The International Journal of Social Sciences World
TIJOSSW is Available Online at:
https://www.growingscholar.org/journal/index.php/TIJOSSW
Vol. 4 No. 2, July-December 2022, pages: 1~23
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7054424
ISSN **2690-5167**
Growingscholar Publisher

The Oroqen Story

Shaun CR Ramsden[1]

Article history:
Received June 30, 2022; Accepted: September 06. 2022; Displayed Online: September 08, 2022; Published: December 30, 2022

Keywords

Oroqen;

Chinese ethnic minorities;

Tungusic languages;

Manchuria;

Shamanism;

Birch bark;

Abstract

This paper endeavours to depict the Oroqen story by shedding new light on their culture and modern situation by discussing the author's experience of visiting them for a period of time. The paper also covers a variety of literature on the Oroqen in a short and succinct manner, so that much of what is known about them can be summarised in one manuscript. The paper conveys a wide variety of topics which include the following: the physical appearances of the Oroqen and what their traditional clothes were and how they were made, traditional dwellings, hunting, birch bark, religion, Oroqen shamanism, language, music, dance, folk tales, genetic studies and discusses the relationship the Oroqen have had with the Chinese government. This paper concludes that the Oroqen losing their way of life is attributable to numerous causes, the key one regarding more recent times is the dramatic local forest exploitation that has taken place on a grand scale. The Oroqen story is similar to that of many other native and aboriginal peoples from around the world, where a more powerful foreign country came in and made the original native majority become a minority, while also removing any chance of self-government and forcing modernity upon them by specifically taking away their shamans and religion. While modernity brought many negatives to the Oroqen, there does appear to be just as many positives in regard to access to health care, heating and education.

[1] *Independent researcher, Perth, Western Australia. E-mail: shaunramsden@gmail.com*

1. Introduction

While studying in China for many years, the author had the opportunity to live with half of the main minority groups, which included: Manchu, Uygur, Tibetan, Mongol, Chinese Korean or Cháoxiǎn zú (朝鮮族), Kazakh and Tajik. Each of these peoples have unique cultures, physical features and languages that are completely different to that of the Han Chinese. It was the Tungus peoples though that seemed to have the least information about them in regard to their culture and history. So in the winter of 2008 a three week trip was made by train and bus from Běijīng (北京) to Hāěrbīn (哈爾濱) and then to Hēihé (黑河), Tǎhé (塔河) and Mòhé (漠河). The goal was to find one of these Tungus tribes and to learn about their culture and story. In the end, it was the Oroqen of Shíbāzhàn (十八站) in Tǎhé (塔河) that the author found and spent time with. The paper took many more years to write as there was such a lack of publicly available information on the Oroqen until recently.

2. Materials and Methods

The aim of this paper is to shed some light on a sometimes-little known minority group of China by conveying what was discussed when the author spoke with Oroqen elders and observed their conditions of living and circumstances. As the Oroqen language did not have written form, much of the information about them would have come to scholars by word of mouth. This method of gathering information can be quite unreliable. Combine this with the fact that much of the work done by scholars on the Oroqen was conducted quite a long time ago (but also not long enough for them to have truly experienced Oroqen culture before it changed with modernity) and a scenario is created where there is a high risk of receiving information that is incorrect or missing crucial points. This paper has endeavoured to cross-examine the limited amount of information on the Oroqen as much as possible to keep errors to a minimum. It is purposely designed to be broad-based study, so that much of what is known about the Oroqen can be summarised in one manuscript.

3. Results and Discussions

Who are the Oroqen?

In Chinese, Oroqen is pronounced Èlúnchūn (鄂伦春). These three words/characters have no meaning in Chinese as they are only sounds attempting to match the word Oroqen. They are also known as the Àolúnqiǎn (奥倫淺) in Chinese (Wu, Kim & Cho, 2016, p. 67), which is also based on an attempt to match sounds. The Oroqen are one of the fifty-six minority groups of China. The author was told by an Oroqen elder that all of them who live within China, live in Hēilóngjiāng (黑龍江) close to the Amur river.[2]

Noll & Shi (2004, p. 4) described the Oroqen as the people who used to live south of the Hēilóngjiāng (黑龍江) or Amur River in the forests and rivers of what is known as the Lesser and the Greater Khingan or Xīngān lǐng (小/大興安嶺) and Ilkhur Mountains of northern Manchuria. Noll & Shi (2004, p. 4) further explain that the Oroqen have been collectively called the Khingan[3] Tungus or

[2] The Chinese name for the Amur River is Hēilóngjiāng (黑龍江), which means Black Dragon River.
[3] Khingan refers to the Khingan mountains, known in Chinese as Xìngān lǐng (興安嶺).

Mergen Tungus[4] but in the past were individually known by names which associated them with the geographic areas they were located. The list is as follows:

- Kumarchen (or Manegir) of the Kumara (Hūmǎhé - 呼玛河) basin on the Upper Amur
- Birachen (or Birar) of the Xun River (Xúnjiāng - 浔江) and Zhan River (Zhānhé – 沾河) basins on the Middle Amur
- Naunchen
- Ganchen
- Numinchen

In 2004 the Oroqen could be found in ten main localities within the province of Hēilóngjiāng and Inner Mongolia. These were (Noll & Shi 2004, p. 4)[5]:

- Gānkuí (甘奎)
- Gǔlǐ (古里)
- Nuòmǐn (諾敏)
- Tuōzhāmǐn (托扎敏) in the Oroqen Autonomous Banner of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region
- Shíbāzhàn (十八站) in Tǎhé (塔河) County
- Báiyínnà (白银纳) in Hūmǎ (呼瑪) County
- Xīnshēng (新生) in Hēihé (黑河) City
- Xīn è (新鄂)
- Xīnxīng (新兴) in Xùnkè (逊克) County
- Shènglì (胜利) in Jiāyīn (嘉蔭) County

History

Little is known about the history of the Oroqen peoples.[6] One key feature is that they can be linked back to the birch bark culture. The Birch Bark[7] culture refers to an 'ancient cultural phenomena with obvious regional features (Zhang, 2016, p. 423).' The key features of birch bark are as follows (Zhang, 2016, p. 423):

- In Northern China it is a readily available material. It is light, has a soft texture to it, it is also water-proof and is relatively easy to process.

[4] Whaley & Li (2000, p. 114) describe how according to S.M. Shirokogorov there were four Oroqen dialects: Biračen, Kumarčen, the Khingan Tungus and the Mergen Tungus.
[5] Whaley & Li (2005, p. 107) explained (21 years ago) that there are 'six townships in Inner Mongolia with Oroqen speakers: Alihe, Tuohe, Nanum, Wulubutie, Dayangshu and Guli' and 'six townships with Oroqen speech communities in Heilongjiang province: Shibazhan, Baiyina, Xinsheng, Xin'e, Xinxing and Shengli (Whaley & Li, 2005, p. 109).'
[6] According to Whaley and Li (2000, p. 105), very little is known about the Oroqen pre-1950's except for what was recorded by S.M. Shirokogorov.
[7] The term 'Birch Bark culture' is generally not used by Western scholars and is a Chinese term (樺樹皮文化).

- White birch grows in the northern hemisphere and in-particular the cold temperate zones of the Northern Hemisphere. It is therefore sometimes called the Sub-Arctic Birch Bark Cultural Zone.[8]
- The Birch Bark culture that exists among the minorities within China include the Oroqen, Evenki, Hezhen, Manchu and Daur.

The history of the Oroqen in relation to their place and role within what was once known as Manchuria is unclear. Zhang (2017, p. 259) explains the following:

- The origin of the Oroqen may lie with the nations of Sùshèn (肅愼) and/or Dōnghú (東胡).
- It has been mentioned that the Shìwéi (室韋) nations of the Southern and Northern dynasties have some correlation to Oroqen in that they were one of those nations.
- There were five Shìwéi (室韋) nations of which Bō Shìwéi (鉢室韋) is sometimes highlighted as possibly being Oroqen.

These three points made by Zhang (2017, p. 259) are highly debatable. Sùshèn (肅愼) appears to only be a very generic term used by some Chinese scholars to refer to people who come from the North East. The origin of this word and idea most likely comes from the *Classic of Mountain and Seas* 《山海經》. In scroll seventeen the Sùshèn (肅愼) are described as a 'clan' and that their 'country' is linked to an area in what is supposed to be, the same as modern day Shāndōng (山東) near the border of Liáoxī (遼西).

This idea that the Dōnghú (東胡), also called the Dōngyí (東夷) (which could be translated as either Eastern Barbarian or Eastern Foreigner) comes from both the *Ěryǎ* 《爾雅》 and *Lǐjì* 《禮記》, where four regions and four peoples of ancient China are described. The term Eastern Barbarian is therefore an extremely broad term and has little meaning for the Oroqen. It is like saying, 'I come from East Asia.'[9]

Unlike Sùshèn (肅愼) and Dōnghú (東胡) which refer more to geographic areas, Shìwéi (室韋) can refer to a peoples and has been linked to the Khitan peoples.[10] There has been no evidence to suggest there is a connection to the Oroqen. Therefore, the above three potential groupings as suggested by Zhang (2017, p. 259) currently cannot be used to describe the history of the Oroqen as there has been no significance evidence to suggest their connection more than being in the same broad geographical location.

Zhang (2017, p. 259) explains that the origins of the name Oroqen has two possible meanings. Firstly, 'reindeer raiser' and secondly, 'people on the mountain.' Wu, Kim & Cho (2016, p. 67) explain that àolún (奧倫) means 'reindeer' in the Oroqen language and the Oroqen used to breed reindeer. Other authors such as Yan & Zhang (2020, p. 536) mention, 'for the convenience of packing, the Oroqen people made the birch bark carrier; two for each reindeer, which were fixed on the left and right sides.' In regard to Yan & Zhang's (2020, p. 536) statement, it is unclear where this evidence

[8] The term 'Sub-Arctic Birch Bark Cultural Zone' is generally not used among Western scholars and is a Chinese term (樺樹皮文化在此北極圈). Groups that seem to be connected to this subarctic region and who use/d birch bark are as follows: Dene, Cree, Ojibwa, Atikamekw, Innu, Beothuk (all Canadian) for more information see Sutton (2016). Sami (Lapp) culture of Scandinavia, Nenets (Siberia) and the Ainu (Hokkaido, Japan).

[9] For further details on the Eastern Barbarians see Ramsden (2021, pp. 27-28).

[10] For further details on the link between the Khitans and Shìwéi (室韋) see Shimunek (2018).

comes from as according to the elder the author spoke with, they were never reindeer herders. The confusion among these writers may stem from a misunderstanding between the Evenki and Oroqen.

> *Doerfer (1978) splits the Oroqen into Solon and Evenki, and yet locates one of his Solon groups (Solon-Managirische = Manegir) in an area where the Chinese claim Evenki is spoken. There are, in fact, groups of Evenki speakers in Amur and Chita (Siberia) who refer to themselves as Orocheny, claiming their name is derived from a form of oron 'reindeer.' Still, at least some of the Oroqen in China claim their name comes from a form of oro 'mountain top' (Shirokogoroff 1929). While it is obviously dangerous to take folk etymologies as a basis for ethnic or linguistic classification, the problem of self-appellation further exemplifies the confusion surrounding Northwestern Tungusic affiliations, particularly when one takes it as a marker of genetic affinity.* (Whaley, Grenoble & Li, 1999, p. 292)

While the Oroqen do not appear to have a connection to reindeer, the Evenki certainly do. In a basic test conducted by Whaley, Grenoble & Li (1999, p. 307), they played literary Evenki to several Oroqen speakers. Out of the thirteen Oroqen elders, only two claimed to have understood any words and none made any comprehension of the story. This confirmed that there is little or no intelligibility between the two languages. Interestingly the recording consisted of a one-hundred-and-twenty-word folktale about how reindeer came to the Evenki.[11]

As the Manchurians could be seen as distant cousins to the Oroqen, it is during the Qing dynasty that we begin to see the Oroqen appearing in history books. According to Xu & Wang (2020):

> *The establishment of schools in the Oroqen region began in the 34th year of Kangxi period (1659). Like Daur and Evenki, the early school education of Oroqen started in the Morgen region of Hēilóngjiāng. One school was set up on each wing of the Morgen area, and were provided with one teacher …* (p. 337)

Physical Appearance

The Oroqen appeared to all be quite short in stature but also relatively stocky. The males seemed to be shorter than the average Han Chinese, with an average height of about five foot, seven inches. The females were generally shorter. Their facial appearance was very similar to that of the Manchu with distinctive small round eye sockets and high cheek bones.

The Oroqen elder that the author met did not wear any unique clothing as he and all his children and grandchildren were dressed in modern attire. The elders still had some of their more traditional clothing probably for special occasions as some of these were seen lying on the floor near the old photos on the wall. In a paper by Wu, Kim & Cho (2016) the Oroqen traditional costume is discussed. The following key points can be made:[12]

[11] To complicate matters, Noll & Shi (2004, p. 4) state that even though the Oroqen south of the Amur river had no history of reindeer herding, their 'Oroqen relatives' north of the Amur river in Russian Siberia did. It is unclear what they meant by this. Maybe they were referring to the Evenki? Whaley & Li (2000, p. 112) describe how certain Oroqen tribes at the beginning of the century had contact with Russian traders and Yakut Evenki, who were also called Reindeer Tungus or *Aoluguya* Evenki.

[12] Their paper has a large number of photographs of the varied clothing used by the Oroqen and therefore provides an extremely useful record.

The traditional clothes can be grouped into five different categories (Wu, Kim & Cho, 2016, p. 67):

- Coats
- Trousers
- Hats
- Shoes
- Gloves

The Oroqen primarily used roe deerskin to make clothing. This material was most likely used due to the high population of roe deer in the region (Wu, Kim & Cho, 2016, p. 68).[13] To use hide for clothing requires multiple steps using numerous procedures. The first step was tanning. This was done by an Oroqen women who would tan the hide with simple tools to make it soft and clean. After drying the hide, a mixture of boiled liver (from the roe deer) and water was applied, after which it was left to sit for a day till it softened. Then by using a special two-foot long arced scraper with a jagged blade - kèdérè (克得熱)[14], the women repeatedly scrapped and rubbed the hide to take off the outer skin and any form of dirt. The next step was to scrape it with a two-foot-long dull bladed scraper - mòdàn (莫但). Through this repeated process, the leather would become soft and elastic. For the last step of the process, the hide would be stretched and smoked over a fire of rotten wood. This was specifically done to make sure that the hide would not harden even if it came into contact with water or rain (Wu, Kim & Cho, 2016, p. 68).

In winter the Oroqen wore large, long (nearly down to their ankles), thick leather coats; they were called sūēn (蘇恩). Most winter clothing was made of the hide of the roe deer. This was said to be because of its fine-like hair. Both men and women wore similar clothes except that the men's sūēn (蘇恩) commonly had two slits (on the lower quarter of the coat) on the front and back, while the women's slits were on the sides (Wu, Kim & Cho, 2016, pp. 69-70).

During the spring, summer and autumn months the Oroqen wore short leather coats which were called kălāqì (卡拉氣) or gŭlāmĭ (古拉米). They were made from the leather of roe deer but with the hair removed and were normally orange in colour (Wu, Kim & Cho, 2016, p. 70). Wu, Kim & Cho (2016, p. 70) describe how the Oroqen also wore vests called déālìè (得呵列). They look very similar to modern ones in structural style.

Trousers were called èrìkèyī (厄日克一) whether short or long. There were various types worn. Short trousers for Oroqen men were made from roe deer leather and would reach above the knees in length. Longer trousers were also worn especially during hunting. They would also wear a pair of over-trousers on top of their regular ones (Wu, Kim & Cho, 2016, p. 71).

Hats were also worn and called miètăhā (滅塔哈). These hats are especially distinct as they are made from the whole head of roe deer.[15] They are created by cleaning out the inner part of the head, while saving both the ears and antlers. The eye sockets would then be filled with black balls. The Oroqen would ingeniously keep the lower part of the heads fur so that it could be folded upwards as

[13] The author visited the Oroqen in late December, the average day time temperature would hover around minus twenty-five degrees Celsius. At these types of temperatures, clothing made from animal furs and wool appeared to be much more effective than synthetic materials. The Oroqen clothing materials would have also centred around the use of roe deer simply due to its ability to keep them warm. With industrial like central heating now found in the village, the use of such material would have quickly become unnecessary.

[14] In the paper by Wu, Kim & Cho (2016), all the words used to describe the various forms of Oroqen clothing and the equipment used to make them, are Chinese words, which are based upon the equivalent Oroqen word sounds.

[15] These hats were not only designed to keep them warm but were specifically created to use as camouflage during hunting expeditions.

a brim which could be rolled down to protect their ears from the cold weather or wind when necessary. In winter the Oroqen women would wear felt or round hats - sìyányuánmào (四沿圆帽), with brims on four sides. In the summer months Oroqen men wore a bālǐ (巴里), which is a conical hat made with textile (Wu, Kim & Cho, 2016, p. 72). The Oroqen wore three types of boots (Wu, Kim & Cho, 2016, pp. 73-74):

- Ankle length (or slightly above) boots were called qíhāmì (奇哈密). They were made using the hide from the leg of the roe deer. The sole was made from elk hide pressed to make it soft or the hide from a roe deer's neck. The boots were pale yellow and the front of the boot pointed upwards.
- The second type of boots were called wēndé (**溫得**), these boots went high up the calves to below the knee. They were made with the hide of elk's legs while the soles were made with deer or elk hide.
- The third type of boot was the one used in summer, called àoláoqí (奥劳其). These too went to below the knee. They were made with hide of the roe's belly, while the sole was made with elk hide or hide of roe deer's neck. Socks were also used and called wūlacǎo (烏拉草).

Oroqen gloves were especially distinct. Oroqen women wore mitten like gloves called *khaoluo* (kǎohūluò - 考呼落). These mittens were made by using the roe deer's hide for the palm area of the hand, while the finger's area were made from the thin leather of the roe deer's belly. Some of these gloves reached all the way up to the elbows. The Oroqen also had finger fitting gloves that went by various names such as sàrìbāqí (薩日巴奇), fěnbāhēi (粉巴黑), and píqiàkè (皮恰克), depending upon which region they came (Wu, Kim & Cho, 2016, p. 78).

The decorative patterns on the clothing included M-shape figures, spirals of sheep-horns, bows and arrows, antlers, clouds and geometric patterns (Wu, Kim & Cho, 2016, p. 76). The flora and fauna that was around the Oroqen was obviously the source of their designs (Wu, Kim & Cho, 2016, p. 78).[16]

Traditional Dwellings

The elder that the author spent most time with said that the traditional dwelling they used to live in (for him it was up to the age of twenty-five), was very similar to that used by some of the indigenous peoples of the Americans. It is called *sierranju* - xiérénzhù (斜仁柱). In the photos he had of them, they were made up of thirty or so poles in a circular cone-like shape and were covered in animal furs which looked like they were from roe deer. When seeing the photos of a dwelling resembling that of the indigenous peoples of Americans, a connection seemed obvious. The elder appeared to know much about indigenous American culture. He told the author that the Canadian government had sent the elders to Canada on numerous occasions for cultural exchange and that their culture was more similar to the Eskimos than that of the indigenous people of the Americans.

Yan & Zhang (2020, p. 535) explain that birch bark coverings were used for the house in summer and that the house was called *cuoluozi*. They further explain that the *cuoluozi* can also be known as the xiérénzhù (斜仁柱) which is the Chinese name for it and in the Oroqen language may mean, 'the house that covers the sun.' The internals of the dwellings are described as follows:

[16] For more on the decorative patterns used by the Oroqen see Zhou & Huang (2018).

> *There are three bunks in 'cuoluozi': the one facing the door is the 'God of Maru,' which only allows men to step in and forbids women to approach; the left and right sides are the 'Aolu,' where the son and daughter-in-law live on the left side and the parents live on the right side. There is a horizontal wooden pole on the ceiling of 'Aolu' on the left, which is used to hang the cradle. A wooden frame is arranged on the inner side of each berth to place clothes, food, guns etc. A wooden frame is also set on the left side of the entrance door to put some food utensils, and the fire position is in the middle.* (Yan & Zhang, 2020, p. 535)

In terms of the traditional Oroqen society, Noll & Shi (2004, p.4) explain that it was made up by patrilinear *moku* or clan organisations and that each *moku* consisted of numerous *wulileng* or large family units. Each family had their own dwelling (also known as a tepee) but the property was still owned communally by the *wulileng.*

Hunting

Judging from the photos on the wall of the elder's house, hunting was obviously done by men. They would hunt animals like deer after which they would air dry the meat on wooden poles for later consumption. It is interesting to note that this elder in-particular had permission from the Chinese government to hunt and own a rifle. The Oroqen elder made it very clear that they were not reindeer herders and instead had a culture of hunting, he also spoke of how horses were a major part of their culture and were used when they went hunting. While the younger Oroqen ate Chinese food, the elders or those over seventy years of age were focused on eating fish and wild meat. When visiting the house of another elder (female), the care taker said that she could not speak Mandarin and did not eat Chinese food.

Birch Bark

Birch bark was used to make all kinds of things. They showed the author various forms of containers made from birch bark. There was little to no tourism in the town but some of the older ladies sold birch bark containers as souvenirs. Using birch bark to make things appeared to be an exclusively female practise. This has been noted by other authors such as Zhang & Zhang (2019, p. 291).

The process and techniques used to make birch bark products are described by Zhang & Zhang (2019, p. 291): the stripping of birch bark begins in May as it is full of moisture and therefore very easy to peel. The most common stripping method is to cut the bark on both ends of the tree with a knife and then pull it open through the two sides. It is then pulled off the tree from the trunk with the point of the knife. Once it is off the tree, three methods are used to make products (Zhang & Zhang, 2019, pp. 291-292):

- Folding method: this is used to make bowls (with small barks) and basins (with large barks). In this method barks of different sizes are selected after which the four corners are cut off. These corners are then folded to a width of five to six centimetres. The gaps are then seamed with horsetail thread after which a cut is made on the upper end and the edges are covered with veneer.
- Interlocking method: interpenetration is used between joints for natural interlocking without using any sutures.
- Stitching method: stitches are used in the main body of the birch bark vessel at the joint. This method is used for making barrels and boxes.

Yan & Zhang (2020, pp. 535-537) describe birch bark artefacts. They can be divided into three broad categories:

- Birch bark coverings that are used to cover the traditional dwelling in summer
- Birch bark boats
- Birch bark utensils such as boxes, bowls, baskets, buckets and cradles

Below are four photos of a small birch bark box that was given to the author. The box is well over a decade old, has always been used and travelled to four different countries. It is extremely durable as even now, it has no signs of decay, rotting or cracks. It is very firm with some elasticity to it. It is four centimetres in height and its length and width is eight point five centimetres.



Fig. 1. Top View



Fig. 2. Back View



Fig. 3. Side View



Fig. 4. Open View

Language

There were three generations of Oroqen in Shíbāzhàn (十八站) when the author visited. The elders were around the age of seventy or older, their children were around fifty years old and their children, who were between twenty and twenty-five years of age. While the youngest generation spoke Mandarin to their parents and grandparents, some elders spoke little or no Mandarin at all. Twelve years ago, Li &Whaley (2009, p. 525) explained that there are only a few dozen Oroqen that

can still speak their language fluently, and that all of them are over the age of sixty-five. They also mentioned that there are about one thousand Oroqen who can speak the language semi-fluently.[17]

Twenty-one years ago, Whaley & Li (2000, p. 105) noted that Oroqen is a language spoken by about two thousand five hundred people in two provinces within north-eastern China. The first being Hēilóngjiāng (黑龍江) and the second Inner Mongolia. The Oroqen were said to have lived as traditional hunter-gatherers until the 1950's, when the Chinese government begun to settle them into villages. Before this time little was known about the Oroqen language outside of the work done by the Russian ethnographer, S. M. Shirokogorov. It was only during the early 1960's, and after the nomadic Oroqen way of life ended that comprehensive research on Oroqen language began, with one of the first being the work of Hu Zengyi (Hu, 1986). His work resulted in a grammatical sketch of Oroqen.

The Oroqen language is a part of North-western Tungusic language which includes, Evenki, Solon, Negidal, and Orok, it is a sub group of the Northern branch of Tungusic languages (Li & Whaley 2009, 525) and can be divided into four dialects: Western (spoken in Tuohe and Nanum), Central (spoken in Wulubutie), North-eastern (spoken in Baiyinna and Shibazhan) and South-eastern (spoken in Xunke), in Alihe both Central and Western dialects are spoken (Whaley & Li, 2000, p. 112). In a paper by Whaley, Grenoble & Li (1999, pp. 312-313) describing the Oroqen connection to the Evenki language, three conclusions were drawn:

- Evenki and Oroqen are closely related linguistic varieties and have traditionally been referred to as languages in the Northern Tungusic classification. They do though possess language like differences but are not mutually intelligible.
- There is confusion when it comes to the picture of North-western Tungusic that extends beyond the status of Oroqen and that Tungusic classification needs be rethought, even from a very basic level.
- North-western Tungusic languages cannot be classified using the usual family tree model.

In regard to the academic research surrounding the Oroqen, most of it falls into the category of language studies. The initial burst of studies was between the years of 1981 and 2000 with the following papers: Li (1981); Saxirong (1981); Doerfer (1983); Hu (1986); Zhang, Li & Zhang (1989); Li (1992); Han & Meng (1993); Meng (1993); Li (1996); Zhang (1996); Li & Whaley (1998); Whaley & Li (1998); Whaley, Grenoble & Li (1999); Whaley & Li (2000).[18] Other language studies that have come since include: Li & Whaley (2009); Dresher & Nevins (2017).

Music, Dance and Folk Stories

The Oroqen have their own unique culture when it comes to dance and music. The current situation though in regard to what was once a very important part of their culture is described by Xu & Sun (2016):

[17] This is quite a contrast to the article they wrote nine years earlier, where they give a much more detailed and longer list of where fluent Oroqen speakers are located. For example, they describe the city of Alihe as having two-thousand ethnic Oroqen with well under half able to speak the language with some fluency. Tuohe was said to have one hundred and fifty fluent speakers and Nanmu was mentioned as having about sixty (Whaley & Li, 2000, p. 108).
[18] For more details on the early studies of the Oroqen language see Whaley & Li (2000, 105-106).

> *Folk songs are inherited through people's lips (orally) and ears … Besides most of the old people who can sing, the Oroqen songs have [all but] passed away.* (p. 504)

Most research on Oroqen dance has been done by Rui Zhang and Weibo Dang. Zhang & Dang (2018, p. 45) explain that the Oroqen dance has a strong relationship to its hunting culture, is usually accompanied by singing, normally uses movements from everyday life, the content also tends to be about everyday life, the dance can include animal positions and imitations, while the lyrics contain few words and are 'catchy and rhythmic.'

Zhang & Dang (2018, p. 45) explain that the Oroqen dance can be classified into four categories, all of them start slow, accelerate gradually and end with intensive actions or movements. Another key feature is that the dance is not usually accompanied by instruments, but instead with simple lyrics and/or songs. The words that appear most often are *jiehui jiehui*, *ehu dehu*. There are also rhythmic calls, such as *zhe hei zhe*, *jia hei jia* etc. The four classifications that the songs fall into are as follows:

- Entertainment
- Labours
- Rituals
- Religious

Some specific dances include (Zhang & Dang 2018, pp. 45-46):

- Fighting bear dance, which is described in detail by Zhang & Dang (2018, p. 45). The Oroqen consider bears[19] to be their ancestors, hence this dance is of special significance.
- The *Ehulan* or *Dehulan* dance is named after the words of the song and portrays the daily chores of Oroqen women.
- The *Yi He Na Ren* dance which is a ritual dance involving the shaman and is performed in clan meetings once every three years.
- Religious or shamanistic dance are different and unique, Qiu (2007) explains the importance of the shaman's drum:

> *The music the shaman performs for the 'jumping god' is a special language to communicate with that god; the god's drum and waist bells, which are borne by the shaman, are two highly important instruments in the production of this language. The shaman's melody and dance for the 'jumping god' may not be well developed, but the drum music is extremely rich and shows the extreme significance of the entire ceremony. Without the drum, it would be impossible to speak to the god; without the drum, the god cannot come to help. Without the drum, the shaman cannot obtain the god's permission to be his or her messenger.*[20] (p. 236)

[19] The importance of the bear to the Oroqen is emphasised throughout this paper. The significance of the bear to both the Oroqen and Ainu peoples provide a connection that is probably beyond something that is mere coincidence. For more information on the Ainu Bear Ceremony see Yamada (2018).

[20] For more on the 'shamans dance' see Zhang & Dang (2019).

Folk Stories

Fu (2018) explains that the Oroqen had a rich history of folk stories and that these stories were a prominent part of their culture. There were four main types (Fu, 2018, p. 47):

- Legends about the creation of the world with an emphasis on three divisions: upper world, underworld and middle world (or humans world).[21]
- Legends about the origins of man which were numerous and varied.
- Legends about heroes. These stories focus around heroes who sacrifice themselves for to save their clan, fight with evil forces, sympathize with the labours of the people, help to solve problems and cure disease.
- Shaman legends.

Fu (2018, pp. 47-48) further explains that the characteristics of these stories fit into three basic categories:

- Simple philosophical thinking, in that the Oroqen expressed their understanding of the world or universe through pristine thinking and a more primitive way of communication.
- Romantic humanistic spirit, in the way that the stories would reflect their polytheistic pantheon, which was especially related to Animism.
- The value of the harmonious coexistence of everything, which according to Fu (2018, p. 48) is especially obvious in the varied stories about bears becoming human and the special place they hold in Oroqen culture. Fu (2018, 48) suggests Oroqen believed they needed to be harmonious with nature in order to continue to exist.[22]

Religion

When visiting the Oroqen, the elders did not speak of any religious aspects, nor did the author see any signs of a local shaman. In a paper by Noll & Shi (2004), entitled, *The Last Shaman of the Oroqen of Northeast China*, the reason for the lack of religious aspects among the Oroqen is described, in that by the time the author visited the Oroqen, their shamans were no longer alive. Their paper focuses on a man named *Chuonnasuan*, who was an Oroqen shaman and according to Noll & Shi (2004) was the last shaman of the region. It is through their paper and research that we can get some insight into Oroqen Shamanism.[23] The following conclusions is about Oroqen Shamanism.

[21] These same divisions have been used in China since very ancient times, one of the earliest mentions of them comes from the *Chūnqiū fán lù*《春秋繁露.立元神》何謂本？曰：天地人，萬物之本也。天生之，地養之，人成之. 'What [is] called [the] root? [It is] said: Sky, earth [and] man, [they are] everything's root. [The] sky produces, [the] earth nourishes [and] people become. We can see these same three 'worlds' mentioned among native people from Siberia, the Americans and Mongolia, for further details see Sarangerel (2000, pp. 11-15).

[22] This idea of maintaining balance and harmony with nature is also especially important for the Mongolian shaman (Sarangerel, 2000, p. 3). The Chinese had the same idea through the concept of yin and yang, especially in the way it is used in Chinese medicine.

[23] Both female and male shamans are mentioned in very early Chinese classics. For example in the *Shuōwén jiězì* it says: male [shamans are] called xí [and female shamans are] called wū《說文解字.卷六.巫部》在男曰覡，在女曰巫。In the *Hànshū* we are also told the same thing《漢書.志.郊祀志.郊祀志》在男曰覡，在女曰巫. In the *Hòu hànshū* it talks about male and female shamans and turtle shell diving 《後漢書.列傳.張衡列傳》… 或察龜策之

- Not anyone can become a shaman as it is only through the 'intention of the spirits' that one can become one (Noll &Shi 2004, p. 6).
- They performed healing rituals as a major part of their role in Oroqen society (Noll & Shi 2004, pp. 6-11).
- Once one is 'selected' and 'had' to become a shaman, they go through a ritual/s. In one ritual, offerings are made (moose, wild duck, goose, fish and deer) as is preparation for the spirits. The already initiated shaman would dance and beat the drum and sing spirit songs over the course of three days. The shaman to be is introduced to over fifty spirits that come one by one as the presiding shaman sings a spirit song specific to only one spirit. The spirits that come to know the soon to be shaman teach him to dance as they possess him. This is the first step to becoming a shaman (Noll & Shi, 2004, p. 7).
- Visions come many years into training (Noll & Shi, 2004, p. 7).
- Spirits are invited into a person's body normally only during healing rituals (Noll & Shi, 2004, p. 7).
- Three levels of reality form the basis of Oroqen cosmology related to the shamanic spirits (Noll & Shi, 2004, p.8):

    - Upper world (*b'wa*) – the most powerful spirits
    - The middle world (*berye)* – the spirits that wonder the earth (like fox-spirits)
    - Lower world (*buni*) – this world is where the shaman travels to seek the cause and thereby cure of a serious illness

- Oroqen shamanism is usually based on hereditary transmission and thereby is a kind of hereditary occupation among the Oroqen as family members tend to inherit spirits (Noll & Shi, 2004, p. 6).
- The critical role of the *jardalanin* (second spirit): to become a shaman a person needs to first be a *jardalanin* and then get healed. This second spirit plays an especially crucial role as they are the assistant to the shaman, and thereby selected by the shaman (Noll & Shi, 2004, pp. 8-9).

The demise of Shamanism among the Oroqen is described below:

> *One reminiscence that everyone shared was the tragic summer (June or July) of 1952 when Zhao Li Ben, a newly converted communist, and the Chinese authorities coerced the Oroqen people to give up their superstitions and abandon any religious practices … Chuonnasuan and Zhao Li Ben were two of the most powerful and respected shamans among the Oroqen, and so the Chinese communists took them for a free trip to eight major cities by train and aeroplane to try to convince them that resistance was futile and that the future*

占，巫覡之言… In the *Shǐshū* it too talks about male and female shamans《史書.國語.楚語下》在男曰覡，在女曰巫。In another section of the *Hòu hànshū* it talks about the yin yang and Five Phases 'babble' of male and female shamans《後漢書.列傳.顗襄楷列傳下郎》其言以陰陽五行為家, 而多巫覡雜語。Qiu (2007, p. 232) explains that it was in the Song dynasty in particular that shamans held a high status in society as they participated in ceremonies, sacrificial offerings and many important government activities. It does appear though that Qiu (2007) may be oversimplifying the role of shamans in the Song. Wei (2019, p. 2) claims that it was during the Sui dynasty that Shamanism was an official religion and that it was in the Song that the government issued policies to supress it. Wei (2019, p. 2) further explains that the Song government had an unusual attitude to Shamanism in that sometimes they eliminated shaman temples, while other times they would promote them.

> *was with Mao and the Communist Party … the communist official viewpoint would have been that the purpose of the trips was to reinforce the message that Shamanism was 'primitive' … Since neither man had ever been out of rural Oroqen regions, they were clearly affected by the propaganda exercise and organized and participated in a three-night ritual in which the Oroqen people asked the spirits to 'go away.'* (Noll & Shi, 2004, p. 12)

A Chinese author by the names of Xianping Qiu also wrote about the predicament of the Oroqen Shaman:

> *At present, the agricultural economy with which the Chinese government has encouraged among the Oroqen has not taken root, however the nomadic life has become increasingly difficult to pursue. Under such attempts to civilize the tribe, Shamanism's status has been greatly diminished, even to the point that the last Oroqen shaman, Guan Kouni, is living out her final days in the Hēilóngjiāng (黑龍江) province of China. As the Oroqen way of life has been greatly curtailed, scattered concentrations of Oroqen culture are no longer able to support a fully shamanistic cultural system. Shamanism itself has just about vanished, however its spirit has left a profound mark on the Oroqen people.* (Qiu, 2007, pp. 233-234)

Qiu (2007, pp. 234-240) explains the basic religious aspects of the Oroqen, the key points are as follows:

- Among the Oroqen a shaman is chosen by an unusual method, after which he/she undergoes rigorous training. One example of the unusual way a shaman is chosen, is by selecting a child that has recovered from some form of a serious illness. Adults can in a similar way be chosen if they had suffered from a mental illness (Qiu 2007, p. 234).
- A key feature in their study is that of *aoyun* (a state of trance or profound state of concentration). Magical powers are measured in *aoyun,* such as three, five, seven or nine *aoyun* (Qiu, 2007, p. 234).
- The shamans hold various precepts in regard to the animate and inanimate world.

These precepts are as follows: a myriad of things live, there is a mutual connection between these living things and all living things are sacred (Qiu, 2007, p. 234).

- As a result of these three precepts, the shaman's sacrificial offerings are directed to three types of realties (Qiu, 2007, p. 235):

  - The three different worlds that exist: the sky, the earth, and human beings.
  - Everything in the world has a soul. Changes to someone's good luck or bad luck is controlled by demons, ghosts, and gods.[24]
  - There is the personification of the following: elements such as fire, mountains, rivers, trees, the sun, the moon, stars, thunder, lightning, clouds, the fog, snow, ice, wind, rain, the rainbow, and certain animals who have the ability to control the natural world. The Oroqen believe each one of these gods or sprits has a personal will, their own desires, and passions that are

[24] The word 'God' can be substituted with the word 'spirit' as these words are used interchangeably among many different authors. The word 'spirit/s' seem to be a better representative English word to use.

equal to themselves. One key difference though is that each of these gods in the world of 'matter' has a different function. Interestingly, each of the gods also hold an approximate equal status to each other, hence so do shamans, even if some are more powerful than others.

The Oroqen have a particular fear of the souls of their ancestors, disease and death (Qiu, 2007, p. 235). Oroqen built tepee for temporary sacrifices, these tepees were bigger than the ones they lived in. These special tepees had to face southeast while in the opposite direction the idol called *malu* (god tablet) would be placed (Qiu, 2007, p. 235). The two most important sacrifices of the year are the spring and fall sacrifices. The spring sacrifice is described in detail by Qiu (2007, pp. 235-237).[25]

The Oroqen people believed in the worship of many different kinds of animals. The hawk spirit was called *Dayi* and was the shaman's protector spirit. The bear was of particular significance. In early times, they believed bears were their ancestors. It was therefore strictly forbidden to hunt them. After the arrival and then spread of firearms, the Oroqen did gradually start to hunt bears. Whenever a bear was killed a ceremony was held and the entire tribe would be present. Qiu (2007) explains this interesting and in-depth ceremony in detail:

> *During the ceremony they would cut the bear's head off, put it on a tree, kneel down to incense it and recite the following prayer: 'Grandfather (or grandmother), have you fallen asleep? Do not blame us, we did not intend to injure you, this was manslaughter. Do not become angry, please give us good luck in the future to hunt more wild creatures.' While kowtowing repeatedly, they would burn grass to incense the bear's head. Only then did they finally believe that the bear's soul could go far away from them. After this ceremony the people would carry the bear meat back to their dwelling, shouting the words 'ga, ga' like crows, and then sit around a fire to boil the bear meat. They also called out, 'ga, ga' or 'gu, gu' while eating the meat itself. After the meal, the men would collect the bones and put them into a wicker basket so the bones could be buried in a tree. This method of burial is called a wind burial which included the practice of mourners feigning sobs of grief.* (p. 237)

Next, Fire worship (*Hantbaruk)* shows that the Oroqen people believe that fire originated from the sky above. The fire spirit was seen to be the 'holist, purest and kindest spirit.' It had the ability to wash away all contamination, and drive away evil spirits (Qiu, 2007, p. 238).

Worship of Mountains (*Bainaqia*): mountains were thought to be the residence of ancestors. The mountain spirit is believed to control most wild animals (Qiu, 2007, p. 238). Worship of the sky: the Oroqen sacrificed to a sun spirit who was called *Deleqin*. This sacrifice took place during every spring festival. There were also sacrifices to the moon spirit who was called *Biya*. These took place in the first lunar month on the fifteenth or the twenty-fifth day. These sacrifices were aimed at 'lasting peace (Qiu, 2007, p. 238). Ancestor worship could be considered the primary aspect of shamanistic worship. Each Oroqen tribe or family has its own ancestor spirit/s. There did appear to be a rule to ancestor worship which was that any deceased member of the family who lived before the paternal great-grandfather could be a spirit. Most of them though were male (Qiu, 2007, p. 239). Shamans tended to consecrate idols. These idols were made of stone, wood, bone, grass and/or animal skin. Some other types of sacred images could be drawings of human beings. They were drawn on animal skin. After

[25] Sacrificial offering such and the Spring Sacrifice tend to involve wild animals but are usually fowl as they are the most abundant and easy to catch (Qiu, 2007, 236).

the idol was completed, it had to be 'sacrificed' in a ceremony in order for it to acquire spirit-like power (Qiu, 2007, p. 239).

One practise among the Oroqen was to hold a ceremony that would deliver the souls of the deceased. For this ceremony they would construct a human-like figure of straw and tie it with laces. The children and also other family members in mourning would then grasp laces from behind the figure. The shaman would also grasp one of the laces while at the same time chant incantations; praying and telling the dead not to miss their homeland, while asking them to leave quickly (Qiu, 2007, p. 239). When Oroqen hunters found it is hard to hunt, they would hold ceremonies to beg for better hunting (Qiu, 2007, p. 240).

Genetic Studies

A study drew the following conclusion:

> *Oroqen and Evenki populations are more closely related to Mongolian, Khalkha, Oold and Tsaatan populations.* (Zhang et al., 2010, p. 343)

In another study done, the following conclusion was made about the Oroqen:

> *The Oroqen were regarded as the earliest inhabitants who lived in the Heilong River valley (Du and Yip 1993). The Oroqen population size experienced serious reduction during the past ten decades: the population size was about 18,000 in 1895, but was reduced to 2,256 by 1953. In 1990, the sample size increased to 6,965 (Du and Yip 1993). The genetic structure of our Oroqen sample showed concordant features with its small population size and recorded history: high frequencies (86.4%) of north-prevalent haplogroups, such as D, G, C, and Z, were found, but with low haplotype diversity.* (Kong et al., 2003, p. 404)

In regard to the genetic studies done on the Oroqen there does not appear to be anything that signifies something out of the ordinary with northern haplogroups prevalent and a close relation to neighbouring peoples.

The Modern Oroqen

When the author visited the Oroqen it was clear that at least some of them were in relative terms well off financially. Many lived in houses and at least one of the children drove a European car. On pondering how this had come to be, the author was taken to a large factory where he met the son of an Oroqen elder. He took the author inside this factory. After sometime I discovered that these factories were growing vast quantities of black wood ear *hēi mùěr* (黑木耳), which were sold all over China.

Those who have been to these far northern areas of Manchuria may assume that as the Oroqen have an autonomous banner and forest exploitation is so rampant that they would benefit greatly from this. According to Lundberg & Zhou (2009, p. 353) though, 'the Banner government exercising autonomy had no power to decide whether, how and the quantity of forest resources that are exploited' and that all they can do is represent local government in regard to the forestry logging quota set by state organs at higher levels.

The key feature to note in regard to decision-making and the powers of the autonomous banner was that the Land Reform law of 1950 stated that all forests and flora and fauna within were owned by the state government and administered by it (Lundberg & Zhou, 2009, p. 353). In other words, even though the OAB (Oroqen Autonomous Banner) was a state organ, it had near to no powers in regard to the process of forest exploitation (Lundberg & Zhou, 2009, p. 353).

On further investigation it could be said the OAB autonomous powers are extremely limited. The head of Banner for example has the same administrative rank as the heads of the companies engaging in the forest exploitation, furthermore, the heads of these forestry companies have access to 92% of the Banner's land area (Lundberg & Zhou, 2009, p. 354). While China has given the autonomous banner to the Oroqen, Evenki and Daur one would have to question how much of this is just symbolic. If the Oroqen's power in the organs of self-government are an example to go by, then one would have to question all divisions; autonomous regions (自治區), such as, Zhuang, Mongol, Tibet, Uighur and Hui; autonomous prefectures (自治州); autonomous counties (自治縣) and autonomous banners (自治旗).

When the author enquired to the elder about his current situation compared to when he was twenty-five years old, he did say that the fish which used to be half a meter in length were now five centimetres in size and that hunting was not what it used to be. He did also say that circumstances are much better now. When asked why, he was very clear: hospitals, heating and education for his grandchildren. It certainly seemed that he was not interested in living like he had fifty years before. While there appeared to be a high level of comfort among the Oroqen, on deeper investigation though there seem to be numerous issues that could be summarised as follows:

> *In 1996, the Oroqen Autonomous government adopted a decision to prohibit all hunting activities in the area, including that of Oroqen hunters … This hunting ban was described by the officially published local chronicles as the third historical leap taken together with the other two in the 'social progress' of Oroqen during the past half-century. It was claimed as the prime symbol of the start of the Oroqens' modern life … Although there were many positive proclamations from local autonomous authorities, some Oroqen regarded this as 'betraying the Oroqen ethnicity.' Oroqen hunters were not only prohibited to hunt, but also ordered to hand in their hunting guns.* (Lundberg & Zhou, 2009, p. 350)

In a paper by Lundberg & Zhou (2009, p. 350) the reasons for this event point to some obvious tensions between the strategy for development and the implementation of regional national autonomy in regard to the rights of minorities in China. Their paper goes onto to investigate whether or not the Oroqen chose to enter into 'civilised modern society.'[26] In regard to what the two 'leaps forward' were before the hunting ban (there were a total of 'three' leaps), they were as follows:

- At the beginning of the 1950's the Chinese government established the Oroqen banner in the area of the Greater Khingan Mountains, which was most likely the original area where the Oroqen had led a nomadic way of life. It was actually one of the first

[26] What is interesting to note here is that according to Whaley & Li (2000, p. 113) the Oroqen of Shibazhan that the author visited, assert that they just about had no contact with other ethnic minorities in China before being pressured into settling and also had very limited contact with the Han Chinese. When visiting these areas of far north China or Manchuria, the author can attest to the fact that without trains, cars and roads, this area of world would have been incredibly isolated.

autonomous areas meant for ethnic minorities. They were given a total of sixty thousand square kilometres for a population of about eight hundred people. At the time of its hand over to the Oroqen, the land was covered by 97.2% forest and had a vast array of flora on it (Lundberg & Zhou, 2009, pp. 351-352). An Oroqen folk song from the 1950's described their circumstances:

> *In the high Xing'an Mountains, there are vast forests. In the forests live the brave Oroqen. Each has his hunting horse. Each has his gun. And there are countless roes all around the mountains.* (Lundberg & Zhou, 2009, p. 352)

- The second 'leap' started in 1954 and ended in 1958 after establishing six villages, when the Oroqen life was changed from that of a nomadic one to a sedentary way of life (Lundberg & Zhou, 2009, p. 369). The four-year process was not without numerous issues as there was obvious resistance among the Oroqen, simply put, the Oroqen did not want to change their old way of living and accept a modern life (Lundberg & Zhou, 2009, 369). The methods used by the Chinese government to make the changes, were as follows (Lundberg & Zhou, 2009, p. 369):

  - Promotion of the advantages of a modern life. The Oroqen were assured that only a progressive way of life would make them a modern nation.
  - Organised tours for the Oroqen were conducted. The aim was to teach them about modern life and make them understand it.
  - Establishment of state-funded settlements.

The difficulties related to settling the Oroqen was also mentioned by a Chinese writer named Xianpeng Qiu. He described the Oroqen predicament as follows:

> *Since the 1980's the government of the People's Republic of China has arranged for the Oroqen to settle down, prohibiting hunting and attempting to force the tribe to forego its nomadic practices and turn to agriculture. Modern civilization has taken a great toll on the Oroqen culture, bringing them to the verge of extinction.* (Qiu, 2007, pp. 233-234)

The third 'leap' was the prohibition of hunting (Lundberg & Zhou 2009, p. 351). The reason for its prohibition is described below:

> *The head of the government of the Banner emphasised that the decision was based on the government's investigation which found that the Oroqen hunters could no longer live on hunting exclusively … According to the Banner Chronicle, the wild animals' habitat was reduced and undermined over time. Meanwhile, a great amount of migrant lumberjacks and farmers caught and killed animals contrary to regulations in place and completely ignored the hunting rules of the Oroqen hunters. As a result, the formerly countless wild animals finally became rare.* (Lundberg &Zhou, 2009, p. 352)

As the author took various trains from Hāěrbīn (哈爾濱), to Hēihé (黑河), to Tǎhé (塔河) and finally to Mòhé (漠河), for as far as the eye could see were lined rows of trees no thicker than your own arm. It was clear that thousands and thousands of square miles of forests had been cut down and replaced with new rows of young trees.

One of the most unfortunate aspects and best examples of the lack of power the OAB has, is in relation to reforestation. As stated by Lundberg & Zhou (2009, p. 356) the local government wanted to reforest the wasteland but could do little as most undermined forest areas were on state owned land. This was clearly stated by an Oroqen, 'within a single step beyond our village or town, we enter the land of the forest owned by others (Lundberg & Zhou, 2009, p. 357).' The situation got so out of control that, 'using the excuse of reforesting formerly cultivated land, the state-owned companies even planted trees at the doorway of the hunters.' To increase tension even more, 'forestry companies distributed parts of the forest to their employees under a "contract of responsibility" in order to solve their difficulties of livelihood (Lundberg & Zhou, 2009, p. 357).'

Just as these new trees now dominate the landscape and outnumber any form of the original flora, the Oroqen too had a dramatic change in the proportion of them in relation to the Han Chinese. As the Oroqen were originally the dominant majority in their own autonomous area, consisting of 99.48 per cent of the local population in 1951, by 1999 this decreased to a marginal minority group of 0.7 per cent of the local population. When the Oroqen were the majority population they could be in the organs of self-government (Lundberg & Zhou, 2009, p. 363) but as a minority they lost all control.

This technique of making a majority population of a specific geographic area become a minority has been used by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) since they gained formal control over China, where large majorities quickly became small minorities by creating favourable circumstances for Han Chinese and allowing a massive influx of them. While the exact numbers and statistics are hard to come by and therefore precise evidence is rare, by speaking with older minority members, this somewhat ingenious technique gives the CCP full control with little or no direct conflict. It has been used throughout Mainland China but is most obvious in the geographic areas that could have been considered countries before the full establishment of the Chinese Communist Party. Examples include, Tibet, Manchuria and East Turkestan. One may also note, whether directly or indirectly other nations such as the British also used this technique (Australia, New Zealand, American and Canada are four well known examples). Apart from Tibetans, Kazakhs, Tajiks, Uzbeks and sometimes Uighurs, it is the authors experience that most of the other minority groups of China including groups such as the Korean Chinese (朝鮮族), do identify themselves as being Chinese (especially the younger generations). While the plight of the Oroqen losing their way of life is attributable to numerous causes, the key one in more recent times is the dramatic local forest exploitation that has taken place on a grand scale.

4. Conclusion

On initial investigation the Oroqen may appear to be a small group of peoples that have come from a simple and primitive culture and have already been sinosized. While the sinosization appears to have occurred, the idea that the Oroqen have or had a primitive culture seems to be far from the truth. The Oroqen instead have had a deep and rich culture that was heavily centred around their religion and shamans. As their religion and shamans were indirectly taken away from them and they were forced to settle, they clearly lost many important aspects of who they were as a nation of people. Some had tried to fight this, others gave in but in the end, modernity arrived and they were assimilated into the twenty-first Century.

It does appear though that efforts are being made to keep parts of their culture and identity alive through their clothing and birch bark techniques. It seems that at least some Oroqen have been given lucrative business opportunities and none appeared to be living in poverty. How much of this wealth is spread through the community or if it is only kept among a few families is not known. What is obvious though is that the youngest generation seem to be rapidly losing their ability to speak their mother tongue (if not lost already), use birch bark, make traditional clothes or have any interest in their ancient shamanic religion.

In conclusion, the Oroqen story is similar to that of many other native and aboriginal peoples from around the world, where a more powerful foreign country came in and made the original native majority become a minority, thereby removing any chance of self-government and forcing upon them modernity by taking away their shamans and religion.

Acknowledgements

The current work is self-funding research. The author delivers his gratitudes to the editor of Growingscholar publisher for publishing this research.

References

Doerfer, G. (1973). Das Kur-Urmische und seine Verwandten. *Zentralasiatische Studien 7,* 567-599. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41928224

Dresher, E. B., & Nevins, A. (2017). Conditions on Iterative Rounding Harmony in Oroqen. *Transactions of the Philological Society 115*(3), 365-394. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-968X.12104

Fu, Z. (2018). An Analysis of Oroqen Folk Tales and Their Cultural Value in the Creation of Picture Books. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 284*, 47-49. https://doi.org/10.2991/icassee-18.2018.8

Han, Y., & Meng, S. (1993). *Elunchun Yu Han Yu Duizhao Duben*. Zhongyang Minzu Xueyuan Chubanshe.

Hu, Z. (1986). *Elunchun Yu Jianzhi*. Minzu Chubanshe.

Kong, Q.P., Yao, Y., Liu, M., Shen, S., Chen. C., Zhu, C., Palanichamy, M. G., & Zhang, Y. (2003). Mitochondrial DNA Sequence Polymorphisms of Five Ethnic Populations from Northern China. *Human Genetics 113*, 391-405. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00439-003-1004-7

Li, F., & Whaley, L. J. (2009). Loanwords in Oroqen, a Tungusic language of China. In M. Haspelmath & U. Tadmor, *Loanwords in the World's Languages* (pp. 525-544). De Gruyter Mouton.

Li, B. (1992). Elunchunyu de Yuanyin Hexie. *Minzu yuwen 6*, 47-53.

Li, F. (1996, December). *A Report on the Study of the Consonant Systems of Two Manchu-Tungusic Languages in China: Evenki and Oroqen* [Paper presented]. Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, San Diego, America.

Li, S. (1981). Elunchun-yu cihui shulue. *Minzu yuwen 5*, 405-426.

Li, F., & Whaley L. J. (1998). Rise and The Rise and Fall of Derivational Morphology: The Case of Reduplication in Oroqen. *Papers from the Thirty-fourth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society.* 259-268.

Lundberg, M., & Zhou, Y. (2009). 'Hunting-Prohibition in the Hunters' Autonomous Area: Legal Rights of Oroqen People and the Implementation of Regional National Autonomy Law. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights 16*, 349-397.

https://brill.com/view/journals/ijgr/16/3/article-p349_3.xml?language=en

Meng, S. (1993). *Elunchun Min Jian Wenxue*. Heilongjiang Sheng Minzu Yanjiusuo.

Noll, R., & Shi, K. (2004). Academia.
https://www.academia.edu/6400421/_Chuonnasuan_Meng_Jin_Fu_The_Last_Shaman_of_the_Oroqen_of_Northeast_China_Journal_of_Korean_Religions_2004_6_135-162.

Qiu, X. (2007). Shamanism as the Ultimate Reality and Meaning of the Oroqen Peoples of Inner Mongolia. *Ultimate Meaning and Reality 30*(3), 232-243.
https://www.utpjournals.press/doi/pdf/10.3138/uram.30.3.232

Ramsden, S. C. R. 2021. Indo-Europeans in the Ancient Yellow River Valley.' *Sino-Platonic Papers* (University of Pennsylvania), no. 311.
http://www.sino-platonic.org/complete/spp311_indo_europeans_china_zhou_dynasty.pdf

Sarangerel. (2000). *Riding Windhorses: A Journey into the Heart of Mongolian Shamanism.* Rochester: Destiny Books.

Saxirong. (1981). *Jianming Hanyu Oroqenyu Duizhao Duben*. Beijing Academy of Social Sciences.

Shimunek, A. (2018). Early Serbi-Mongolic–Tungusic Lexical Contact: Jurchen Numerals from the 室韋 Shirwi (Shih-wei) in North China. In A. Á. Bertalan, *Philology of the Grasslands: Essays in Mongolic, Turkic, and Tungusic* (pp. 331-346). Brill.

Sutton, M. (2016). *An Introduction to Native North America 5th Edition.* Routledge.

Whaley, L. J., & Li, F. (1998). The suffix -kan in Oroqen. *Studies in Language 22*, 181-205.

Whaley, L. J., & Li, F. (2000). Oroqen Dialects. *Central Asiatic Journal 44*(1), 105-130. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41928224

Whaley, L. J., Grenoble, L.A., & Li, F. (1999). Revisiting Tungusic Classification from the Bottom up: A Comparison of Evenki and Oroqen. *Linguistic Society of America 75*(2), 286-321. https://doi.org/10.2307/417262

Wu, Y., Kim, I. H., & Cho, W. H. (2016). Animal-Hide Clothing and Decorative Arts of the Oroqen People. *International Journal of Costume and Fashion 16*(2): 67-79. https://www.koreascience.or.kr/article/JAKO201609064340090.pdf

Wei, X. (2019). *The Development of Shamanism and Its Social Functions in the Song Dynasty (960-1279): Taking Folktales in Record of the Listener as Major Examples* [MA thesis, Seton Hall University]. Seton Hall University Dissertations and Theses. https://scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations/2681

Xu, J., & Wang, F. (2020). 'The History of Ethnic Minorities' Language Education in Inner Mongolia. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 490,* 335-338. https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.201127.068

Xu, Z., & Sun, X. (2016). Protection and Inheritance of the Original Ecological Oroqen Music Heritage. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 40*, 503-505. https://doi.org/10.2991/icelaic-16.2017.119

Yamada, T. (2018). The Ainu Bear Ceremony and the Logic behind Hunting the Deified Bear. *Journal of Northern Studies 12*(1), 35-51. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331484608_The_Ainu_Bear_Ceremony_and_the_Logic_behind_Hunting_the_Deified_Bear

Yan, T., & Zhang, X. (2020). Study on the Protection of Birch Bark Art of the Oroqen Nationality from the Perspective of Intangible Cultural Heritage. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 416*, 535-538. https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200316.117

Zhang, X. (2016). Discussion on Origin of Birch Bark Art of Oroqen Nationality in Hēilóngjiāng Province and Its Production Inheritance. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 40*, 423-426. https://doi.org/10.2991/icelaic-16.2017.99

Zhang, X., & Zhang, Y. (2019). Research on Birch Bark Art of Oroqen Ethnic Group in Hēilóngjiāng River Valley. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 310*, 290-294. https://doi.org/10.2991/iccese-19.2019.67

Zhang, H. B., Wei, S.G., Zheng, H. B., Yu, B., & Lai, J. H. (2010). Distribution of human leukocyte antigen alleles and haplotypes in Oroqen and Evenki nationality minority in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of China. *International Journal of Immunogenetics 37*, 337-344. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20518845/

Zhang, R. (2017). Research of Oroqen Dance Culture. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 171*, 259-261. https://doi.org/10.2991/icassee-17.2018.57

Zhang, R., & Dang, W. (2018). Study on the Characteristics and the Development Vein of Oroqen Dance Culture. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 252*, 45-47. https://doi.org/10.2991/jahp-18.2018.9

Zhang, Rui., & Dang, W. (2019). A Brief Analysis of the Role of Primitive Religion in the Traditional Oroqen Dance. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 329*, 2021-2023. https://doi.org/10.2991/iccessh-19.2019.432

Zhang, X. (1996). *Vowel Systems of the Manchu-Tungus languages in China* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto]. University of Toronto Linguistics PhD students' Dissertations. https://twpl.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/twpl/article/view/6517

Zhang Y., Li, B., & Zhang, Xi. (1989). *The Oroqen Language*. Jilin University Press.

Zhou, X., & Huang, J. (2018). Study on the Expression and Causes of the Implication in Animal and Plant Patterns in Oroqen Decorative Patterns. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 232*, 298-301. https://doi.org/10.2991/icadce-18.2018.63