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“Demographic Expansion” – Russian-Chinese Marriages in Migration Mythology

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The massive influx of Chinese migrants into post-Soviet Russia has created among other consequences a rich mythology and a system of stereotypes. An important component of this complex is the concept of “Chinese expansion” aimed at economic and cultural development of the Russian Far East and Siberia with their subsequent annexation. A key role in this concept is played by the idea of “demographic expansion”. The article is devoted to the analysis of its significant constituent – the thesis of “marriage expansion” as an instrument of nonviolent and invisible invasion through assimilation, dissolution of the Russian population in the Chinese demographic dominance. This mythologeme and rhetoric based on it have been regarded by some politicians as an effective tool of political manipulation and struggle for power. However, the marriage statistics of the Far Eastern and Siberian cities show a little number of mixed marriages. The corresponding calculations of scientists are now needed not so much to fight against this myth as to study complex problems of intercultural interactions in human relations. Having studied the idea of “marriage expansion”, we could identify some mechanisms of myth-making. The result shows, in particular, that the distinction between the mythological and scientific consciousness with mutual diffusion observed is not as rigid and specific as the interstate border. Naturally, myths are the scientific analysis object. But often they act in the form of scientific knowledge, authoritative in the society. Moreover, mythological representations can penetrate into real scientific research; all it takes is only to neglect the sacred for historians principle of “criticism of sources”.

Keywords: Chinese migrants, mixed marriages, the syndrome of “Chinese expansion”, “marriage expansion”.

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The massive and prompt influx of labour migrants into post-socialist Russia turned out to be completely unexpected for its society and

authorities. World experience shows that the related problems are complex and conflictual on their own. For Russia, the situation was even

more complicated not only due to the scale of migration flows, the immense role of migrants in the economy of the whole country or some of its key regions, the adverse public reaction, geopolitical fears, but also because of the novelty and unpreparedness of society and authorities for migration adequate understanding and regulation. The newness of the phenomenon was multiplied by the factor of the spontaneous character of these migrations, unique for the Russian experience and independent of the Russian state regulations. For the first time ever a huge number of people have been crossing the Russian border at their own choice and decision, defying any state-organized, regulated and sponsored programs.

The society, ordinary people, laymen experience a state of confusion and irritation, being confronted with an unexpected crowds of new people, differing in appearance, manner of behaviour, lifestyle, language, system of moral norms, taboo, etc. In urban compact society, migrants can no longer exist in the form of territorially and/or socially isolated groups of class type, enjoying only minimal communication with the host society. The scale of everyday and ubiquitous contacts and interaction in the economic, social and cultural spheres are radically expanding, not only at the level of groups, but at the level of individual relations.

The arrival of new people "in bulk" and the formation of a new social phenomenon necessitate the creation of a mechanism for the host society adaptation to these incomers. And this could not be done without developing a certain relationship and forming a stereotype. Myths and stereotypes are formed so quickly and rooted in the public consciousness so firmly for a simple and important reason, which is they are necessary. This is an indispensable way to determine the place of new people and new groups in the hierarchy of relationships and statuses. They form a model of relations and facilitate its

functioning. They are the means of ideological mobilization and struggle for power; a tool for solving departmental, regional or corporate problems. As the attitude of the host society to migrants changes, the structure of stereotypes and the intensity of the corresponding fears and hostility change, too. But xenophobic attitudes and complexes are inevitably present in them.

A stereotype is, first of all, the development of a relationship. Not so much heuristic, but assessing social information and aimed at its ordering. This is the sphere of a priori/pre-scientific knowledge. Therefore, by hypothesis, stereotypes do not involve the criticism of sources, verification, internal logic and consistency of individual postulates. But it is they, not the positive scientific knowledge, which form the general attitude of society and authorities towards migration and migrants. The importance of their study is obvious. One should investigate their prevalence and strength, their internal structure, logic and mechanisms of formation.

Migrantophobia is not the only but practically predestined and strong reaction of the host society to the presence of migrants. This is one of the strategies for understanding the problem and developing a certain relationship to it. After all, the migration process itself is usually painful and conflictual. In the complex and dynamically changing palette of social relations new people are coming, a new quality of "old ones" is emerging, new groups are popping up. If the emergence of a new element is unanticipated and rapid, if this element occupies an important place in the life of the host society, it inevitably breaks the old equilibrium, giving way to the materialization of complex problems and conflicts. Migrantophobia occasionally takes the form of pre-existing ethnic, racial or cultural phobias, and is often seen as such.

A powerful mythological complex has been formed around Chinese migration. There are

many reasons for this: the historical experience of interaction between the two countries with a long-distance common border, exacerbated by contradictions and conflicts; the rapid transformation of China into an economic and political superpower, and fears about the huge population of China and the scattered population of the neighbouring Russian Far East. Important is the little experience of contacts, interaction and mutual recognition on a personal, individual level. The experience gained in the late imperial era, when the numerous Chinese diaspora had developed in the Far East, was almost completely lost in the Soviet epoch.

We should not forget about the impact of the world-wide complex of ideas about the world, ideologemes, stereotypes, fears and prejudices, known as the "yellow peril", that developed back in the 19th century. This complex was based on a racial approach backed by the presumption of the natural, organic belonging of man to a certain "race", whose biological characteristics predetermine the intellectual, moral and spiritual qualities. Obviously, racial approaches have been discredited during this time with Soviet society largely torn out from the global ideological context. For a long time "yellow peril" ceased to be relevant for the Soviet man because of the almost complete lack of contacts with the Chinese. Nevertheless, these words have survived, as well as the notion that the whole world is afraid of and dislikes the Chinese in general and Chinese migrants in particular.

Modern mythology is no longer concentrated around the concept of "yellow peril", the foreseeable deadly battle between the "yellow" and "white" races. It focuses on the notion of "Chinese expansion", the idea that overpopulated, resource-poor but rapidly growing and strengthening China is simply doomed to seize the resources of other countries, especially neighbouring ones. The essential

part of this mythologeme is the "demographic expansion" idea.

There is a widespread thesis that there is a "plan" of the Chinese authorities on migration expansion to Russia, which includes a system of power organization, planning and regulation. It is realized through coercion and incentives (up to a financial reward to those who have settled for permanent residence). This thesis is widely represented in the media, as well as in the statements of officials and politicians, and in the works of scientists. Leading researcher of the Institute of Scientific Information in Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Candidate of Economical Sciences M. Pal'nikov, citing some Russian authors, writes that "China has already developed a state program for the settlement of the Far East: The Chinese government bodies not only grant their citizens visas, but also help them to legalize in Russia, report them addresses where one can settle in Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, Blagoveshchensk, give instructions on how to fit into Russian life quickly". Some argue that the "process of sinicization of the Russian Far East" (Pal'nikov, 2009) is already in full swing.

An enormous role in the formation of this view was played by the first, apparently, book on Chinese migration to modern Russia, published in 1994 by such authoritative experts as L.L. Rybakovskii, O.D. Zakharova, V.V. Mindogulov. Reproduced in a series of journal publications, its main points are the following: "China, which has huge territorial claims to Russia, in every possible way stimulates the penetration of its citizens into its territory and the creation of a base for legal existence. ... The main goal of Chinese penetration into Russia regardless of the forms and channels is integration into economic activity, the acquisition of real

estate and land, that is, the creation of economic and legal prerequisites for the legal seizure of the territory..." (Rybakovskii et. al., 1994: 35-36).

"In small groups of one hundred thousand people in each". This is a phrase from the old Soviet jokes of the times of the Soviet-Chinese military confrontation, one of the foundations of the demographic expansion notion. Chinese migrants cannot be small in number by default, for there cannot be just few Chinese in general. Therefore, with a scarcity of the Russian population at large and the east of the country in particular, the Chinese may basically absorb the local population and become a majority. And the further the bearers of such representations live from the Chinese border, the more densely populated by the Chinese are the Siberian and Far Eastern cities in their opinion. The calculations of serious scientists, the statements of the border authorities that the numbers of entry and exit differ by only a few percent (and therefore the illegal component is not as large as it is often believed) are merely ignored. Multimillion estimates of the migrants' number have already "seized" the Russians, have become rigid and formed the basis of a mass of ideological constructs and power decisions. They are confirmed by the authority of scientific experts and officers. They are crucial and therefore ineradicable; they fundamentally differ from the scientific analytical works, criticism of sources, and scientific procedures for work with statistics.

These ideas of targeted expansion by the forces of an innumerable amount of migrants incorporated the thesis of "marriage expansion" as a means of nonviolent and invisible invasion, aimed at assimilation, dissolution of the Russian population in the Chinese demographic dominance. "Only a Chinese can be born from a Chinese", as P. Proskurin, a popular Soviet-era writer, put it. It should be recalled here that the Soviet era, especially in its Stalin version,

created a special attitude towards marriages with foreigners. Directly or indirectly, they were evaluated not as a private matter, not as a result of a personal choice, but as a demonstration of the attitude to the correct ideology and the state.

As a part of this approach, mixed marriages appear as an instrument for the "marital expansion of the Chinese", a component of the deadly threat. Threatening is a special strategy of "marriage for naturalization", when numerous illegal migrants (as well as their children and relatives) acquire legal status through marriages, including fictitious ones. As for the consequences, L.L. Rybakovskii and co-authors write definitely, though in a tongue-tied manner: "Historical experience shows that the specificity of the Far East population and no less specific policies of neighbouring countries, including Japan, at various stages of the development of the Far East give a real chance of a positive outcome of these long-term and thought over plans for the population natural assimilation" (Rybakovskii et. al., 1994: 23).

This frightening prognosis and a statement of "marriage expansion" were almost immediately realized in an anonymous expert assessment of the fact that "in the Irkutsk and Chita Oblasts (regions), about half of the men who marry are Chinese". This assessment somewhat sceptically, but without critical comments was quoted by V. Portiakov, the largest specialist in the Chinese economy (Portiakov, 1996: 82). Since then with reference to his authority, this opinion has been repeatedly cited in the press as having passed scientific examination. The researcher of the mixed marriages problem O. Mahovskaia without any reference to sources asserts confidently that "one of the absolutely new phenomena today is Russian-Chinese marriages. In Primorsky Krai, there are already tens of thousands of such marriages. Chinese men work very hard, do not drink alcohol, bring money home and so have

advantages over Russian fiancés. Russian women are satisfied. Undoubtedly, the number of such marriages will grow" (Makhovskaia, 2003).

There are fears about the "ethnic degeneration of the Far East Russians due to interracial marriages with the Chinese" on pages of printed media (Cited by Vladimirova, 2005: 112), who states that the Chinese use the marriage in order to gain a foothold in Russia.

M. Pal'nikov argues that "the Chinese practically cannot be assimilated" and that they "belong to biologically strong nations. From the statistics of the former Portuguese colony of Macau... it is known, for example, that in every 100 mixed marriages, there were born 80 babies with signs of a Mongoloid race and only 20 with signs of a European race". Consequently, in Russia "the Chinese have laid the foundations for the future: the number of Sino-Russian children is growing in the Far Eastern Federal District. These children are usually born not so much in legal Sino-Russian marriages (there are few of them) as in the result of extramarital affairs. Thus, in Blagoveshchensk, out of 1,500 newborns in 2002, the share of mestizos with particularly pronounced signs of the Mongoloid race accounted for almost 20 %, while in only 21 cases a Chinese citizen was announced the official father. In 2003, the share of such babies was 37 %... As some researchers believe, the result is a new ethnic and cultural environment, and the Far Eastern Federal District is gradually acquiring the features of the northeast Asian state... One should not overlook such quality of Chinese civilization and culture, demonstrated by this nation for thousands of years, as the ability to absorb surrounding peoples, not necessarily resorting to the help of weapons" (Pal'nikov, 1996).

The story of Blagoveshchensk's "continuous sinicization" clearly demonstrates the mechanism of the myth formation and therefore deserves a

separate discussion. It all began with an interview of a reporter of the newspaper "SPID-INFO"¹, which has no recognition in scientific circles, with the head physician of the maternity hospital in Blagoveshchensk. Without the second thought the latter formulated an "expert" assessment that up to a third of newborns are "slant-eyed mestizos... that is, a full-blood Russian mother gives a birth to a girl or boy with signs of a Mongoloid race" and that "if such rates persist, in a few years there will not be born any Russian children at all". This evaluation was favourably supported by A.V. Dmitriev, the famous sociologist, Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Dmitriev, 2006: 292-293). M. Pal'nikov refers to his authoritative opinion, proving how in Russia "the foundations for the future Chinese presence are laid". Based on the "firm scientific basis", with reference to the M. Pal'nikov article, the publicist E. Semenova remarks: "In recent years, the number of children born in mixed marriages in the Far East has increased, which makes it easier for Chinese people to obtain Russian citizenship. For example, in Blagoveshchensk from 1,500 newborns in 2002, the share of such children reached 20 %, and a year later – 37 %" (Semenova, 2009).

Hereby, the problem of "marriage expansion" is transferred from the legal ones (marriages, including fictitious ones as a means for naturalization) into the literally racial issues. It would be desirable, of course, to make the supporters of this approach find evidence that "racial traits", "blood" can directly or indirectly correlate with culture and especially form it. So far no one has proved that "blood" is the basis of culture, that the Chinese can neither be adapted nor assimilated, and that those who have the Chinese blood conditionally "carry a powerful gene" of "Chineseness". In other words, the assertion that a man with "Mongoloid features" is necessarily Chinese, requires very serious substantiation,

especially considering the complete discrediting of racial approaches in social practice and in scientific thought in the 20th century.

As an unconditional fact, all these mythologems are used in politics, especially in the electoral rhetoric and speeches of regional leaders. The most famous for his ridiculous absurdity is the case when during the regular elections to the State Duma the then leader of the Rodina ("Motherland") party (since December 2011 – Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation) Dmitry Rogozin, through all TV channels intimidated voters by a Russian retired woman who allegedly fictitiously married 96 Chinese who wanted to get Russian citizenship (Lukin, 2006).

The long-term governor of the Khabarovsk Krai V. Ishaev strongly opposed mixed marriages, because he was "worried by the fact that in the region there appear compact settlements of Chinese people who are trying to influence the economic and political situation more and more", and a huge number of Chinese want to marry Russians to obtain a residence permit (Ishaev, 1999). In his estimation, "for a modest sum of money, a Chinese citizen persuaded a Khabarovsk woman to get married to him fictitiously. This would allow this Chinese person and his countless relatives to live freely on the territory of the region. Such cases were ubiquitous" (Cited by: Vladimirova, 2005: 113). On the other hand, it was officially announced that the administration of the Khabarovsk Territory does not encourage such marriages and does not consider them an excuse for giving the Chinese citizenship of Russia. It was noted that in the last 10 years, no Chinese, married to a resident of the Khabarovsk Territory, received a residence permit (Vladimirova, 2005: 113).

The image of "marriage expansion" vividly illustrates the above thesis that the process of myth creation absolutely does not need any verification, reliance on sources, or criticism.

Meanwhile, bringing the problem to the level of real scientific analysis (and just common sense) can be done extremely easy. Marriage is registered with state bodies, the corresponding statistics are carefully kept and are available to public and scientific analysis (except, of course, personal data). In other words, D.O. Rogozin, Doctor of Philosophical Sciences, could have easily learned about a real number of mixed Russian-Chinese marriages registered in Russia.

This work could only be hampered by the fact that such data are not aggregated across the country and are almost not published by the registry offices and statistics bodies. Scientists also have not shown any special interest to this problem yet, perhaps because the struggle with myths by the methods of scientific analysis is an ungrateful task and, in general, hopeless. Dialogue here is impossible in principle: the results and logic of scientific analysis do not fit into the mechanism and process of myth creation. In turn, mythologemes, their creators, mechanisms of formation, internal logic are only a research field, an object of scientific study.

When the co-author of this article carried out one of the first (and probably the first one) studies in this country in the late 1990s, she was mainly interested in the problem of the correlation of marriage statistics and migration mythology (Diatlova, 2001). The vanishingly small number of mixed marriages during ten years of intensive migration in such a meaningful for this process city as Irkutsk closed the question and for a long time diverted the attention from this topic.

This has been facilitated by later studies of Far Eastern scholars. They have demonstrated that in the Far East cities the number of such marriages is insignificant and estimated literally in dozens. According to the D.A. Vladimirova's calculations, in 1992-1997, in Khabarovsk 27 mixed marriages were recorded, in which 20 children were born (Vladimirova, 2005).

In Primorsky Krai, in 1998-2003, only 132 marriages were registered, according to the regional department of the Civil Registry Office. Later calculations, based on the materials of the Civil Registry Offices, show that in 1992-2008, 306 Russian-Chinese marriages were concluded in Primorsky Krai, 107 – in Khabarovsk Krai, 86 – in Amur Oblast (1997-2008) and 39 – in the Jewish Autonomous Oblast (1998-2008) (Ponkratova et al., 2009: 110-111).

According to the references to the quoted works, it is easy to see that the peak of interest in the problem of the Chinese "marriage expansion" and even of Russian-Chinese marriages in general was observed in the end of 1990s – the beginning of 2000s. In the 2000s this mythologeme virtually disappeared from the gradually weakening complex of the "Chinese threat". However, intensive migration exchange has become an integral part of the relationship between Russia and China. The processes of mutual recognition, adaptation, also in the sphere of private life, are ineluctable. And this makes the topic of mixed marriages a potentially important research ground for analyzing the problems of intercultural interaction. Apparently it was not by chance when in the mass media, and especially on the Internet, articles, Internet discussions and other materials about motives for concluding mixed marriages, about the nature of mutual relations in mixed families have begun to appear in considerable numbers. Usually these are the stories of individual families, the reflection of the people who experience mixed marriages themselves. The importance of the intercultural interaction problem makes it possible to predict the return of the mixed marriages problems, which were studied quite extensively in the Soviet era (Susokolov, 1987), into the sphere of attention of Russian researchers. This process has already begun (Ualieva, Edgar, 2011), (Krylova, Prozhogina, 2002), (Krylova, Prozhogina, 2004), (Khromova, 2013).

Marriage statistics, especially comparable and longitudinally organized, may and should become an imperative tool for studying these problems. This was the main reason for continuing the research begun in the late 1990s. The results of this study are presented in Table 1. With the kind assistance of the heads and employees of the Irkutsk Civil Registry office², it was possible to collect and systematize information on the marriages with Chinese citizens registered in Irkutsk for eighteen years. Taking into account the results of the previous study (in 1989-1998), this is a rather long period in order to confirm the thesis about the insignificant scale of the phenomenon. In 1989-1998, 161 marriages with the Chinese citizens were registered, including 35 Chinese-Chinese and 76 Chinese-Russian marriages and 15 marriages of other kind (Diatlova, 2001). As can be seen from Table 1, this trend has not changed for almost two decades. Given comparable data on the Far East cities, it can be argued that far from many Chinese migrants have sought or have been eager to marry to Russian citizens.

Until June 2013, registration of marriages with foreign citizens was carried out in Irkutsk in the Marriage Registration Department in Irkutsk. On July 1, 2013, this function was transferred to the Central Department of Irkutsk State Registration Service of Irkutsk Oblast Civil Registry, which arose from the Marriage Registration Department and Irkutsk Office (in Kirovsky and Kuibyshevsky Districts).

Hence, the rapid and unexpected influx of Chinese migrants into Russia generated a rich mythological complex, the cornerstone of which was the thesis of "Chinese expansion". At first, one of its constituent parts was the idea of "marriage expansion", i.e. a purposeful and stimulated by the Chinese state strategy for the mass conclusion of mixed marriages. It was understood that such marriages should

Table 1. The number of marriages of the PRC (People's Republic of China) citizens, concluded in Irkutsk, in 1999-2016 (according to the materials from the Central Department of the Civil Registry Office in Irkutsk)

Year	Number of marriages	Number of marriage of PRC citizens	Husband – PRC citizen, wife – Russian citizen	Husband – Russian citizen, wife – PRC citizen	Husband – PRC citizen, wife – PRC citizen	Other
1999	2698	11	9	1	1	
2000	2757	12	9	2		1 (husband – PRC, wife – Ukrainian citizen)
2001	3270	17	11	1	5	
2002	3212	11	10		1	
2003	3240	14	14			
2004	3218	8	7		1	
2005	3794	10	7		3	
2006	4089	7	6		1	
2007	4440	13	11	1 (born in China)	1	
2008	3912	9	8		1	
2009	3956	13	9	1	3	
2010	4032	10	8	2		
2011	4440	11	10	1		
2012	4037	12	9	3		
2013	4766	9	6	2	1	
2014	4677	10	7	1	2	
2015	4531	7	6			1 (husband – PRC, wife – Uzbekistan citizen)
2016	3773	6	6			

first become a means for the naturalization of migrants and their development of Russian resources, and then the way of assimilation and absorption of the Russian population. This mythologeme and rhetoric based on it were regarded by some politicians as an effective tool of political manipulation and struggle for power. However, an insignificant number of such marriages observed by even ordinary people led to a "marriage expansion" from the epicenter of migrant mythology. This again confirms the fact that myths can live only under the condition of mass demand for them.

The corresponding scientific calculations, based on official marriage statistics, are now needed not so much to combat this myth as

to study complex problems of intercultural interactions at the level of human relations.

Having considered the idea of "marriage expansion", we could identify some mechanisms of myth-making. We found, in particular, that the distinction between the mythological and scientific consciousness is not as rigid and specific as the interstate border. Mutual diffusion is observed. Naturally, myths are the object of scientific analysis. But often they act in the form of an authoritative scientific knowledge in the society ("scientists tells us that..."). Moreover, mythological representations can penetrate into real scientific research, when someone forgets about the sacred for historians principle of "criticism of sources".

¹ AIDS-INFO (2004). No. 4, 10.

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«Демографическая экспансия» – русско-китайские браки в миграционной мифологии

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Массовый приток китайских мигрантов в постсоветскую Россию породил, наряду с другими последствиями, богатую мифологию и систему стереотипов. Важной составной частью этого комплекса стала концепция «китайской экспансии», ставящей целью экономическое и культурное освоение российского Дальнего Востока и Сибири с их последующей аннексией. Ключевую роль в этой концепции играет идея «демографической экспансии». Статья посвящена анализу ее важной составной части – тезису о «брачной экспансии» как инструменте ненасильственного и невидимого вторжения посредством ассимиляции, растворения российского населения в китайском демографическом море. Эта мифологема и основанная на ней риторика расценивались некоторыми политиками в качестве эффективного инструмента политического манипулирования и борьбы за власть. Однако брачная статистика дальневосточных и сибирских городов показывает ничтожное количество смешанных браков. Соответствующие подсчеты ученых нужны теперь не столько для борьбы против этого мифа, сколько для изучения сложных проблем межкультурных взаимодействий на уровне человеческих отношений. Изучение идеи «брачной экспансии» позволяет выявить некоторые механизмы мифотворчества. Оно показывает, в частности, что грань между мифологическим и научным сознанием не такая жесткая и определенная, как межгосударственная граница. Наблюдается взаимная диффузия. Естественно, что мифы являются предметом научного анализа, но зачастую они выступают в форме авторитетного в обществе научного знания. Более того, мифологические представления могут проникать и в настоящие научные исследования – стоит только позабыть о сакральном для историков принципе «критики источников».

Ключевые слова: китайские мигранты, смешанные браки, синдром «китайской экспансии», «брачная экспансия».

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Научная специальность: 07.00.00 – исторические науки, 22.00.00 – социологические науки.
