

THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THE STATE IN SUBARCTIC SIBERIA. By NIKOLAI V. SSORIN-CHAIKOV. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. ISBN 0-8047-3462-3. xii + 261 p., map, photos, bib., index. Hardbound. US\$55.00.

This is a fascinating, and mostly successful, book that provides a partial “ethnography” of the Russian state in its engagement with its northern peripheries and its attempts to subjugate them. It tacks between theoretical premises and arguments, ethnographic and archival texts, and illustrative (and often entertaining) anecdotes from the author’s fieldwork in and near “Katonga,” the alias for an Evenki village along the Podkamennaya Tunguska River in Central Siberia. Thus, it can be read for several purposes, offering new interpretive frameworks for thinking about Russian/Soviet colonization and “development” of the hinterlands, applying others’ analytical frameworks to the specifics of the Siberian context, and providing ethnographic information on the Evenki of this region. It offers a panoply of ideas, some more convincingly interconnected than others, but all interesting in their own right.

Ssorin-Chaikov received his undergraduate training in Moscow, with stints of fieldwork on the Podkamennaya Tunguska in the late Soviet period. He then pursued graduate training in Anthropology at Stanford University, carrying out fieldwork in the same area in the early post-Soviet period. The different traditions in his training are evident in the book’s approaches, and his bibliography includes a wide range of English- and Russian-language sources.

The book states as its goal “to chart forms of governance that expand alongside these displacements [of indigenous lifestyles and identities], to examine the social life of the state in everyday contexts that extend beyond formal state institutions, and to theorize statehood from the unique vantage point of its self-perceived limits at northern ‘borderlands’” (p. 4). To do so, it offers six substantive chapters, as well as an introduction to the author’s theoretical frameworks, and a conclusion. A number of the chapters are based on previously published papers and have a stand-alone quality that somewhat challenges the cohesiveness of the book.

Ssorin-Chaikov initially lays out several premises that he will explore: 1) that “failure” is a continuous discourse during the Tsarist and Soviet periods and is used to invoke further state intervention (drawing on Bruce Grant’s (1995) idiom of “a century of perestroikas”; 2) that “the state” and “indigenous” are not fixed cultural constructions, but domains recursively and differently defined in relation to each other over time; and 3) that the etatization of work during the Soviet period eventually led to the production of new “traditional” lifestyles and identities among the Evenki, who discursively exploited concepts of “modernity” and “traditionality” in their attempts to manipulate or deflect state agendas. The book then follows a generally chronological development, though with necessary back-

and-forth between periods. Chapter 2 looks at the ways in which the Evenki (Tungus) discursively become Tsarist subjects in a variety of textual media (ethnographic reports, official documents, laws, etc.), while often being portrayed—paradoxically—as beyond the administrative reach of the Russian state. Ssorin-Chaikov explicates the colonial imaginings of Siberian “wildness” and indigenous “lawlessness” as strategies for both justifying state failures to extract resources from the hinterland and representing backward “stateless” areas as in need of sustained intervention by a European Russia. A brief historical background of state presence in the Podkamennaya Tunguska basin provides a backdrop for later chapters.

Ssorin-Chaikov then investigates the debates of the early 20th century on whether the Evenki (as well as other indigenous Northerners) were to be regarded as primitive communists, relatively untainted in their social organization by contacts with Russian society during the Tsarist period, and on the appropriate locus of Evenki administration. Those involved in striving to identify the “ethnographically correct” political-territorial organization argued about the authenticity and survival of Evenki social institutions. The chapter is well illustrated with numerous anecdotes about attempts to implement Soviet institutions of “native administration” on the ground.

Chapter 4 continues to explore constructions of Evenki as “other.” It looks at how a number of individuals (kulaks, shamans) were identified as “polluted” by capitalism—and thus were purged. Traditional kinship structures themselves became suspect: Ssorin-Chaikov argues that kinship came to entail a double meaning: as an ideology which Soviet officials purported was used to mask class domination and as a lineage through which Soviets traced potential “contamination.” Class identity was seen as genealogically transmittable, justifying purges of entire clans.

The author also calls our attention to how Soviet discourse manipulated history to locate the genesis of the crises that plagued the early Soviet years (e.g., the famines of the 1920s) in the pre-Soviet period. These disasters were explained by Soviet powers not as the result of Soviet policies, but rather as the “starting points” for reforms that would erase the possibility of such events in the future. Moreover, Ssorin-Chaikov perceptively notes how Soviet power is recursively identified as being established “for the first time” in the Far North, during the unremitting (yet shifting) campaigns (e.g., the organization of clan soviets, the collectivization of reindeer, and the founding of collective farms).

The idioms of nomadism form the initial focus of Chapter 5. Ssorin-Chaikov contrasts Evenki discourses regarding the spontaneity and flexibility of taiga life with those of state regulatory discipline, explores the limits of that discipline, and gives examples of how both are exploited in specific situations by Evenki herders and state officials. He then draws on the work of János Kornai (1980), who argued that shortages, rather than acting as a brake, encouraged expansion in socialist economics, and

on Caroline Humphrey's (1983) observations about the criticality of bargaining and allocative power to the everyday operations of socialist economies, to examine labour shortages and bargaining power in the context of Katonga's collective farm economy. He explicates how Evenki blame their failure to meet state orders on the failure of the state itself to provide them the means to do so. He also traces the way in which labour shortages were understood and employed to recruit outside workers, and how this approach worked to turn the Evenki into a social and economic underclass.

"Lumpenized" youth have resulted from the above forces, and from an educational system that does not prepare them for the employment opportunities they will face. The author looks at this phenomenon historically, then traces the recent romanticization of the taiga as the authentic and appropriate locus of Evenki life (borrowing from Istan Rev's (1998) "retrotopia" concept), and the changing importance of situated (i.e., village versus taiga) knowledge to survival, with its implications for educational institutions and practices. Youth who have returned to the taiga are few, but reified as "real Evenki."

Ssorin-Chaikov's ideas on the cultural production of traditionalism in the contemporary Russian North find further development in the chapter entitled "Mothering Tradition." He argues that traditionalism is a product of Soviet reforms in the North. He traces the paradoxical revival of discussions regarding a native women's appropriate place—at a time when birth rates are low, death rates high, and concerns about cultural and genetic survival widespread. Ssorin-Chaikov notes the irony of urban, professional (non-traditional) Evenki women propounding the need for Evenki women to return to the taiga, marry Evenki men, and produce Evenki children who are brought up knowing (traditional) Evenki culture. He also describes how Soviet and post-Soviet economic policies have created a Russian analogue to the west's "welfare mother" among a significant percentage of the village-based female population.

The Soviet Union acted as a "weak state" in its peripheries, Ssorin-Chaikov concludes, yet he draws our attention to the way it thrived on weaknesses and failures. He also underscores the irony that Evenki are continually imagined as being "outside the state," both by Evenki persons and by state officials.

The book will be most accessible to Russian specialists: Ssorin-Chaikov assumes a general knowledge of Soviet history and Soviet institutions. His prose at times suffers from a pretentious intellectual self-reflexivity (e.g., his rationale for use of "panels" to introduce extended quotes, p. 78), and on a few occasions bogs down in what can be flippantly described as post-modern prattle. Yet it occasionally ascends to wonderful levels: witness his apt coinage of the term "ethnographic present-perfect" to characterize early Soviet ethnographic writings (p. 88). Continuity between chapters and chapter sections is sometimes natural, sometimes forced, and sometimes lacking.

But for the most part, the book is engaging, well written, and perceptive. It is an important contribution to improving our understanding of indigenous life in the Soviet and post-Soviet Subarctic.

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"MUST WE ALL DIE?": ALASKA'S ENDURING STRUGGLE WITH TUBERCULOSIS. By ROBERT FORTUINE. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2005. ISBN 1-889963-69-0. xxxix + 264 p., maps, b&w illus., notes, glossary, appendices, index. Hardbound. US\$39.95.

Robert Fortune (pronounced Four-TYNE) is Alaska's pre-eminent medical historian. As we expected, this fact-filled book is thoroughly researched and meticulously documented. His preface begins with an account of an x-ray survey in a remote village early in 1946, when a distraught father pleaded, "Five of my children die this way — I don't want my other kids to go. Must we all die of the TB?"

For the educated layperson, anthropologist, or historian, Fortune's introductory chapter provides necessary background concerning the medical aspects and history of tuberculosis (TB), a disease that is carried by one-third of the world's population, killing about 1.8 million people each year, and still increasing in incidence globally.

During the Russian occupation of Alaska (1741–1867), TB was readily transmitted from infected Russians to the aboriginal people. The Native people lived in relative poverty under crowded and unhygienic conditions, so that the almost unprecedented TB epidemic spread like wildfire across Alaska, affecting people of all ages.

From 1926 to 1930, the TB death rate for Alaska Natives was 655 per 100 000, compared to 42 per 100 000 for whites. In southeastern Alaska, females aged 20 to 29, in their prime childbearing years, had the horrific mortality