attracting spectator attention, recognition from the professional community. The performance was included in the long list (the most prominent performances of Russia) of the National Theater Prize “Golden Mask” of 2014/2015 season. At the international festival “Gegeen Muse” in Mongolia, Sayan Zhambalov was recognized as the best director, Bayarto Endonov was recognized as the best actor.

The method of artistic provocation, which was completely legal and widespread in art, was not used. In other words, the scandal was not envisaged and was not planned at all. It was all the more unexpected.

It began in the genre of classical theater-like squabbles with a statement by Tatyana Nikitina, a journalist from the newspaper “MK in Buryatia”, and with a corresponding article in the newspaper (Nikitina, Bru-ga-ga) about the nepotism flourishing in the

theater. The official reply of Timur Tsibikov, the Minister of Culture of Buryatia, followed: a similar situation does not contradict the law; moreover, the presence of creative dynasties is part of the country's great theatrical tradition (Scientists, 2015). Then quite an ordinary household squabble was transferred into the format of ideological conflict. Then some articles by Nikitina with headlines in the style of the 1930s followed, "*Down with the Urzhingarmaevshchina from the stage*", "*In the Khural – patriotism, in the theater – neo-fascism?*" (Nikitina, Down with; In the Khural).

The task of identifying the logic and argumentation of the charges seems almost insoluble due to their inaudibility. At least, *The Echo of Moscow* columnist I. Ozerov, who devoted a lot of time to this and outstanding professional abilities and efforts in the interview with T. Nikitina, was forced to retreat.

Here is the most intelligible example of the logic of accusations against the theater, "*The essence of the question is in the following: the state should not fund and pay for performances that similarly bring such historical figures to the national heroes on the stage of the state theater, this is nonsense. Urzhin Garmaev is the enemy of the Soviet state. We are still successors, we defend the interests of the state, we cannot write an alternative history today. We honor veterans of the Great Patriotic War. On May 9, we will go to Soviets Square with you and carry the portraits of our grandparents, and, literally, a few hundred meters away, the hero who fought against our grandmothers and grandfathers will go to the stage of the Buryat Drama Theater. This is nonsense, this should not be in a civilized state ... Today, we have a democracy – yes, say whatever you want. But there is government policy, there are ideological norms, there is government money. Here, it is forbidden to do this for state money*".

"*It's about the ideology of the play, which in a positive perspective shows the image of Urzhin Garmaev, who consciously stood up during the Second World War under the banner of the Japanese emperor and shed the blood of Soviet soldiers not for the Buryat people, as its authors diligently try to show in the play. If Urzhin Garmaev and those for whom he worked had won in 1945, there would not have been a country called the USSR and the Republic of Buryatia, in particular. There would not have been the theater of the Buryat drama, eminent Buryat actors, who are now proud of their homeland. The horror of our time lies in the fact that in the year of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Victory, after the "Immortal Regiment" and kilometers of feature films about the war, they preferred to rewrite the history of the Great Patriotic War in the Republic of Buryatia in their own way. We have seen how the Ministry of*

*Culture of Buryatia, which finances the Buryat Drama Theater and is accordingly responsible for the content of its performances, in fact works on patriotic education and opposes neo-fascism” (Nikitina, In the Khural).*

Such a large quotation here is necessary for understanding the level and style of the texts of the initiator of the discussion that ensued. A detailed and in-depth analysis of the performance and criticism of the texts by T. Nikitina is contained in the article by Sergey Basaev [Basaev, 2015], which frees us from the need to carry out this rather ungrateful work again. Let us quote only the set of accusations against Urzhin Garmaev that he identified, *“It’s hard to believe, but Tatyana Nikitina calls General Urzhin Garmaev rehabilitated in modern Russia in 1992 “flipped over to the enemy during the Great Patriotic War”(that is, a traitor to the homeland, a betrayer) attempted to “dismember Russia”, “the murderer of Soviet soldiers”, “a Japanese agent”, “a pan-mongolist” in the service of Japanese intelligence (that is, a spy), and for some reason “the Japanese general of the Kwantung Army”! She does not call Urzhin Garmaev a “fascist”. But, apparently, believes he is. It is because the author of the articles (or denunciations?) attaches the label of “neo-fascists” to those people who have made a performance about him today” (Basaev, 2015).*

The articles of T. Nikitina were followed by the statements of veterans-public activists in the same stylistics addressed to the public authorities demanding to ban the performance and official restrained and disapproving answers. Based on the expert opinion of the Academic Council of the Institute for Mongolian, Buddhist and Tibetan Studies of the SB RAS, the Minister of Culture of the Republic Timur Tsybikov stated that the authorities *“do not interfere in the repertoire policy of the theaters ... The performance does not contain the idea of glorification of Urzhin Garmaev, but reflects the tragedy and the fate of a person, in which, like in a drop of water, the controversial history of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is reflected, which is the history of global social transformations and upheavals. The basis of the drama’s stage solution is a combination of facts, private stories with traditional rituals, folk games, with the poetic sound of Buryat folk songs and music, reflecting the culture of the Shenekhen Buryat group that was local and closed up to the 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Cit. ex: Scientists, 2015).*

This whole story was vigorously debated on the Internet. For the majority of participants in these discussions, the play about the Shenekhen Buryats and the Shenekhen Buryats themselves, with their dramatic migration destiny, turned out to be a reason to discuss topical issues. Again, in a situation of social and political

uncertainty, people test, try on the situation of a social split, irreconcilable hostility of the next “red” and “white”, the existential choice, the drama of a person who is forced to choose the non-elected.

### **Ethnic dimension: “Our dead will not leave us in trouble ...”**

The discussion immediately went to another plane, the direction of which was set by T. Nikitina, *“When questioned films, books and songs about the great Kolchak-Semenov-Ungern’s role in Russian history continually appear under various slogans in the large state, it can be understood. When prominent cultural figures of small Buryatia cannot understand their small history, it is unforgivable and sad”* (Nikitina, Down with).

It is proposed to consider the fate of Urzhin Garmaev not as a tragedy of a man torn by the choice between equally important loyalties given by the Civil War, not as the fate of a participant in the “white movement” and “white emigration”, an exile from his native land, not even as a general of the Manchukuo army but as part of “*little Buryatia*” with its “*little history*”. It is fundamentally important for the journalist that he is Buryat. She resolutely refuses to put him on a par with Kolchak and even Semenov precisely on this basis. And she makes separate claims to him regarding loyalty to the state, which she, in a conversation with *The Echo of Moscow* columnist, regards as the highest and absolute priority.

Speaking the usual domestic language, there was a transfer of the problem in the ethnic, national plane. It is not by chance that the argument that “*they mold an icon from an aspiring white emigrant. Garmaev himself is certainly an ambiguous personality. But he is lifted up on the pedestal by the same figures who want to separate Buryatia from Russia*”, “*People in whose aspirations anti-Sovietism and Russophobia are felt quite clearly are obviously trying to raise such an ambiguous personality as Urzhin Garmaev as a national hero of Buryatia...*”, “*The play about Garmaev is one of the most important bricks in an interethnic strife*” immediately appeared in the Internet comments<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Online discussions are a very specific source requiring special approaches. Their members are anonymous, and their statements are posted on individual blogs and pages, which are also basically anonymous. The forums, ownership and concept of which is stated, are rarely found. Therefore, it is possible to analyze only the texts themselves as such. Therefore, links to specific addresses, as a rule, are not informative. Based on this, **in this case**, a controversial and critically sensitive decision was made that is to analyze the replicas as such, without references to blogs and pages. That is, it will not be a full-fledged citation with the author’s attribution. Conventionally, this can be defined as one general discussion, where the content and style of anonymous statements are important (Discussion of this problem: [Forum, 2011]).

The reciprocal mirror accusation logically followed, *“An explicit order for inciting national hatred has been published in the MK. The truth of the Buryat people will not be able to hide and slander; it is necessary to restore its true History. So that from childhood everyone knew their ancestors and honored their memory”*. Such articles *“are written for the sole purpose of stirring up the national discord. Only in order to show everyone that they, “Buryat nationalists”, really exist!!! Because Buryat Nazism is a rather ephemeral concept in contrast to Russian chauvinism. We do not have Buryat marches with a ridge through urban centers, we do not have Buryat ethnic music groups that glorify Nazism, we do not have fascist groups that beat and kill everyone who is not Buryat; But the authors of such essays seem to have a desire to prove to everyone in Russia that this is the way it is, they start to frighten everyone with the notorious Buryat neo-fascism inciting hatred towards the Buryat-Mongolian people”*.

However, there is an understanding of the fact that *“specifically in Buryatia, I know that neither Russian nationalists, nor Buryat nationalists are really capable of anything. Of course, if various self-appointed fighters against them call all Russians of Buryatia Russian nationalists or call all Buryats Buryat nationalists, it will cause a backlash”*.

Such a view withdraws an assessment of the situation from the familiar, already routine and clearly outdated paradigm of national conflict and the search for those who incite it. The indignation at the national arrogance about the “little history” of “little Buryatia” is understandable and does not require special comment. Reflection on the fate of the Buryat people and their right to have their own destiny, their own heroes, their “paternal coffins” comes to the fore.

*“Heroes of the USSR, General Baldynov, Guards Colonel Borsoev and other thousands of senior officers of the Red-Soviet Army are Buryats who honestly fought for the USSR. It is a fact. But this fact in no way makes the Buryat-Mongols who fought for other states, strangers, non-Buryats, non-patriots of the Buryat-Mongolian and Mongolian people. This is our internal matter to determine them by the Reds, the Semenovtsy, the Cochkinsy, by anyone! It is ours!!! But not yours!!! You will deal with your white-red-skin-antanto-Vlasovtsy and other officers who served dozens of foreign countries. Urzhin is the pride and pain of the nation, of Buryat-Mongolian nation. When in Rome do as the Romans do. We do not rail against Shkuro, Makhno, Kolchak, Vlasov ... thousands of Cossacks, regimental commanders who served the Wehrmacht, for “the holy goals of liberating Russia from the Stalinist genocide”*.

There is no motive for national discord, but there is a clear and conscious opposition of one's own "Buryat-Mongolian nation" to other nations in this statement, which is emotionally sharp and intellectually deep at the same time. In the absence of their own "Buryat-Mongolian" state, eminent people of the nation are free to serve different states, and this can be assessed only by their own nation. There is a clear understanding of the problem of forming a political nation on an ethnic basis.

The director of the play, Sayan Zhambalov, is far from a political view of the problem, from the idea of "Buryat-Mongolian nation", at least in the concept of this performance. For him, the memory of the ancestors, being involved in their tragic fate as the foundation, the basic principles for the preservation of culture and the people are important, *"this is a performance about our unspoiled history. Yes, this pain still lives! The Russian people wept it out through the works of Bulgakov and Sholokhov, and we, the Buryats, did not. And we didn't have the desire to hurt or offend anyone by staging this performance that is the understanding of the facts of our history"* (Sayan Zhambalov). It means our departed ancestors are necessary for *us* as the basis of *our* full-fledged existence.

### **Conclusion**

The history of the performance, which is a local, seemingly purely theatrical, cultural event, revealed an interesting and important pattern. Without detracting from the artistic merit of the performance, it is worth noting that it was not because of them that it has not become an important social event. The story of a small and quite self-sufficient diaspora group of the Shenekhen Buryats was the reason for a serious sociopolitical debate. The fact that this is not a random choice, says that in the 1990s, it served as a material for building the fabric of the project of "national-cultural revival".

The need to comprehend the results of ethno-national development in the Soviet era and formulate guidelines and goals for the future is the task that was an undoubted priority for the national elite. A series of meetings, congresses, research and journalistic texts were created, resolutions and official documents were adopted, parties and movements were formed. The problems of the native language and culture were discussed; new versions of national history were constructed. Discussions about the preservation, revival, development of national culture organically turned into a discussion of issues of statehood, the nature of power. In the modern language, a project of nation-building was formed.

The existence of the Buryat diaspora turned out to be an extremely important argument to substantiate the relevance of the old idea “gathering the nation”, formulated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, namely the idea of political unification of the Mongolian historical and cultural community, long and firmly separated by state borders. The Shenekhen Buryats turned out to be a convenient material for the revival of this project, even if not as a practical task, but as a unifying dream.

The Shenekhen Buryats became extremely popular as unique carriers of authentic traditions, customs, cultural norms, lost by the metropolitan society in the process of modernization and preserved in the diaspora isolate. According to V.A. Khamutaev, one of the founders and leaders of the Buryat-Mongolian People’s Party and the National Unity Movement “Negedel”, it is very important that the Shenekhen Buryats “*keep traditional farming, study, sing, dance, organize weddings. We emphasize that they have preserved everything native, Buryat: consciousness, language, games, traditions, clothes, rituals, Old Mongolian writing, “taban Khushun” – traditional cattle breeding, etc. ... It is necessary to allocate land for individual construction and compact (in one locality) settlement of Shenekhen repatriates in order to preserve the established world order, course, traditions, way of life, forms of management, maintenance of “taban Khushun”, and horticulture. Preserving the well-established traditional lifestyle of a unique ethnocultural group accords with the interests of the entire ethnic group*”. This causes such indignation about the adaptation of repatriates and their children, “*Buryats from China come to the Republic, their children, who know only their native language, are forced to comprehend a foreign culture, language, morality, loudly express emotions, because they are scattered around different schools. Every day they lose all their native, ethnic, national qualities, manners, behavior, which have been developed for thousands of years, increasingly turning into noisy, shrill Soviet mankurts*” (Khamutaev, 2000).

All this does not mean at all that the theme of the Shenekhen Buryats was monopolized by the discourse of nation-building. Perhaps, this story began to play such a role in political and ideological practice, because it relied on a rather sincere and unselfish public interest. A lot of people were just wondering how “ours” lived and live in a foreign country. A quotation from a newspaper article about the Shenekhen Buryats is very illustrative, “*They do not speak Russian at all and live like they did 100 years ago. Collectivization, industrialization and the Second World War passed them at a distance. There was no May Day demonstration of the era of stagnation, or perestroika ration cards for them. And there was life, according to centuries-old Buryat*

*traditions in hard daily work for the good of their family. The historical memory of the descendants of Buryat immigrants is not littered with the changes of the last decades. The Shenekhen Buryats, who colonized the unoccupied lands of Inner Mongolia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, were able to multiply the wealth saved from the Bolsheviks and preserve their culture as it was more than a hundred years ago (Number One)*”.

Perhaps, this is somewhat reminiscent of the huge, one might even say exalted, interest in Russian post-revolutionary emigration in general. They peered at it as at “different own”, they peered in order to understand themselves, to see “materialized unfulfilled”. Another life, “another Russia”, which they had passed, which they had lost because of the choice made once. Perhaps, this feeling was most acutely conveyed by Vasily Aksenov in his “Island of Crimea”.

With the end of the “era of national cultural revival” of the 1990s politicians and officials got many new problems and concerns, the life of the Shenekhen Buryats and the possibility of their return ceased to be a politically relevant topic. However, the interest in the diaspora as an exotic, alternative beginning, that mirror, which the society of the “national center” peers into trying to understand itself, has not disappeared anywhere.

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## **Диаспора шэнэхэнских бурят в общественно-политических дискуссиях современной Бурятии**

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*Взаимоотношения диаспоры с исторической родиной могут динамично меняться во времени и принимать самые различные формы. Иногда возникают ситуации, когда диаспоральный сюжет выходит в центр общественной жизни отпускающего общества, становясь важным фактором его развития. Чаще всего диаспора выступает*

*поводом, отправной точкой, символом для осмысления и обсуждения собственных проблем. И тогда изучение споров и обсуждений диаспоральных проблем может стать инструментом для понимания важных процессов в этом обществе. Объектом исследования статьи является общественно-политическая дискуссия вокруг спектакля Бурятского театра драмы «Ветер минувших времен». Перевод события из поля культурного в поле политическое позволяет в формате case-study выявить важные процессы общественно-политической жизни современной Бурятии. Основное внимание авторов сосредоточено не на самих шэнэхэнских бурятах, а на выявлении через отношение к ним, к судьбе их знаковых фигур, сложных и противоречивых, часто подспудных процессов нациестроительства, проблемы соотношения в них культурной и идейно-политической составляющих.*

*Ключевые слова: диаспора, шэнэхэнские буряты, историческая родина, Бурятия, спектакль, Уржис Гармаев.*

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