

NEWS IN BRIEF

SIBIRSKIE CHTENIIA. IX INTERNATIONAL SIBERIAN STUDIES CONFERENCE. KUNSTKAMERA, SAINT PETERSBURG, 28–30. OCTOBER 2013

Sibirskie Chteniia is a famous Siberian Studies conference, the place to go when you study Siberia and are interested in the Arctic. The fact that the conference is organised by the Kunstkamera and many sessions take place in Kunstkamera, a semi-ethnographic museum established by Peter the Great, adds an historical atmosphere to the event.

This year Sibirskie Chteniia was a truly international conference, bringing together participants from Russia, Eastern Europe, Western Europe and North America. The international flair of the event was combined with serious academic content that was emphasised by the historic locations of the conference venues.

The opening plenary session took place in the Russian Geographical Society, in the inner city, not far away from the Nevski Prospekt. The event was well planned and gave the participants a notion of community. In this session, leading Siberian researchers gave an overview of ongoing projects in their home institutions and home countries. We received a coherent picture about the state of affairs of Siberian/Arctic research in Germany (Otto Habeck, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology), Austria (Peter Schweitzer, University of Vienna), Moscow (Dmitri Funk, Russian Academy of Science) and Saint Petersburg (Nikolai Vakhtin, European University, Saint Petersburg). The emphasis was on new plans and projects, for example Nikolai Vakhtin explained the prospects for a new Northern Studies program at his university. The atmosphere in the plenary session was friendly and informal, the general interest in the talks was obvious.

After the opening session, the conference continued with panels. Unfortunately, the panels were located in different buildings around the inner city of Saint Petersburg, which is a large area with quite a complicated transport system. Bad weather – cold rain and wind – did not motivate one to switch between panels too actively. Therefore I was unable to visit as many different panels as I'd hoped, and therefore chose sessions that had the biggest number of attractive talks. This was one reason why I spent my time at two Tungus (Evenki) sessions. The topics covered here belonged more to the traditional research topics in Siberian indigenous studies. Olga Povorozniuk's (Russian Academy of Science, Moscow) talk was based on her recently published works on the Transbaikalian Evenki and discussed social relations between different categories of incomers and local Evenki. The comparison with other regions showed that the local social environment is in every region different, and largely influenced by the concrete socio-economic environment. Donatas Brandišauskas (Vilnius University) presented a theoretically well presented talk about the ontology of luck in the Evenki culture. While most presentations in the Tungus' panels were based on current field material, then Jaanika Vider (University of Oxford) added an historic dimension, discussing the expeditions and museum collections of Polish-British researcher Maria A. Czaplicka in the light of modern theory on Evenki studies.

To me, the most enjoyable talks were on topics that are outside of the sphere of traditional Siberian indigenous studies. Vladimir Kisel (Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography, Saint Petersburg) focused on home made alcohol (*samogon*) brewing among Tuva people. It was interesting to hear how the technology of alcohol brewing was adapted from Russians, modified and became part of Tuvian culture. The process of the revitalisation of Tuvian home brew as a symbol for traditional culture is not unusual, yet unexpected for the region. Vera Galindabaeva and Nikolai Karbainov from Kazan addressed the topic of Mestization in Buryatia. This is an increasing tendency all over Siberia; the growing Mestizo population that develops its distinctive ethnic identity, similar to the Canadian Métis. Bukharan migrants in Siberia were the topic for one very interesting presentation. Svetlana Korusenko from the Omsk Russian Academy of Science has followed the history of the Il'iaminov family, who appeared in Siberia centuries ago and became a successful trading family. The history of the Il'iaminovs in the Soviet era was a typical trail of repression and hiding. The family, however, maintained its coherence and sense of history and is today emotionally connected to the places where their ancestors lived.

The Sibirskie Chteniia conference is a great opportunity to understand how broad Siberian studies are today. From linguistic studies to the research on industrial development, there are multiple scholars engaged in interesting and important work exploring issues that are relevant not only in the framework of regional studies, but also to be regarded as a valuable contribution to academic work at an international level.

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