East Asian Cultural Elements in Modern Belarus as Instrument of “Soft Power”

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Abstract. Subject of the article is elements of East Asian culture in Belarus as instruments of “soft power” policy. We defined spheres where East Asian culture is spreading in Belarus: Martial arts, Religion, Cuisine, Anime / Manga subculture, Language, Cultural organizations. Also the role of embassies in the process of spreading East Asian culture in Belarus was determined. This using of “soft power” instruments influences the image of migrants from East Asia region and attitude to them by local Belarusian society.

Key words: soft power, East Asia, Belarus, adaptation.

Introduction

The aim of the article to define the instruments of “soft power” in the elements of East Asian culture spreading in modern Belarus. For accomplishing this aim we should do such tasks: define spheres where elements of East Asian culture spreading in Belarus, the channels of spreading, the role of embassies in this process. In such a way the subject of study is the elements of East Asian culture as the instruments of “soft power” in Belarus.

East Asian region in this work includes such countries as China, Korea (South and North), Japan and Vietnam. The so-called “Sinic civilization” in the terms used by Samuel Huntington or East Asian cultural sphere in the terms of Nishijima Sadao which includes countries that share the philosophy of Confucianism, the religion of Buddhism, and similar political and social structures (3, p. 45; 6).

There is nothing weaker than water, but it can destroy even stone. (Laozi)
The influence of East Asian culture and spreading of its elements never has been the subject of study in Belarus. But the fact is that Belarus is not out of world processes of globalization and migration: the number of migrants from East Asia is growing year by year, East Asian culture is spreading through mass media and subculture channels. For us is important to study how spreading of East Asian culture influences on the attitude to migrants from East Asia in Belarusian society.

The “soft power” term

The term “soft power” was developed in 1990 by Joseph Nye of Harvard University to describe the ability of East Asian culture to attract and co-opt rather than coerce (5). He distinguished two kinds of power: “soft power” which means using culture for succeeding in international affairs and “hard power” which using economics and army. As instruments of “soft power” can be used ideas and institutes (democracy, freedom, rights, charity), art, movies, anime, traditions (“hanami” – admiring by sakura, “tsukimi” – admiring by Moon, Chinese New Year), religion (Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism), material things (clothes, technology) etc. The analysis of term “soft power” was also conducted by Giulio M. Gallarotti, Professor Wesleyan University “Soft Power: what it is, why it’s important, and the conditions for its effective use” (2), George Filimonov “Soft power of U.S. Cultural Diplomacy” (8). The idea of “soft power” cause discussion in East Asia itself. In particular Akiko Fukushima in her article “Modern Japan and the Quest for Attractive Power” stated that “soft power” concept was actively taken on board by politicians, journalist and academics in Japan (1). Professor Koichi Iwabuchi in his work did analysis of possibilities of “soft power” in international affairs of Japan for improving its image and influence (4). Separate elements of “soft power” such as Japanese dramas was studied by Seiko Yasumoto, a lecturer in Japanese and Asian Studies at the University of Sydney (7).

Though East Asia region is rather far from Belarus, local population’s attitude to it is surprisingly positive. In 2008–2011 a questionnaire survey in all regions of Belarus was taken 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.
East Asian Martial Arts was the first sphere where East Asia culture elements started spreading. For example, Belarus Judo Federation was founded in 1977 (Belarusian judoists took part in the Olympic games in Tokyo in 1964), Karate appeared at the end of 1970th years, Wushu in the beginning of 1980th years, etc. It goes without saying at that time directs contacts with East Asia region were impossible. So the first introduction of East Asia Martial Art Belarusians could see in the permitted films such as “Judo saga” by Akira Kurosawa, films by Bruce Lee or even soviet films like “Pirates of 20th century” where elements of karate could be seen. Belarusian first got to know Wushu from Vietnamese who came here to work. The first coach of Belarusian team of Karate studied Karate in Tallinn. That were the ways how martial art appeared in Belarus. In 1984 Karate was officially forbidden in USSR till 1989.

Next stage started after the breakup of the Soviet Union. East Asian Martial Art started spreading quickly, many new schools appeared, contacts and relationship with international federations were set, regular competitions and seminars with masters from Japan, China and Korea are held.

At that time new types of East Asian Martial Arts appeared in Belarus such as Taekwondo, Aikido, Jujutsu, Kendo etc. The formation of the first Taekwondo club was performed with the help of Korean specialists. The first club of Kendo appe-
ared thanks to consulting with Russian and Ukraine Kendo Federations. Sometimes Japan and Korean Embassy in Belarus support competitions and seminars.

**Religions**

Religious and philosophic components can be found in all kinds of East Asian Martial Arts. For example, the appearance of Oomoto-kyo sect in Minsk is based on activity of the Aikido and Esperanto clubs. The fact is that the founder of Aikido, famous Morihei Uesiba was also involved in the sect. Oomoto-kyo sect was working from 1995 till 2005 when the registration was not approved. In the most active years the number of people involved in the sect reached 300 people. In 1996 the sect was carried out the ritual of Setsubun – Japanese New Year by the Moon Calendar in the center of Minsk.

Though there is no Buddhist temple in Belarus there are a few Buddhist groups. First of them is practicing Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism. The group appeared in 1998 after meeting with Ole Nidale, an missioner from Dutch. They have branches also in Vitebsk, Mogilev, Brest. In turn group is integrated in Russian Karma Kagyu Federation. The representatives of the group take part in the conference and seminars in Poland and Ukraine. As they said, the group is under process of registration. Theravada Buddhism is mostly spreading in Southeastern Asia in such countries as Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand. Today it becomes popular as the school of Buddhism that saves traditional way of its practice. Not numerous group of this branch of Buddhism is gather around site www.Buddha.by.

Also in Minsk studying Zen meditation in the way of the Soto Zen school. This group is acting under authority of the Association of East culture and traditions “Hagakure”. Every year they hold Zen seminar with participation of master Deguchi Tetsujo – a prior of the International center of Zen at the Tosyoji temple (Tokyo).

There are also non-registered groups of the Unification Church (was founded in 1954 in South Korea). It counted about 150 of people and started acting since 1990th years. In 1996 the Unification church was considered to be a destructive cult by the experts of the Committee of religions and nationalities. Nevertheless they continue activity in particular using Internet.

The University Bible Church (was founded in 1961 in South Korea) is acting in the form of a home church. Missionaries mostly works among students and university’s lecturers. Every Sunday they hold church service which ends with common dinner. University Bible Fellowship also use reading Sogam (confession), individual study of Bible, regular conference. They have relationship with university bible groups in South Korea, Russia, Ukraine, Germany.
Cuisine

Chinese Cuisine represented in Minsk with 2 restaurants with names “Peking Duck” and “Shanghai”. The owners of both restaurants are Chinese. First is held by the former Chinese student in Belarus. In spring 2013 new Chinese cuisine brand of take away type appeared in Minsk. The name and form was taken from Kiev where this brand is used since 2011. The fact is that among cookers are also Chinese.

On the opposite, at Japanese restaurants in Minsk there are no native Japanese cookers. Most of cookers study Japanese cuisine in Russia or Europe. The largest chains are “The Planet of Sushi” and “Manga”. “Manga” is local brand. Only here was used native Japanese consulting for making menu, also master-classes of Japanese cuisine were held. The brand “The Planet of Sushi” appeared in Belarus in 2004 and was taken from Russia. In 2013 also came brand “Eurasia”, also from Russia. In the category take away the largest chain has name “Sushi Vyosla”. It has 6 branches and 300 people of staff. Every year Japanese cuisine contest is held. This year this contest will be judged by the ambassador of Japan in Belarus. Also should mention the appearance of new type of Japanese cuisine in Minsk, the so-called “Kaiten Zushi” where dishes are given on the conveyor. This new brand “Yo! Sushi” is taken from England.

Korean cuisine isn’t still represented in Belarus.

Vietnamese cuisine is represented in Minsk with the café chain “Saigon” which is situated mostly at the trade area “Zhdanovichi”. According to the owner of the chain, Mr. Fam, in Belarus they should adopt Vietnamese dishes to local tasted. They combine not only Vietnamese cuisine in the menu but also Caucasian, Russian and Belarusian. Also they use local products for substitution. For example substitute rice flour with wheat flour mixed with milk.

As you may see, East Asian cuisine comes to Belarus not directly from East Asia but through Europe, Russia, Ukraine. All cuisine is adopted to local taste. It’s not so spicy and use local products in particular frozen fish.

Anime / Manga

There are many fans of Anime and Manga in Belarus. The first club “Anibel” appeared in 1996. At that period it was difficult to obtain Anime because they were spread in video-cassette form. That was the main reason for creating club to make the process of obtaining easier. On next stage the necessity of it disappeared. Nowadays the fans of Anime / Manga are combined near festivals. The largest are Higan and Amaterasu which are held twice a year since 2006. During festivals origami, calligraphy workshops are conducted with the help of Hagakure and Infocenter of Japanese culture. This year the Japanese embassy established special price for karaoke contest.
Language

In Belarus Chinese, Japanese and Korean languages are taught both by universities and private tutors. The main language centers are at the Belarusian State University where the department of east languages was founded in 1997. Another center is Minsk State Linguistic University. In both above mentioned universities was opened the Institute of Confucius as a center of teaching Chinese language. Korean language also taught at the Association of Belarusian Koreans. Every year with support of the Embassies Japanese, Chinese, Korean languages contests take place in Minsk. There is possibility to pass international certificate exam in Korean and Chinese languages in Belarus.

Cultural organizations

Above mentioned The Institute of Confucius was founded in 2006 at the Belarusian State University. Among its main aims are to improve relationships between Belarus and China, to promote Chinese language and culture in general in Belarus.

The Association of Belarusian Koreans is official representative of local Korean ethnic group in Belarus. It actively works with the Committee of religions and nationalities and with the Center of National Cultures, the Korean embassy in Belarus. Under the authority of the Association the school of Korean language, traditional dance group are working.

Infocenter of Japanese culture has been working since 1999. The center is supported by the fund “Chiro”. There is constant exhibition of Japanese culture mostly Kyoto region, library, Japanese language club. Also the center conducting support programs for the victims of Chernobyl disaster.

The Association of East Culture and traditions “Hagakure” is organized for improving relationships between Belarus and Japan, for promoting East Asian Martial Arts among Belarusian, for studying East Asia culture. The association cooperates with the Japanese embassy in Belarus. Also works on many directions such as zen-buddhism, Japanese language, ikebana, calligraphy, tea ceremony, origami etc.

The Vietnamese community exists like informal organization with leader with filiations in every city where Vietnamese live in Belarus. This organization support connections among all Vietnamese, between Vietnamese and the Vietnamese embassy and local administration.

The policy of the embassies

Besides of standard cultural programs the Embassy of Japan in Belarus will support the Infocenter of Japanese culture and The Association “Hagakure”, the
Embassy of the Republic of Korea actively cooperate with the Association of Belarus Koreans and support local Koreans in particular with special programs for native Koreans students, for Koreans businessmen. The Embassy of China in Belarus holds scientific conferences together with the National academy of science of Belarus. Also encourages students and lecturers for study in China. The embassy of Vietnam actively works with Diaspora in Belarus and helps to organize cultural events such as a song contest etc.

Conclusions

We defined spheres where East Asian culture is spreading in Belarus: Martial Arts, Religion, Cuisine, Anime / Manga, Language, Cultural organizations. We can set stages of this spreading. From 1970th years appeared first clubs of Martial arts. This activity creates a basis for appearing subcultures whose members were easy to involve into other elements of East Asian culture. After breaking of USSR new forms of religions came to Belarus. Some of them were later forbidden as destructive sects. Also at the second part of 1990th years we can find an appearing of Anime / Manga subculture and its evolution to a fest form. Also at this time at the universities started teaching East Asian languages. Department of East Languages was organized in 1997. After 2000th in Belarus became popular East Asian cuisine.

Countries of East Asia actively use elements of East Asian culture as instruments of “soft power” policies. Firstly spontaneous process of interesting in East Asian culture by Belarusian society, especially transported through mass media and subcultures’ channels, later is supported by the Embassies: they support cultural organizations, establish prices for East Asian culture contests etc.

The culture of East Asia comes to Belarus as complex phenomena: for example if you started from the interest to Martial Arts then can be involved into a religious sect.

East Asian culture elements comes to Belarus not directly from East Asia but through Europe or Russia where they adopted to local taste. We can notice this fact clearly studying East Asian cuisine in Belarus.

The elements of East Asian culture influence the perception of migrants from East Asia by local Belarusian society creating positive image. According to a questionnaire survey conducted in 2008–2011 years in Belarus most respondents stated positive, kind, normal tolerate attitude rather then negative.

References


**S I A R H E I S A K U M A**

**RYTŲ AZIJOS KULTŪROS APRAIŠKOS ŠIUOLAIKINĖJE BALTARUSIJOJE**

**Santrauka**

kokiose kultūrinio gyvenimo sferose šiuolaikinėje Baltarusijoje labiausiai jaučiama minėtoji Rytų Azijos imigrantų kultūrinės gyvensenos įtaka.
Pastebima ir aktyvi Rytų Azijos šalių ambasadų Baltarusijoje veikla. Per kultūros atašė yra remiami ir subsidijuojami įvairūs masiniai jų kultūros renginiai – festivaliai, konkursai, sporto varžybos ir pan.
Rytų Azijos šalių kultūros apraiškos į Baltarusiją ateina ne tiesiai iš Kinijos, Pietų ar Šiaurės Korėjos, Japonijos ar Vietnamo, bet pasiekia šią šalį per įvairias Vakarų Europos valstybes bei Rusiją.
Vis gausėjantis imigrantai iš Rytų Azijos šalių vietiniams baltarusiams nėra nepriimtini ar atgrasūs. Apklausos būdu 2008–2011 m. gauti duomenys liudija vyraujantį pozityvų, tolerantišką, normalų šiuolaikinės Baltarusijos jaunimo ir kitų gyventojų požiūrį į šiuos atvykėlius bei jų perteikiamus savo kultūros elementus.