

The adaptation of Japanese, Chinese, Koreans and Vietnamese in Belarus

Sakuma Siarhei

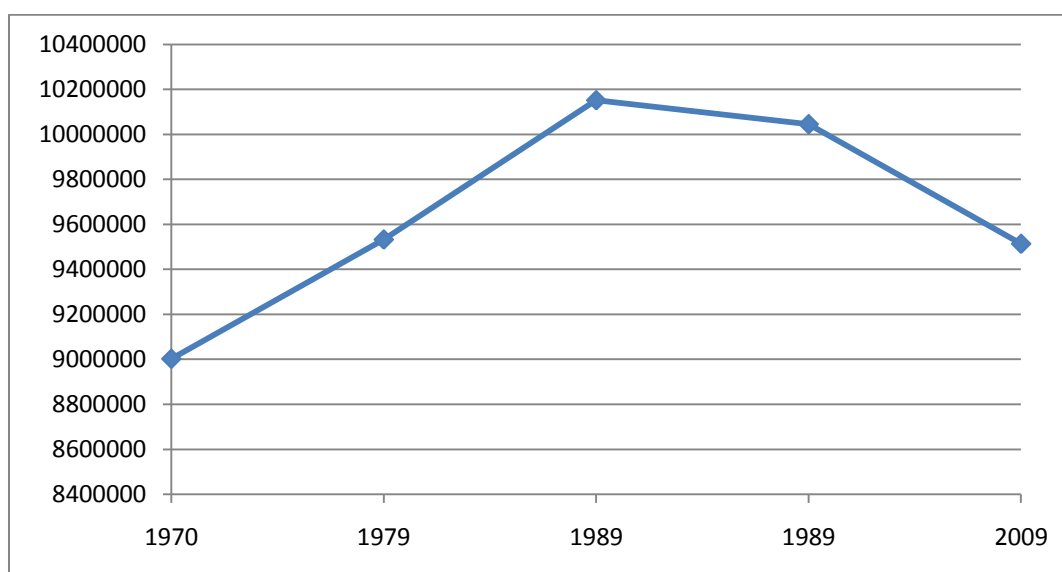
The Center for the study of Belarusian culture, language and literature

The number of Asian people in Belarus has a tendency to increase year by year. This has started to change traditional way of life of the Belarusian society. That is why we need to study the adaptation of new ethnical groups in Belarus. On the other hand, due to the process of adaptation, patterns of life of Japanese, Chinese, Koreans and Vietnamese are changing.

In this paper, I would like to provide an overview of the adaptation of Japanese, Chinese, Koreans and Vietnamese in Belarus and analyze the main factors influencing that process, by paying attention to the dynamics of their population and transformation of their traditional patterns. For analysis I used the statistic data of the National statistic committee of Belarus and also the data of field work conducted in 2008-2011 years among East Asian people in Belarus.

Demographic situation in Belarus

Belarus is a small European country between Poland and Russia with population of 9,468,154 people (as for 2014). From the second part of 1970s population growth has started to slow down in Belarus.

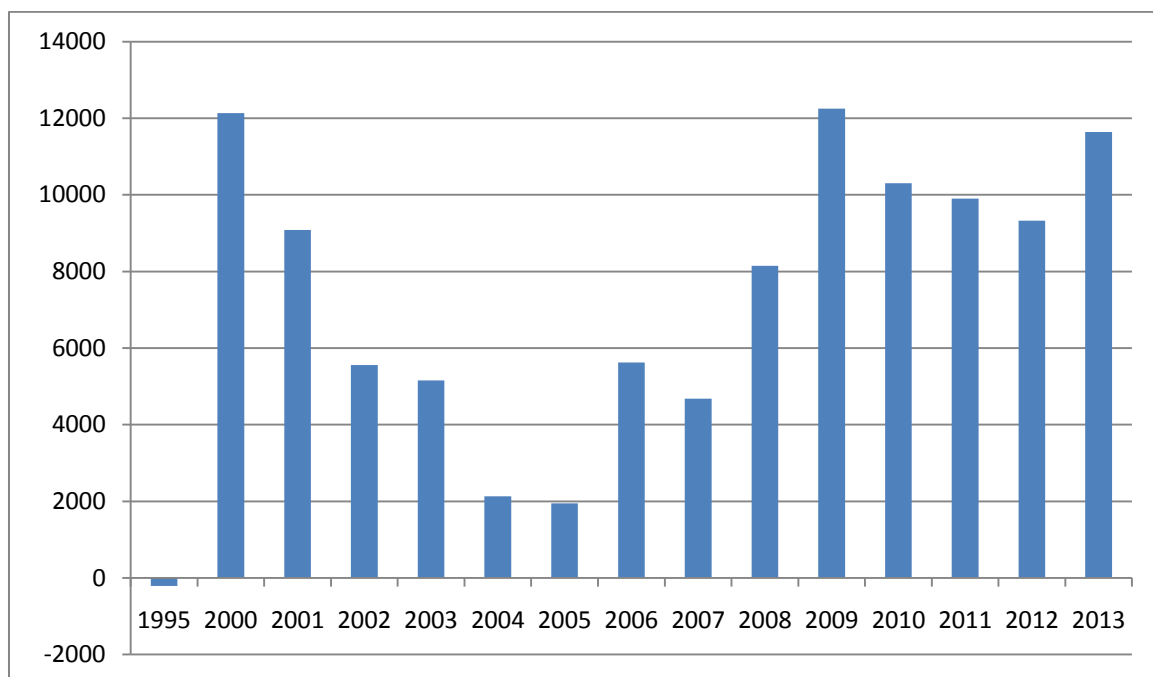


Source: National statistic committee. See <http://belstat.gov.by/>

Figure 1 Population in Belarus (1970-2009)

In the beginning of 1990th years Belarus has entered the depopulation phase: population growth changed into population decline, age and gender structure of population has deformed, a decline in the proportion of the population composed by children and a rise in the proportion of the population that is elderly was fixed. Now every fifth citizen of Belarus is over 60 years old, and in the rural area every third.

The most alarming thing is a sharp decline in the labor force. In order to reverse negative demographic trends, the Government passed law on demographic security of Republic of Belarus. On its base the National Program of Demographic Security of the Republic of Belarus for 2011-2015 was adopted. According to the Program, it is supposed that activization of immigration to Belarus can be a means to solve this problem taking national interests of Belarus into account. In particular, the Government made a plan to increase admission of migrants to 15 thousand people per year.



Source: National statistic committee. See <http://belstat.gov.by/>

Figure 2 Net migration rate (1995-2013)

Consequently the study of adaptation of new ethnical groups whose life patterns are greatly different from local patterns is becoming actual and important.

The history of appearing

Before the World War 2 there were separate Chinese, Japanese and Koreans living in Belarus. We can speak more or less mass migration only after World War 2. Ethnic Koreans who living in Belarus can be divided into three categories: 1. Koreans who came from Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan), the so-called Koryo-saram; 2. the so-called Sakhalin Koreans 3. Koreans, that came to Belarus directly from Korea after 1991 (after dissolution of Soviet Union). Koreans from Central Asia are descendants of Koreans that moved to the Russian Empire's Far East beginning from the second half of the 19th century, and were deported to Central Asia in 1937-1938 years. The Sakhalin Koreans are descendants of Koreans that moved or were moved to South Sakhalin (Karafuto).

The appearance of the first Vietnamese in Belarus is connected with arrangement of the Agreement between the Soviet Union and the Socialistic Republic of Vietnam about directing and accepting of Vietnamese citizens to get professional education and to work at factories in USSR (signed April 2, 1981). Since 1985, groups of Vietnamese workers started to arrive in big industrial cities of Belarus such as Vitebsk, Orsha, Mogilev, Gomel, Bobruisk, Grodno, Brest and Minsk. Vietnamese people worked typically at the light industry enterprises, because mostly they don't have professional or higher education and came just after graduation from school or after serving in the army. They got profession directly at work. As a rule, according to the Agreement Vietnamese workers who could go to USSR were limited by age (from 18 till 35), without families or possible to go without family's members, men were chosen only those who had already served in the army and had passed patriotic training.

In 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Vietnam stopped sending new groups of workers. The permitted period of stay for the last group of Vietnamese workers finished in 1996, according to the Agreement.¹ In 1991-1993 years most of them returned home facing political and economical problems. Those, who stayed, preferred to find vent for difficult situation in the sphere of small business.

¹ Соглашение между правительством СССР и Правительством Социалистической Республики Вьетнам о направлении и приеме вьетнамских граждан на профессиональное обучение и работу на предприятиях и в организациях СССР, 2 апр. 1981 г. // Bestpravo – Законодательство Российской Федерации [Электронный ресурс]. – Москва, 2011. – Режим доступа : <http://russia.bestpravo.ru/fed1991/data03/tex14920.htm>. – Дата доступа : 25.07.2011.

The appearance of the first Japanese is fixed since 1980s. It was the so-called the Sakhalin Japanese – Japanese who stayed to live because of different reasons in South Sakhalin after the World War II when it was joined to USSR. The reasons for moving are similar to the ones of the Soviet Koreans: employment at the enterprises, work placement after graduation.

Chinese moved to Belarus for studying at the Belarusian universities. Some of them got married with Belarusian and stayed for permanent residence in Belarus.

Dynamics of population

Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese have positive dynamics of population growth. The number of Vietnamese in Belarus has grown from 54 (as for 1989) to 588 people (as for 2009). Population growth is 534 people, or their population became 10,8 times larger. The number of Japanese has grown from 5 (as for 1989) to 23 people (as for 2009), or their population became 3,9 times larger. The biggest growth was fixed for Chinese in Belarus: from 78 (1989) to 1642 people (2009). Their population became 1564 people more or 20,5 times larger. The number of Koreans in Belarus has a tendency of declining. From 1999 till 2009 the number of Koreans reduced from 679 to 541 people, or 138 people less. Among reasons of declining of Koreans' population we can mentioned such reasons as natural population decline, assimilation process in Belarusian society, returning of Koreans to Korea.²

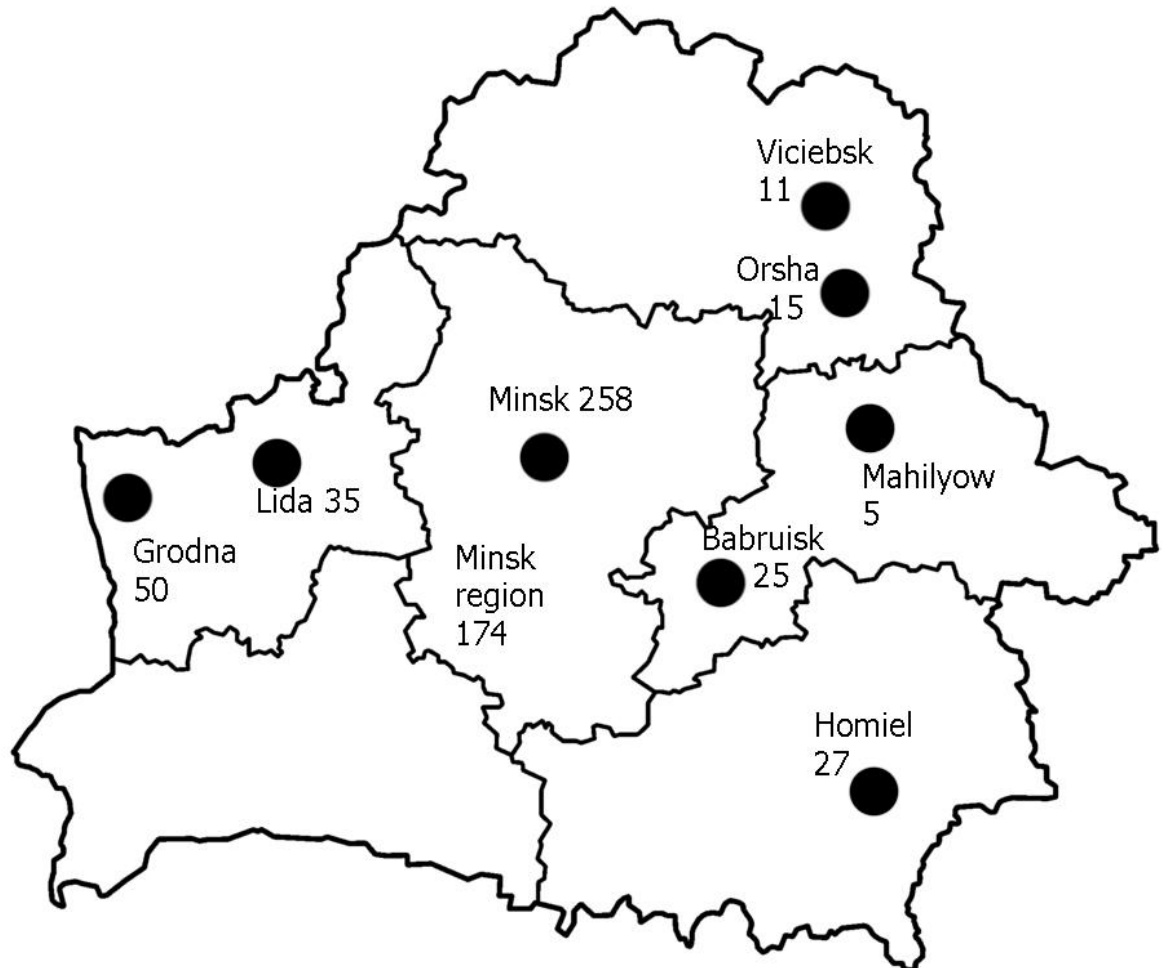
Settlement

Vietnamese, Chinese, Koreans and Japanese are spread in all regions of Belarus. The character of spreading is influenced by different factors: location of economic and education centers, working place.

Most of Vietnamese live in Minsk, the capital of Belarus (258 of 588 people = 43,7%). 174 Vietnamese people (29,7%) live in Minsk region, area around the capital. Also Vietnamese are settled down in Grodno region (50 people), Mahilyow region (40 people). Less numerous Vietnamese communities exist in many other cities of Belarus such as Orsha, Babruisk, Homiel, Moladechna, Lida etc. Their settling down connected with their professional activity as small-scale wholesale market's sellers. As a rule they settle down at

² Source: National statistic committee. See <http://belstat.gov.by/>, Field study data

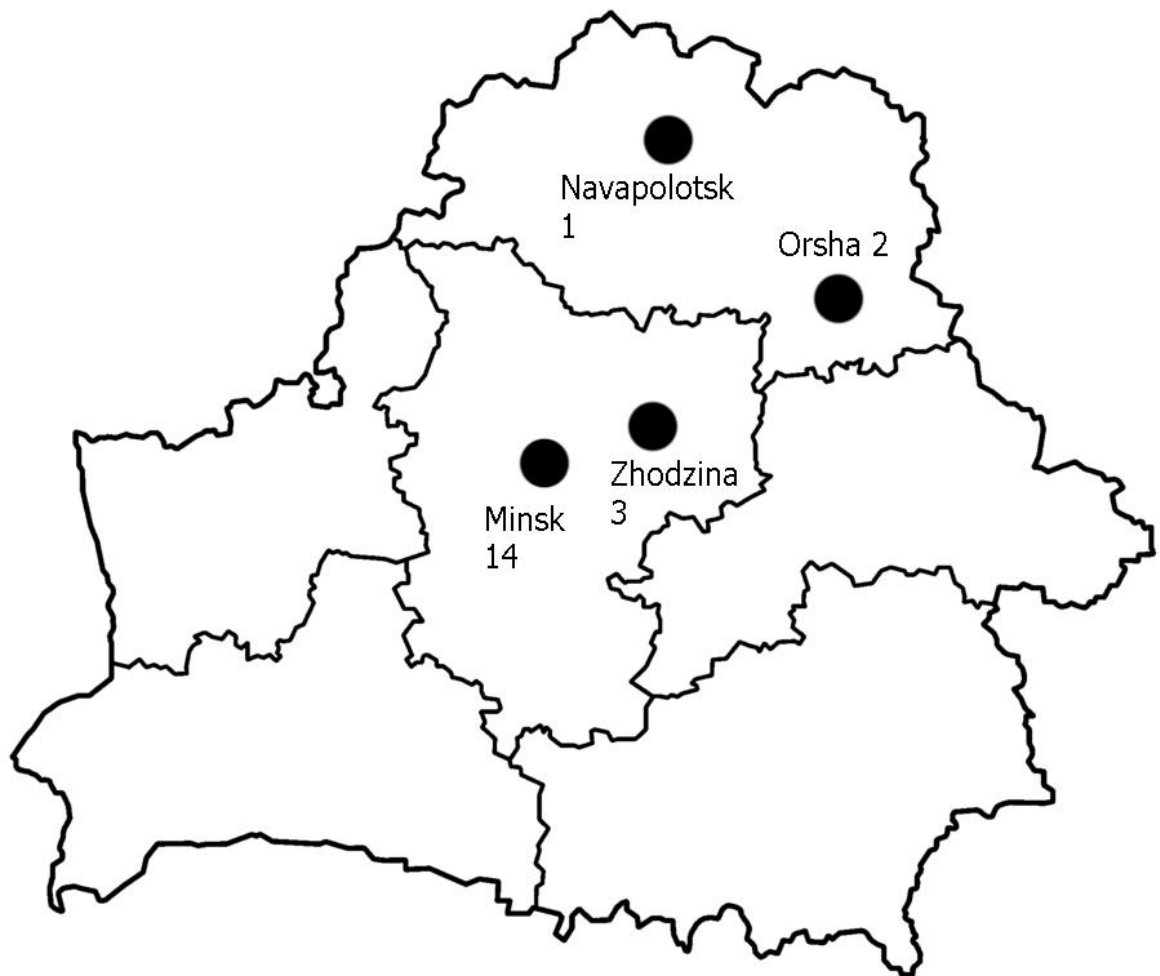
the cities where there is developed market place and transport connection with Moscow as the place where they buy items for selling. Also it's influenced by the Agreement between USSR and Vietnam, 1981, which defined the settling of Vietnamese workers, who later became a core for modern Vietnamese communities in Belarus.



Source: National statistic committee. See <http://belstat.gov.by/>

Map 1 Vietnamese settlement in Belarus

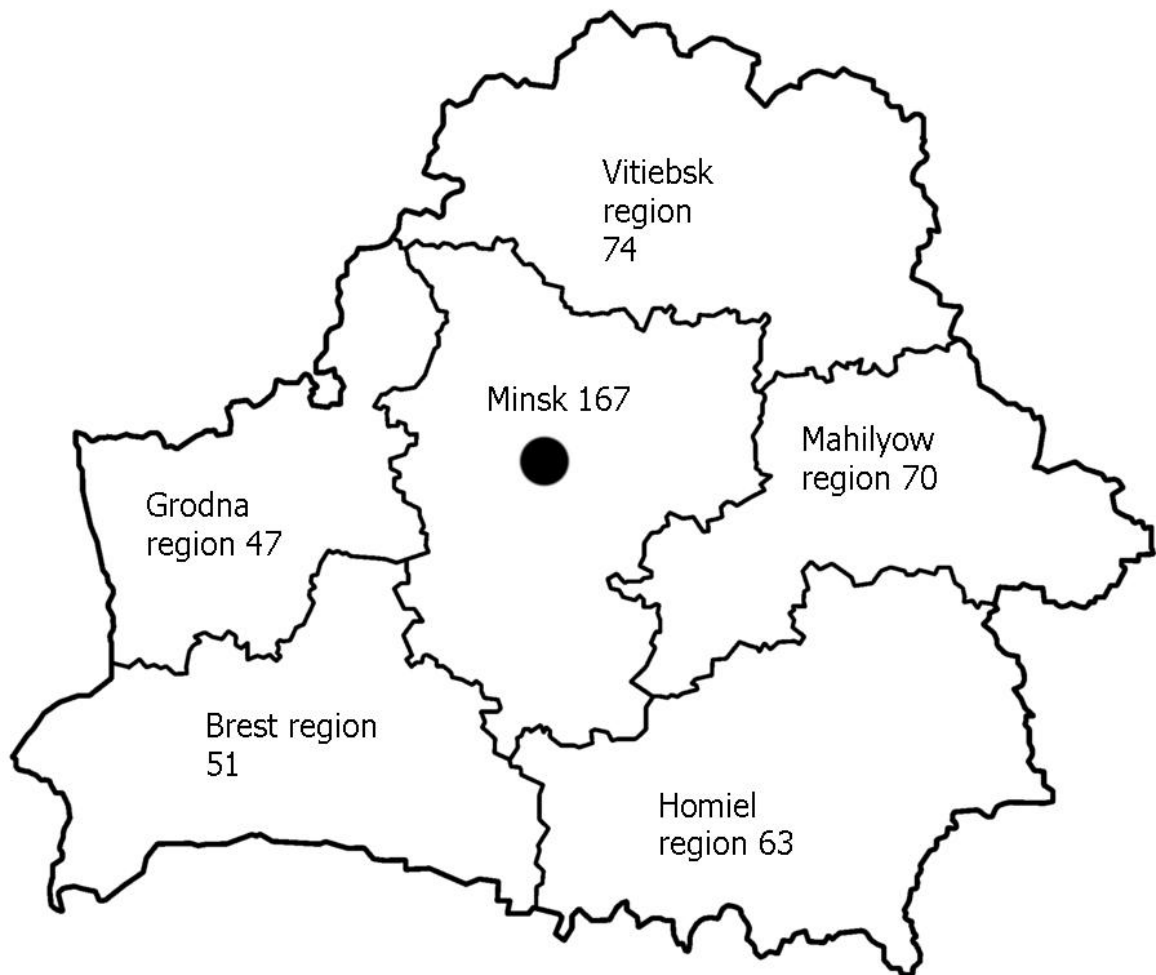
Japanese live mostly in Minsk, also in such cities as Orsha, Zhodina, Novapolotsk. Such spreading is influenced by working activity.



Source: Field data

Map 2 Japanese settlement in Belarus

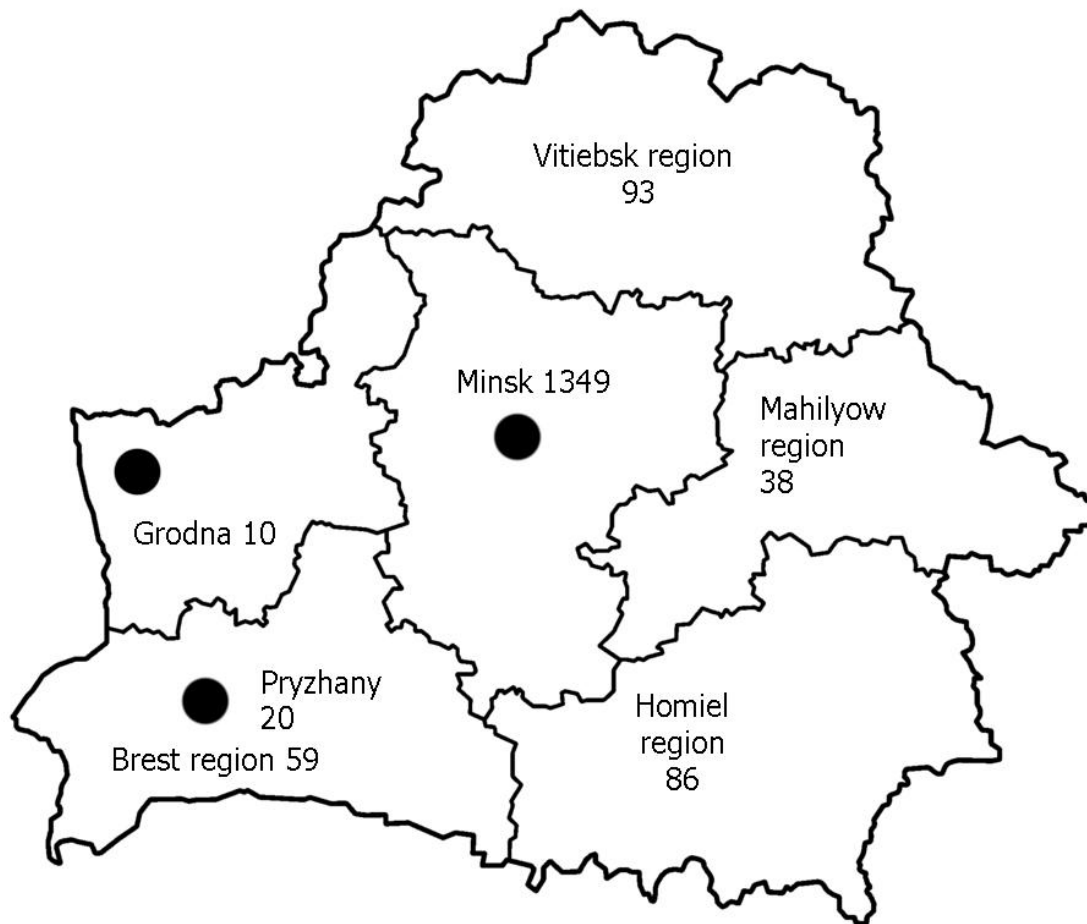
The character of settlement of Koreans in Belarus is more uniform - approximately equal groups of Koreans live in every region of Belarus: Brest – 51 people, Grodno – 47, Gomel – 63, Minsk region– 69, Mogilev – 70, Vitebsk – 74, Minsk capital – 167 (or 31%).



Source: National statistic committee. See <http://belstat.gov.by/>

Map 3 Korean settlement in Belarus

The settlement of Chinese is also characterized by a tendency to concentrate in the capital of Belarus. 82% of Chinese live here, but at the same time the Embassy of China is undertaking measures to spread Chinese students to other regions of Belarus. Some of respondents told that they chose Grodno for studying because here live not so many Chinese and there is a chance to study Russian language more effectively. Also there is an experience of settlement of Chinese in rural area of Belarus.



Source: National statistic committee. See <http://belstat.gov.by/>

Map 4 Chinese settlement in Belarus

Adaptation in material culture

The descendants from East Asia in Belarus are saving some elements of East Asian culture in clothing and house: for example, home altar, furniture as a low table, tokonoma, zabuton, traditional clothing which used during holidays or cultural events (kimono, hanbok). To a greater degree traditions are saved in food. We can state some tendencies typical for it: 1. Using for preparing dishes local products as replacement for ingredients that are hard to buy in Belarus (for example, Vietnamese use wheat flour mixed with milk instead of rice flour) 2. Appearance of shops where is possible to buy East Asian products in Belarus and restaurants of traditional Asian cuisine including those that were opened by descendants from East Asia (production of Korean salads, tofu, Vietnamese and Chinese, Japanese restaurants). Their feature is that Asian dishes are adopted to local tastes: not so spicy, using potatoes, mixing with other cuisines. In Belarus the so-called Korean salads are popular. The fact that they are unknown in South Korea itself. Also they brought such tradition as chaihana – collective tea

drinking. They were taken from Central Asia by Koreans who came to Belarus from there. 3. Saved traditions of eating: collective eating, using chopsticks for eating, dining etiquette. 4. Adaptation of local dishes with adding new features (for example, for preparation of traditional Belarusian dish – draniki – using instead of meat vegetables and fish).

Adaptation in mental culture

Language

Because most Belarusian Koreans are born in USSR or their descendants, they can't speak Korean. Especially this regards to second-third generations of Belarusian Koreans. Those who can speak Koreans are representatives of first generation, especially Sakhalin Korean who had chance to study at Korean schools there. According to the 2009 population census, among Koreans Korean language was chosen as mother tongue by 51 people, Belarusian – by 22 people. Most of Koreans have chosen Russian language as mother tongue – 465 people³. It should be mentioned that the Korean language that is used by Koreans moved from Central Asia is supposed to be as a rude, non literary language⁴. That variant of language is north-east dialect of Korean which was formed among first Korean immigrants to Far East of the Russian Empire. For Belarusian Koreans is actual a problem of loss of Korean language.

Compare to Koreans, Chinese of Belarus, in general save their home language. According to the 2009 census, Chinese was chosen as home language by 1522 people out of 1642, Russian - by 29 people, Belarusian - by 9 people, Ukraine - by 1 people.

As for Vietnamese, Vietnamese language was chosen as home language by 526 people of 588, Russian – by 36 people, Belarusian – by 3 people.

All Japanese who live in Belarus can speak both Japanese and Russian, some of them also know English. At home they use both Japanese and Russian because their family mostly mixed.

Holidays

Among descendants of East Asia in Belarus are saved tradition of celebration main state, calendar and family holidays: day of independence if

³ Source: National statistic committee. See <http://belstat.gov.by/>

⁴ Field study data

their states, New Year (Oshogatsu, Chinese New Year, Tet), birthday (especially solemnly 60th anniversary by Koreans). Recently there were attempts to restore and represent some holidays (for example, Koreans did presentation of ritual connected with Chuseok, the old festival of harvest). It should be mentioned that descendants of East Asia adopt local holidays, especially when mixed family type, and take part in regional festivals (the city day, festival of national cultures etc).

Religion

Among Vietnamese, Japanese, Chinese believers are spread Buddhism and Confucianism. There is no temples of that religions in Belarus, and because of this, religious rituals are undertaken at home altars. For Koreans who to a greater level are integrated into Belarusian society are typical local religions such as catholic and orthodox Christianity. Also the religion mission of University Bible Fellowship is working in Belarus as home church. University Bible Fellowship is a protestant church which was founded in South Korea in 1961. Its activity is mostly undertaken at universities. Both Belarusians and Koreans take part in divine services.

Identity

Among first generation of Japanese, Chinese, Koreans and Vietnamese in Belarus primary identity is saved. Mixing of identities, appearance of double identity (Belarusian and Vietnamese, Belarusian and Korean etc.), assimilation is typical for second-third generations. The main factors that influence on mixing of identity or its choosing are such as living in mixed family type, school education, life perspectives. We can take indirect data about changing identity studying names of second-third generations of descendants from East Asia, comparing them with local names. According to data collected among Vietnamese in Grodno region, 5 children of 19 have not Vietnamese names. One of them is Milanda. As respondent said he can't gave to his daughter local name because her appearance is not local but can't give Vietnamese too, that's why he made up new name where popular Vietnamese name Lan is contained. Factor of life perspective can be decisive for choosing identity because identity can be used for getting education or for searching work. For example there are special programs for ethnic Koreans in Belarus with help of which they can entered Korean universities or visit Korea.

Adaptation in social culture

Family

Main family traditions are saved among descendants from East Asia in Belarus such as honoring of elders, customs connected with childbirth, wedding ceremony. For example, Koreans in Belarus save ceremony of first year, when in front of a child are laid out different things and choice of one of them define destiny and future profession. With special attention they celebrate 60th anniversary. Also as unusual practice Koreans undertook a few wedding ceremonies in Korean traditional style. Nowadays wedding ceremony is unified. Family traditions are gradually changing to local in mixed families.

Ethnic organizations

There are a few types of ethnic organizations of descendants from East Asia acting in Belarus. First type is an officially registered public organization which takes part in the work of government and regional authority and does consulting function. For example, Association of Belarusian Koreans. It opened school of Korean language, founded clubs of traditional Korean dance and music, where younger Koreans can get to know about traditions. Association is actively cooperating with Embassy of Republic of Korea in Belarus. As a result of this activity annually local Koreans (about 20 people) have a chance to visit Korea or enter Korean universities.

Second type is informal organization which is not registered. To this type we can refer Vietnamese association in Belarus. The work of association is aiming to solve concrete tasks: problems connected with first stage of adaptation. In every city where live some Vietnamese there is an acting local association with an informal leader at the head. The head is chosen from people who has lived more than other in Belarus or from the richest ones. The head of capital city association is Mr. Pham who is an owner of Vietnamese cuisine chain.

Third type of ethnic organization is information center which spread knowledge about East Asian culture in Belarusian society. The infocenter of Japanese culture can be referred to this type of ethnic organization. The head of infocenter is an Japanese woman Tatsumi Masako, who got married with Belarusian and stayed for living in Belarus. As she got born in Kyoto, in infocenter we can see the exhibition representing this region, and also there is library of books about Japan and club of Japanese language.

Thus ethnic organizations play such functions:

1. Spread knowledge about East Asian culture
2. Mediator between the Embassies of Japan, China, Korea and Vietnam and local authorities
3. Support new immigrants from East Asia to adapt at first stage
4. Save traditions and language of diasporas and connect all members of community
5. Solve conflict inside community

Factors of adaptation

According to the interviews of descendants from East Asia and experts we defined such factors that influence most of all the adaptation of Japanese, Vietnamese, Korean and Chinese in Belarus:

1. Ethnic
2. Social-economic
3. Linguistic
4. Legal
5. Attitude of Belarusian society to descendants from East Asia

Adaptation models of descendants from East Asia is based on traditional patterns of collective adaptation including tradition of mutual aid. For example, when one Vietnamese accidentally died all other Vietnamese of Grodno city supported his daughter and wife till daughter entered university though his wife was Belarusian.

Descendants from East Asia in Belarus often use their ethnic origin for doing business or searching for employment. There are a few of Chinese restaurants, Vietnamese restaurants chain, self-employed persons who selling different kinds of Asian food in the markets. Some of them are working as teachers of Asian languages at the universities, courses, culture centers (Confucius Institute, Korean language center etc.) Vietnamese of first generation in Belarus took its niche of small-scale wholesale market sellers. We can notice them at the city markets everywhere in Belarus. Vietnamese community can be introduces as a pyramid hierarchy at the head of which is 5% of the most prosperous Vietnamese businessmen. As a rule they have the longest period of adaptation, know Russian language better than others, help other members of community to find work or hire them. Most of Vietnamese (2/3) buy their goods (mostly different types of clothing) at the markets of Moscow (Russia) and sell

it in Belarus. The low-lived category of Vietnamese are hired by other Vietnamese. As a rule they are not adapted short time immigrant workers.

According to the field data, among problems Vietnamese face in Belarus the most oftenest one is language barrier, misunderstanding of Russian language. 94% of asked Vietnamese stated bad knowing of Russian language among problems they meet at the first stage of adaptation. Only 11,7% of Vietnamese respondents estimated their level of language as free. They can't improve their language due to constant working activity, living in the half closed community of Vietnamese in the frame of which they do most of their communication and realize traditional patterns. According to our survey, 35% of Vietnamese limit their contact area by other Vietnamese, 65% have both Belarusian and Vietnamese in their social circle, and only 6% do contacts more often with other than Vietnamese people. It is expected that second generation of Vietnamese will have more chances to study Russian attending local schools. And getting school education will give them more opportunities to get of their niche and to be involved in other professional spheres.

Legal status of descendants from East Asia is regulated by Constitution of Belarus, the laws "About national minorities of the Republic of Belarus", "about public associations", "About languages in Republic of Belarus". Only Korean Diaspora used the right for organizing of public association "Association of Belarusian Koreans". It also should be mentioned the Agreement between USSR and Vietnam (April 2, 1981) which caused appearance of Vietnamese in Belarus, their spreading and way of adaptation. It was acting since 1981 till 1990. In particular, it stated that group of Vietnamese people under 35 years old will be settled down at factories in USSR. As our survey showed, modern Vietnamese communities core is consist of Vietnamese who moved to Belarus under that Agreement.

The attitude of local society to descendants from East Asia was studied using questionnaire of local people and content analysis of mass media.

Though East Asia is rather far from Belarus, local population's attitude to migrants from this region is surprisingly positive. The questionnaire survey in all regions of Belarus was taken In 2008-2011 where 195 respondents (local society) were asked to describe in brief their attitude to migrants from East Asia. According to survey data, the number of respondents that stated their attitude as positive (or friendly) – 58, good – 22, normal – 21, neutral – 14, no answer – 30, hard to answer – 4, usual (as to others) – 10, not enough experience of communication or information – 3, calm (tolerate) – 12, have interest – 4, indifferent – 4, alert (suspicious) – 6, negative – 5, positive/negative – 2. If we

do a diagram we can get such scale of attitude of local society to migrants from East Asia from negative to positive.

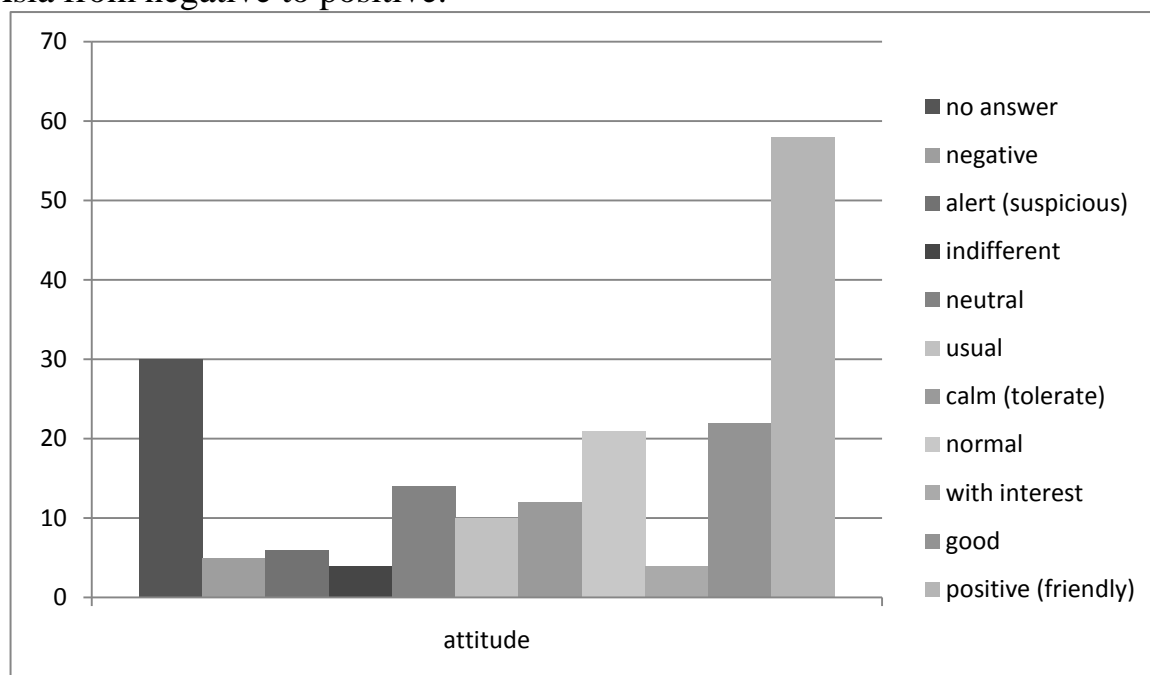


Table 3. Attitude of local society to migrants from East Asia. Questionnaire survey 2008-2011. Belarus.

There are two main image of migrants from East Asia in Belarusian mass media. On the one hand, state mass media draw positive image of people who save their traditions, respect elders, work hard. We can state different attention of state mass media to Japanese, Chinese, Koreans and Vietnamese. For example, due to content analysis of the most biggest state newspaper with circulation of 400.000 copies there were 184 articles connected to East Asian people since 2001. 20 articles of all devoted to Vietnamese, 119 – to Chinese, 10 – to Koreans, 35 – to Japanese. So great attention to Chinese can be explained by intensive economic and political ties between Belarus and China, different scale of interests to these cultures, and by different number of Japanese, Chinese, Koreans and Vietnamese living in Belarus and their representation in local context.

On the other hand, in non-state mass media we can find quite a different image of migrants from East Asia. A few publications which actualizing the problem and fear of Chinese mass labor migration have appeared recently. They are based on contradictory information about new common projects between Belarus and China in construction, in creation of industrial park.

Conclusions

Adaptation effects material, mental and social spheres of culture in different extent. Descendants from East Asia especially save their features in food, language, identity, social patterns, calendar and family customs. The primary identity is saved among first generation of descendants of East Asia but among second-third generations process of mixing of identity or its change can be noticed (double identity was fixed like Belarusian and Vietnamese, Belarusian and Korean etc.).

The main factors of adaptation of Japanese, Chinese, Koreans and Vietnamese in Belarus are ethnic, socioeconomic, linguistic, legal, and factor of attitude of local society.

Therefore we can state gradual integration of ethnic groups from East Asia into Belarusian society. This process is especially actual for second-third generations. For Koreans is typical the process of assimilation because of their long adaptation first in the context of the Russian empire, then USSR and high rate of mixed marriages. There is a possibility of appearance of closed Vietnamese and Chinese communities in the form of ghetto or Chinatown if immigration process will be intensified. In relation to this for effective adaptation of Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese and Koreans it can be highly recommended to improve dialogue between immigrants and local society, to support appearance of public organizations which will represent their community and play role of mediator between ethnic groups and local authorities, to carry out regulated immigration (to invite people with higher education, high grade specialists, in particular, to do such work among study migrants who studying at the Belarusian universities), to support ethnic projects (ethnic restaurants, language courses, common cultural events) for giving possibility to migrants from East Asia to tie their life with Belarus and use their ethnical features for adaptation, to spread information about East Asian culture in Belarusian mass media, to do monitoring of local society's attitude to migrants from East Asia in order to escape conflict situations, to study process of adaptation and discuss its results by scientists and civil society.

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