

BOOK REVIEW

NEW TRADITIONAL NARRATIVES

Tokmashov, Boris Ivanovich. *Қаан Оолақ: богатырское сказание кондомских шорцев* [Qaan Oolaq: a hero tale of the Kondoma Shors]. Novokuznetsk: Novokuznetsk printing centre, 2009. 148 pp. In Russian. ISBN 978-5-8441-0303-2

In 2009, a unique edition of Shors heroic epics came out as a book in a limited print run of 150 copies from a publisher in one of Kemerovo region's major towns (South of Western Siberia, Russia). It was unique before anything else because, at the moment it appeared, it was the first, over the last 70 or so years, publication of the Shors bogatyr epic tale that represented a poorly known *Kondoma* (after the Kondoma river) epic tradition. However, the circumstances around the emergence of the text itself are also of considerable interest, which makes us yet again go back to the discussion of the case of the epic "tradition".



But first a few words on the structure of the book.

The epic text is prefaced by a brief introduction telling us why this particular text was chosen and what the specific issues with its representation were. Boris Tokmashov edited the publication, and translated into Russian himself one of the epic tales that he had heard in his childhood from his brother Viktor Tokmashov (1914–1973), a renowned storyteller born in the village of Tagdagal (presently, the town of Osinniki). Since Shors epics were performed in a guttural singing style accompanied with the narration of sung fragments; and the storyteller Tokmashov was no exception to that tradition, the publishers broke the epic down into 183 fragments of unequal length, “guessing that the storyteller V. I. Tokmashov in the course of his own performance would unfold the story split in the same manner” (p. 5). As a result, a consistent 1800-line-long text emerged before the reader. The text is followed by comments and notes (p. 114–30) which will be of substantial interest to specialists because they reflect not just the folk etymology of characters' names and a loose interpretation of this or that image or motif in the tale, but indeed also Tokmashov's singular observations of the epic tradition of the Shors in particular and the Shors culture in general. The publication closes with supplements and appendices; and I would specifically single out among them, not photographs or bibliographic matter, which are standard for editions of the kind, but the brilliant biographies of a number of storytellers who had performed in Shors villages of the lower Kondoma river area in the late 19th to early 20th centuries, including those of the editor himself and his assistant.

The Shors are a small Turkic ethnic group¹ in the South of Western Siberia, which had been known in Russian sources under different names, from as early as the 17th

century, as hunters, fishers, and gatherers of the mountainous taiga area; and some of their groups had also been known as skilled iron makers. While the importance of the blacksmith trade declined two centuries ago, the Shors are still known for their unique heroic epics which link them to the world of neighbouring Turkic cultures of the steppe. Despite a fairly long history of recording their epics (for more detail, see: Funk 2005), we still know very little about the epic tradition in the lower Kondoma river area, even though there is every indication that it has been one of the more developed storytelling regions in the whole of Sayan-Altai in the last two centuries. As a matter of fact, before this publication of Boris Tokmashov's appeared, there were available but two lower Kondoma epic texts for scholars. Those were a short edition of the *Altyn-Taichy* tale, recorded by V. Radlov in 1861 (Radlov 1866: 342–49; in German translation, Radloff 1866: 366–72; in Russian translation, SGE 2013: 112–32); and a more or less complete recording of the *Kan Kes* epic, done by N. P. Dyrenkova in the 1930s, with an unspecified storyteller (Dyrenkova 1940: 24–71). It was only in 2010 that another small 683-line fragment of a long epic story performed by the lower Kondoma storyteller Stepan Torbokov ("Khan-Pergen, the Least Tall of All Khans") would be published (SGE 2010: 86–137) and about forty recordings of that storyteller would be located in various Russian archives (Funk 2010: 16–49). Should we recall that there have been published over sixty texts of Shors heroic epics² from another area – that of the lower Mras-su river – we realise that the importance of Tokmashov's publication should not be underestimated.

Another consequential detail that I would like to draw attention to is the history of the *Qaan Oolaq* epic, which might be of interest to anyone who is intrigued by the vexed issue of "tradition".

My own field observations over the life of Shors' epic tradition testify to the fact that the ways in which it is transmitted are not always predictable. Indeed, a significant role in the preservation and intergenerational transmission of that tradition has been played not just by the Shors themselves, or neighbouring Khakass, Telet, Kumandin, or Altai, but also by Russians and Germans; and what is more, often by people who were not practicing storytellers per se. The publication under review is in fact a case in point, for it came into being out of the friendship between a Russian adopted as a child into a Shor family (Leonid Petrovich Kozlasov, 1930–2008) and his Shor friend (Boris Ivanovich Tokmashov, b.1934). It so happened that Boris Tokmashov, whose elder brother was an outstanding storyteller and rival of the famous *kaichy* Stepan Torbokov, was not really much into listening to storytellers himself, while his Russian friend Leonid Kozlasov, on the contrary, could spend nights listening either to Torbokov or to Tokmashov. Decades passed, and *kaichy* Viktor Tokmashov (1914–1973) died, having left behind neither tape-recordings nor manuscripts of the epics performed. His younger brother, who had a background in physics, was perennially busy – first as a village school teacher, then as its principal, then as chairman of the village council, and later as head of an administrative unit in a Kemerovo region town. It was only upon his retirement that Boris Tokmashov realised just how valuable the tales of his brother must have been. Still, he was not able to put down in writing on his own all those voluminous epics with dozens of unfamiliar names and multitude of "epic ways", even though he had not forgotten his native language. In spring 2005, there came a moment when he set about visiting his native village in order to look for things forgotten. Nights spent at the house of his childhood friend Leonid Kozlasov brought back recollections of the past and gave him

what he was looking for. Kozlasov retold one of the epic stories, and Tokmashov wrote down its subject line, character names, and narrative formulas in his notepad.³ The rest was now just a matter of time. Four years later, the carcass of that story, which came from the repertoire of his brother, has turned into the full-blown traditional epic of *Qaan Oolaq*. However, since the epic was “told” to us by Boris Tokmashov, not by the *kaichy* Viktor, it is Boris Tokmashov that ought to be held as the “author” of the published version of the text. Yet the question about who it was that he took it over from still remains. To put it in more general terms, where was that epic tradition between the times when the “last” Kondoma storytellers passed away (Tokmashov in 1973, and Torbokov in 1980) and when the *Qaan Oolaq* epic as performed by non-storyteller Boris Tokmashov appeared in 2009? Does it mean that in order to (re)construct a heroic epic, it would suffice to know the main story line, character names, and the principles of building epic language formulas? If so, how could one argue that the tradition died or was interrupted on such-and-such day?

I will not go into discussing the peculiarities of recording and translating the epic text. There are pluses and minuses. The text sits rather far away from the literary norm; on the other hand, it does reflect the specific nuances of the Kondoma dialect of the Shor language. In a number of instances, the translation evades the complex vocabulary of the Shor original; and every once in a while there are instances of incorrect or awkward word usage. On the whole, one has to admit though, the translation is nearly as readable as the original, which is especially important for those Shors who do not have a good command of their native language, as it is, of course, for the lay public that can now immerse themselves into the fascinating world of ancient heroes.

I would like to wrap up with a sort of announcement of Boris Tokmashov’s forthcoming publication. In January 2008, his Russian friend Leonid Kozlasov relayed to him another story – *Qyr-Chaizan* – from the epic repertoire of Viktor Tokmashov. The reconstruction and translation of the epic text is not yet over; but one cannot help thinking that, even in the absence of proper storytellers, this seemingly fading tradition still keeps discovering the resources to persist.

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Notes

¹ For more detail on the history and culture of the Shors, see, for example: Kimeev 2006: 236–323.

² The largest collection of Shors epic texts in the Shor language (38 epic texts) is available online at: <http://corpora.iea.ras.ru>

³ The year that the book was published, I was introduced to Boris Tokmashov and learned the intricacies of how the story was reconstructed. The notepad with sketches of the story told by Leonid Kozlasov is still kept in Boris Tokmashov's private archive.

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REVIEW OF DYRENKOVA'S ARTICLES ON TURKIC PEOPLES OF SAYANO-ALTAI

Н. П. Дыренкова. Тюрки Саяно-Алтая. Статьи и этнографические материалы [N. P. Dyrenkova. *Turkic Peoples of Sayano-Altai. Articles and Ethnographic Material*] C. Schönig & L. R. Pavlinskaya (eds.). St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2012. 408 p. (Series “Kunstkamera – Archives”, Vol. VI) ISBN 978-5-02-08314-2

In 2012, the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) collaborated with the Institute of Turkic Studies, Free University of Berlin, on a volume in the *Kunstkamera-Archive* Series, which comprised a collection of scholarly works by Nadezhda Petrovna Dyrenkova (1899–1941), a renowned Soviet ethnographer, linguist,

and folklore scholar. The volume contained previously unpublished articles and manuscripts on the history and culture of Turkic peoples of Sayan-Altai, particularly the Shors.

We cannot but completely agree with the project directors' idea that "academic studies are conducted for the benefit of the public and should be accessible to them"; and one can at last feel glad that Dyrenkova's works that had lain deposited at *Kunstkamera* (further, *MAE*) for over 70 years finally came out, even if partially. Besides, this is an event of importance just because *MAE*'s archives, as many know, were not always freely accessible to researchers (Alekseev & Kuz'mina & Toburokov 2003: 14).

Dyrenkova belonged to that special constellation of Soviet ethnographers who matured during the 1920s–30s under the guidance of Shternberg and Bogoras, fathers of the famous Leningrad school of ethnography. Her contribution to research on the languages and culture of the Shors, Khakass, Altai, Teleut, and other Turkic peoples was massive and has not been properly assessed to date because the bulk of data collected during her manifold field trips, as well as of unfinished articles, has never been published. "To edit her unpublished materials is our debt to the scholar whose life and work was a heroic deed and selfless service to the homeland science, and who devoted her talent to the flourishing and development of peoples whom she so deeply and thoroughly studied and loved" (Diakonova 1989).

This was the noble and, no doubt, difficult goal that the editors of the volume set for themselves, and that they have handled very well on the whole. As the preface informs us, a large part of the presented articles deals with the study of traditional worldview of Southern Siberia's Turkic peoples (shamanism, in particular), which was indeed among the scholarly priorities of the author. Texts of the articles are provided in the author's original version.

There is an essay of substantial length on the life and career of Dyrenkova [p.19–88] in the volume. The essay's authors draw on diverse sources including memoirs by Dyrenkova's contemporaries, reminiscences of her student class mates and coworkers, accounts of her field trips, her correspondence with Shternberg, Bogoras, and other colleagues, her field diaries, as well as notes by others such as G. N. Raiskaia [Dyrenkova's niece]. The essay is indeed interesting insofar as it casts light on Dyrenkova not only as a singular tireless scholar devoted to her academic career, but also as a surprisingly unique emotional personality deeply affected by what surrounded her and particularly by the fates of peoples whose culture she chose to study.

The assessment of Dyrenkova's contribution to the development of ethnology is quite positive and generally raises no objections, apart from a few statements that appear perhaps too categorical. Thus, one can express doubts about the author's statement that the "typology of oral folk genres offered by Dyrenkova has been foundationally preserved in domestic folklore studies up to the present" (p. 61); as that classification was of a very basic type and is poorly applicable to the oral genres of many, if not all, Siberian peoples (one can be referred to E. S. Novik's works, for example). Similarly, doubtful is the statement that the custom of extramarital relationship "between the husband's father and the bride in cases when the husband was considered under age", as the authors hold it, "has not been observed in ethnographic literature either before or after Dyrenkova" (p. 64). One can take a look at the classic ethnographic work by A. N. Maksimov to see that it is not so.

There are some inaccuracies and inconsistencies in references to Dyrenkova's work. Authors seem to have had difficulties in deciding on the exact count of her published pieces; they mention "over 15 articles and three fundamental monographs" on p.12–13; but then it is stated that there were "about 30" of them, on p.78.

The major part of the volume, however, is taken by Dyrenkova's articles and ethnographic materials per se. The article on the "Shors" is a compendium of data on the history, environment, occupations, social order, and material and spiritual culture of that particular ethnic group; and it is encyclopedic in its scope. The addendum to the article allows the reader to take a peek at an earlier version of the text which somewhat differed from the one being published.

The nine remaining articles deal with the traditional worldview – primarily, religious notions and concepts – of Sayan-Altai's Turkic peoples. The rather solid and lengthy article on "Water, Mountains, and Forest in the Worldview of Turkic Tribes" draws broadly on comparative data to examine the part that these important natural and cult objects play in making the traditional image of the world among Turkic peoples. We would argue that the entire text is permeated with the idea – very subtly felt by the author – that traditional worldview is a complex and elaborate system of interaction between humans and the natural space surrounding them. The article employs the method of studying traditional culture on the basis of a complex analysis of language, folklore, and ritual practices, which has long become a classic genre. Among the merits of the article undoubtedly is the scrupulous description of the rite of feeding mountain and river spirits among the Shors; and particulars of the rite are examined not just in their reference to different districts or kin groups but actually to each village or *ulus* (p. 155–181).

A smaller article on the "Dedication of Animals among Turkic-Mongolian Tribes" (p. 189–199) presents accurately gathered data that reveal the essence of this ritual. The author concludes that the ritual belongs among sacrificial acts and "differs from the common sacrifice only in that the animal is not slain but sent to a spirit or deity alive". The article entitled "The Meaning of the Term *Bura~Puyra* among the Altai Turks (in Connection to the Cult of Horse and Deer)" turns us toward shamanism and is interesting first and foremost, in our view, because of the parallels that the author draws between epic and shamanic traditions, and correspondingly between the shaman and the epic hero; because of the analysis of semantic rows such as "bird–horse–tree" or "mythical heaven horse – sacrificial horse – drum appearing as a horse – shaman embodied in a horse or deer"; as well as because of the semantic identity of shaman's attributes, such as the drum, stick, and bow/arrow, pinpointed by the author. The text of the article on the "*Albasty* in Religious Notions and Folklore of Turkic Tribes" is but a draft, and probably an unfinished one. Still, it presents a good comparative analysis of notions about the female spirit *Albasty* and its sexual relationships with hunters among various Turkic peoples. The author notes that similar notions did also exist in mythologies of Finns and Slavs.

Fragments of articles on "A Number of Ways of Guarding a Child among the Shors" (p. 245–255) and "On Matchmaking and Marriage [among the Shors]" (p. 256–260) are based mostly on the author's research among the Shors and comparative data related to other Turkic peoples of Siberia. The article entitled "Bow and Arrow in the Culture, Folklore, and Language of Turkic Peoples of Altai and Minusinsk Region" (p. 261–276)

discusses the role of the named cultural objects both as important labor tools and as cult objects having high symbolic significance. Although some of the arguments expounded by the author may seem rather naïve to the present-day reader, one must acknowledge that a number of ideas voiced by Dyrenkova (for example, those on the persistence of ritual significance of material objects that have lost their economic functions; or on the rich religious content of objects important in economic activities) sound quite up to date.

The article on the “Attributes of Shamans among Turkic-Mongolian Peoples of Siberia” (p. 277–339) should be viewed, in our opinion, as the gem of the volume. It presents a thoughtful and comprehensive analysis of a whole complex of shaman’s attributes, the drum being considered in the first place. The author discusses in detail the various types of drums, their ritual and symbolic significance, shaman’s cosmogonic views related to the drum, and specifics of handling the drum; what is very important is that the drum is considered as an integral cosmic whole whose parts and aspects contain special meanings. The article provides references and connections to North American shamanism, traces interesting links between shaman’s attributes and tree symbolism, and contains plenty of other thoughts that have not been conclusively developed in contemporary research.

Considering that the volume has been done quite well in terms of print quality, and that the print run has been limited to 300 copies only, one can and should lament on the inaccuracies with image captions. A large part of those (figures 7–15) – at any rate in the copy we held – appear to have been erroneously placed; which is why there were unattractive glued strips over them with corrected captions.

The closing article in the volume is that “From Shamanic Beliefs among the Shors of the Kuznetsk Taiga” (p. 340–358)¹, which carries unique materials on the period when shamanism was originating among the Shors; most of these materials came from research done during Dyrenkova’s own field trips. There are a number of versions of this article available in archives of Russia and other countries; and one can only regret that the detailed drawing of a Shors drum that was there in the article version kept at the Shternberg archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences, neighbor to *MAE*, was not used in this publication. This would have given the description the much needed visual aid.

Most of the text in the volume, as well as various Turkic terms used in the articles, are provided in the author’s original version. On the one hand, this is good because it lets us observe how Dyrenkova’s knowledge of native languages was changing (to the better) as time progressed. On the other hand, minor typos of the author could probably be corrected, or at least pointed to, in footnotes or comments. (For instance, there is a mention of the Shors tale of *Altyn Qymyş* that Dyrenkova edited in the mid-1930s [p.63]; and, obviously, it should have read *Altyn Qylyş*). As for the translation of texts to Russian, the volume editors resorted to providing their own versions solely in the case when there was no translation offered. On the whole, these are quality translations (they are done by the linguist and Turkic scholar I. A. Nevskaya); although one can notice that at times there are untranslated and omitted words (for example, *çoj-ğara*, “black” [p.161]; comments to the word *çoj* are omitted); and at other times translations are oversimplified or incorrect (such as the following translations from the Teleut: *qoltuq ködürzäm*, “if I raise my armpit”, instead of “if I raise my hand” [p.165]; *qol yastyğyn*, “arm pillow”, instead of the “little cushion”, *podushechka* in Russian, which has become long accepted; *qorboçogun qorquspa! ürbeçegin ürküspe!*, “Don’t frighten! Don’t scare the sprout!”).

instead of “Don’t frighten children! Don’t scare the young growth!”; *yek*, “devil”, instead of “evil spirit”, as the term is used as a synonym for *aina* and *körmös*; *yek yamanyn yekirip!*, “disregard the skinny devil” – the translation is stylistically inaccurate and there also is an inaccuracy in interpreting the verb *t’iekker*, “drive out, expel”, possibly “defend oneself”; thus, it should have been, “driving out the evil tiek-spirit”). There are instances of incorrect rendering of verbal forms, sometimes overlapping with incorrect translations (*tarangan*, “combing her hair”, instead of “having combed her hair” (p. 251); *tapšyp kör*, “you let [one] suck”, instead of “feed, do some feeding, try to feed” (p. 253); *ayna yamanyn ayqyr tur*, “spell for the defense against *ayna*”, instead of “drive away the evil *ayna*-spirit”). The ritual language is always full of allegories and allusions, so attempts at literal translation do not necessarily lead in this case to the uncovering of implicit meanings (for instance, see the detailed analysis of, and comments on, the Teleut vocabulary in the book on *Teleutian Folklore* (Funk 2004).

The volume is supplied with the index of names, ethnonyms, geographical places, and administrative designations, which help the reader substantially.

Without a doubt, the volume appears as an important source for studying and understanding the culture of native peoples of Sayan-Altai in the first quarter of the twentieth century. What is just as important, however, is the example of analyzing worldview systems provided in these articles, as well as the object lesson of brilliant comparative research and the very modern way of seeing culture as an integrated whole where each element is connected to all others in a complex manner.

Hopefully, the publication of Dyrenkova’s work will now continue, as it is promised in the introduction to the volume, and the unique materials contained therein will finally become accessible to researchers who have or have not yet had a chance to examine them. It would be reasonable to suggest that the administration of the archive should think about the digitalization of Dyrenkova’s work and making it available on the Internet, which would expedite the process of bringing the scholar’s heritage back to the academic world. An opportunity to study these texts, equal for all interested scholars or students, is, as it seems to us, the most basic condition for the successful development of scientific thought.

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Notes

¹ Previously, fragments of the archival version of the article (drawn on the copy from the archive of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest) were published once (Funk 2005: 73–74).

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THREE BOOKS ABOUT EVENKI

Анна А. Сирина. *Эвенки и эвены в современном мире. Самосознание, природопользование, мировоззрение* [Anna A. Sirina. *Evenki and Eveni in the Modern World. Identity, Nature Relations, World View*]. Moskva: Vostochnaia literature, 2012. 604 pages

Ольга А. Поворознюк. *Забайкальские эвенки. Социально-экономические и культурные трансформации в XX–XXI* [Olga A. Povorozniuk. *Baikal-Region Evenki. Social-Economic and Cultural Transformations in the 20th and 21st Century*]. Moskva: IEA RAN, 2011

Tatiana Safonova & Istvan Santha. *Culture Contact in Evenki Land. A Cybernetic Anthropology of the Baikal region*. Leiden & Boston: Global Oriental, 2013.

Evenki seem to be the most eagerly studied Siberian indigenous group. Therefore, this is no wonder that the Evenki research has shaped several categories and concepts that are used in Siberian and Arctic studies, or in anthropology in general. First of all, the word 'shaman' comes from the Evenki (or Tungus) language and its spread is rooted in a fundamental work of the Russian Tsarist ethnographer Sergei Shirokogoroff – *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*. Another of Shirokogoroff's highly influential works – *Social Organisation of the Northern Tungus* – helped to shape pre II World War structuralist social anthropology from Scandinavia to South Africa. Soviet classic ethnographers like Boris Dolgikh, Il'ia Gurvich and Andrei Popov developed their Marxist-Leninist concepts – ethnicity, ethnohistory and culture of using their fieldwork data collected among Evenkis. Another Soviet ethnographer, Vladillen Tugolukov, is appreciated by researchers of nomadism for several accounts based on Evenki reindeer herders. In

Western academia, David Anderson (Anderson 2000) wrote his often cited monograph – Identity and ecology in Arctic Siberia: the number one reindeer brigade – also on Evenkis. Cambridge based Russian scholar Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003) and American anthropologist Alexia Bloch (Bloch 2004) wrote their monographs about the construction of Siberian indigenous ethnic identities also after studying Evenkis.

Evenkis are one of the biggest Siberian small indigenous people's, counting over 35.000 according to the 2010 Russian census. When adding closely related Eveni people – ca. 22.000 – and ca. 35.000 Evenki living in Mongolia and more than 500 Evenkis in China, the size of the Evenki becomes considerably large for a Siberian indigenous ethnicity. Traditionally, Evenkis have inhabited a large territory from the Yenissei River to Sakhalin and the Arctic Ocean to northern China and Mongolia, and have been historically known as nomadic reindeer herders and hunters. However, in Mongolia and Siberia several Evenki communities have shifted to semi-nomadic horse and cattle breeding.

The first book under review, Anna Sirina's (Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences) approximately a 600 page monograph, has been informally described as 'the Evenki book'. The book is based on her fieldwork materials, conducted among Evenki and Eveni in different Russian regions since the late 1980s combined with a careful reading of works of (mainly Soviet) ethnographers and archive data. The author has structured the book thematically, beginning with the analysis of different ethnonymes and their historical development, followed with the section about Evenki spirituality and discussing in further parts the use of nature, sense of space and world view. The first contribution of Anna Sirina to larger debates of Siberian studies is a well argued questioning of existing ethnic categories. Throughout the book, the author demonstrates her scepticism on the division between Evenki and Eveni, arguing that the cultural, linguistic or economic differences are not very significant, nor do Evenki and Eveni see themselves in many Siberian regions as separate people (e.g p. 56).

After a short review and discussion on Evenki rituals and religion, the author focuses on several topics that have been handled in individual works but rarely summed up by using complex material from different Evenki regional cultures. In Chapter 2 of Part II the focus is on Evenki names and nicknames, how these are linked subsequently to Russian and non-Russian influences. Chapter 3 of Part II thematises Evenki socialisation, especially what David Anderson has called 'Evenki pedagogy', the education and preparation of children for adult life. Here, the argument of independent learning through playing is also supported by the third book of this review, Safonova, and Santha. As an economic anthropologist, I find Part III extremely impressive, which – despite the title 'Nature use' (*Prirodopol'zovanie*) – scrutinises the Evenki economy and places it in the larger context of political, social and economic processes of Siberia and the Far East. For an anthropologist it is of great help in the discussion on post-Soviet reforms, indigenous rights, and laws on indigenous land use and reorganisation, topics that are linked historically to the Soviet economy and concept of 'tradition', often used to define the indigenous economy and social organisation (p. 207). Moreover, Sirina goes back to the pre-Soviet period to offer a complex interpretation on the development of Siberian indigenous identities and economies. A similar complex approach is applied for the first time in anthropological literature on the tradition of sharing and giving-Nimat. Nimat has been seldom mentioned and rarely discussed by Soviet ethnographers except in the context of one regional group. Here, Nimat in the works of Soviet scholars is combined

and compared with research from Western scholars on other Arctic regions. Sirina shows that sharing was one instrument of creating an egalitarian society, discussed also in two other books in this review (p. 324–325). Sirina's monograph is an excellent source of data for scholars about the Evenkis, this sophisticated bibliography helps to find comparative and thematic literature on any topic related to the past and present of Siberian indigenous people.

While Anna Sirina's book is a general analytical overview of Evenki culture and economy, then the other two books are in depth case studies. Olga Povorozniuk (Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences) has published a more regionally focused research on the Transbaikalian (*zabaikalskie*) Evenki. This book is based on the author's fieldwork in the region since 1998, unpublished archive materials and newly published archive resources. The focus of the monograph is – among others – on socio-demographic processes like the gender shift, migration and transformation of identity. What, however, makes the book outstanding, is that these developments and processes are discussed through the prism of establishment and transformation of the civil society in the post-Soviet era.

Probably one of the most valuable contributions of the book to existing post-Soviet studies literature is its discussion of the Soviet enlightenment (*prosveshchenie*) in relation to social and economic reforms and the impact of these changes on various cultural, economic and social processes in the aftermath of the Soviet Union. In the book, the author shows the complexity of the enlightenment on a micro level. Soviet era development was accompanied with increasing access to education and medical care; but also forced sedentarisation and psychological trauma (p. 58). The Transbaikalian Evenki, nevertheless, maintained private and state reindeer herding and close emotional ties with the animals. Interestingly, Povorozniuk argues that reindeer herding existed through the Socialist era particularly due to its low costs – reindeer did not need expensive facilities or preparation of winter supplies. Moreover, the Soviets believed that the northern indigenous people were psychologically dependant on reindeer. Therefore state reindeer herding was seen as a compromise, and a tool to prepare the former nomads for a sedentary Socialist life style (p. 60). This is one interesting argument in the ongoing debate on whether reindeer herding was (and is) a cheap or expensive sphere.

The discussion on Soviet enlightenment also shows that people's 'nostalgia' for the Soviet era is, in fact, a quest for the social security and free entertainment provided by the state. People miss child day care (p. 79) or the free cinema shown by *agitbrigady* (p. 86). Simultaneously, respondents have negative memories from boarding school (*internat*) which was an institutional tool for the social exclusion and marginalisation of Evenki children (p. 79). The Soviet enlightenment machinery introduced forms of collectively celebrated holidays that are still a firm part of the demonstration of 'traditional culture', like the Reindeer Herder Day, folkloristic elements in New Year celebrations or the First of May (p. 88–89). The controversy around the Soviet era 'civilisation process' is not specific or unique to Transbaikalian Evenkies, but is seldom analysed in its complexity. Therefore a deeper description and analysis of the Soviet era 'inventing the tradition' would have been welcome. The topic of the impact of the Soviet enlightenment continues throughout the book and is nicely wrapped up with the section about the different modes of the 'revival of the tradition' in contemporary times.

Safonova (Centre for Independent Social research, Saint Petersburg) and Santha (Research Centre for the Humanities at the Hungarian Academy of Science) joint monograph is the most theoretical of all three books. The book leans on the linguistic theories of Gregory Bateson, an [English anthropologist, social scientist, linguist, visual anthropologist, semiotician and cyberneticist](#) who extended cybernetics to the social sciences. In the context of the book, cybernetics is applied as a tool to identify 'things' via their relationships to other 'things'. The authors believe that Bateson's cybernetics is 'a non-hierarchical language' that is an appropriate tool to 'describe patterns within individual, social and ecological systems' (p. 11). The data was collected in two different regions near Baikal among reindeer herding and horse breeding Evenki. The main arguments of Safonova and Santha are that a) Evenki society is an egalitarian society b) mobility and movement are essential for the Evenki culture c) the egalitarian and non-hierarchical nature of Evenki are expressed by their spontaneous travels and behaviour. These qualities are not new in books and articles focused on different aspects of Evenki culture, society or economy. Apart from being discussed to some extent in the previous two books of the review, the spontaneity and 'Evenki pedagogy' was one of the main themes in the David Anderson monograph, whereas egalitarianism has also been addressed by Gail Fondahl (1998). However, there are segments in the book that include new concepts, intriguing approaches or interesting field material.

The book opens with an introduction that is thoroughly reflective, explaining the difficulties of adaption in the Evenki host communities, subsequent problems and conflicts that (in the spirit of Bateson) had to be solved in order to build a fruitful communication process. The authors also describe how the Evenki life style has influenced their own behaviour after the field work, for example encouraged their own spontaneity and 'wage hunting'. In the first chapter, the authors focus on companionship (i.e. communality) and *pokazukha*. *Pokazukha* is a Russian word for fake or showing off, in this context it is used as ritual behaviour aimed to impress outsiders. Safonova and Santha have been working on Evenki *pokazukha* for a long time and here have summed up their findings. The authors draw on the shamanistic rituals, which are more performed for outsiders than Evenki community members. In the chapter ethnic rituals that are presented as staged performances for Russians or Buryats are analysed. It is interesting that the authors have managed to look behind that screen. In Siberia, every anthropologist has come across such staged stylised performances but only a few have had the privilege to talk to the performers and find out what they really mean and how seriously these performances are taken. As it turns out in this text, Evenki tend to laugh when watching video recordings of their own dances and rituals (p. 31). The authors conclude that *pokazukha* is a strategy to guard their independence from outsiders and leave their egalitarian society untouched.

This book also gives an overview about the relationships and communication patterns of Evenki with the different ethnic groups they meet. The relationships with Russians and Buryats are complex but the nuances fit nicely within the already existing academic interpretations of interethnic relations in Siberia. Relations with the Chinese, however, seem to be qualitatively different to relations with Russian and other indigenous groups. As a fact, Siberian indigenous – Chinese relations have found very limited coverage in the academic literature, if at all. The authors show that Evenki-Chinese economic relations are based on the 150 years history of Chinese presence in the region, where

Chinese have been living from the Tsarist period and throughout Soviet times. During that time the Evenki and Chinese have developed a mutual cooperation that was in 2007 and 2008 used in the trade of nephrite that Chinese purchased with the aim to resell in China. The authors believe that the Chinese possess a certain 'Chinese ethos' that has been formed due the semi-legal status of Chinese workers in the region. Chinese try to maintain a similar autonomous position as the Evenki, keeping their distance from other groups and being independent of other ethnicities. The Chinese ethos in the context of the book means that the actors 'must work hard to maintain their hard-won independence' (p. 119). The Evenki and Chinese 'system of interaction' is based on 'paradoxes' of various kinds of reciprocity, mutual expectations and disappointments (p. 122–123). Using the concept of Bateson – the double bind – Safonova and Santha try to find a logic in – from first sight – irrational interethnic trade and reciprocity. This logic embeds the fluidity between business and friendship. It is not uncommon to move from one sphere to another and back. The shift between different types of interaction also involves shifts in family, gender and social roles (i.e. a wife can turn into a wage labourer and back). It is also remarkable how a partner applies strategies to hinder these shifts if they are unsuitable.

These three books are worthy complementary reading that not only illuminate different aspects of Evenki culture but also enrich the readers' understanding of the historical background of the current social, cultural, ethnic and political processes in Siberia. While Sirina's book is recommended as a basis work to those looking for the general picture and good references on Siberian natives, then the other two should be interesting for readers expanding their knowledge on different shades of post-Socialism in Russian Asia. Povorozniuk adds new facets to the knowledge of how economic restructuring of the indigenous community is linked to cultural and social process, the last work is a good read for people looking for fresh interpretations of formal and informal social relations.

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