

*Evenki Microcosm: Visual Analysis of Hunter-Gatherers Lifestyles in Eastern Siberia.* Safonova T. and I. Santha. 2019. Fürstenberg/Havel: Verlag der Kulturstiftung Sibirien SEC Publications. 173 p, softcover. ISBN 978-3-942883-36-8. €48.00.

Tatyana Safonova and Istvan Santa's book is a kind of remake of a classic book written by the American anthropologists, Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, where they studied Balinese character through the method of photo analysis (Bateson & Mead, 1942). Safonova and Santa applied this method to the three Evenki local communities from the Baunt district of the Buryat Republic of the Russian Federation, among whom they conducted their fieldwork in 2000s. The authors use the word 'microcosm' as a metaphor in order to show the openness and ever-changing character of the Evenki world (p. 8).

This case of the anthropological mimesis, expanded by the author's creativity, gave a very good result. From the huge amount of visual material gathered, including 14 thousand negatives, 3 thousand slides and 100 h of video records, the authors selected 577 photos, structuring them into 6 sections. Each section reflects special features of the modern Evenki culture, namely shaman tree, hunting, gathering, reindeer herding, new technologies and the nephrite road. All these themes correlate with a discourse in anthropological research today. Apart from these basic themes, many other questions are touched upon: the anthropology of human-animal relationships, anthropology of emotions, anthropology of materiality and some others. Such a wide range of themes became possible due to the publication format selected. Every book spread, excluding the preface, contains a series of 5–9 colour photographs, selected according to a specific theme, with short comments on the opposite page. One would not come across such photos on the pages of illustrated books, as they do not illustrate the text, but on the contrary, the text is written for the photo's comments. Many interpretations are based on the actor-network theory.

The Evenki communities under consideration have a long-term history of relationships with the Russian state. Way back in 1822, the "Codex on *inorodtsy* [alien] management" divided Siberian indigenous people into three categories: wandering, nomadic and settled. Most present-day Evenki live settled lives, and many are the descendants of mixed marriages. Many Evenki work or live on social payments and pensions. The question remains, are such communities "egalitarian"? The concept of egalitarian societies does not completely coincide with the gender structure of modern hunter-gatherers, nor to extractivism practices aimed at getting extra profit. Nowadays Evenki are definitely not 'classical' hunter-gatherers. The life of Evenki today is well illustrated in the book; however, it lacks concluding remarks of the Bateson and Mead kind that would be helpful in order to understand the present-day hunter-gatherers.

Safonova and Santa begin their book with a section "the Shamanic tree", which is understood as "not only an ensemble of things", but as "a living system, which repeats same patterns of organisation as other microcosmic entities, such as hunting hut or a hunter himself" (p. 11). The Shamanic tree exists in the book without a shaman. The authors regard the modern practice of leaving gifts (matches, cigarettes, bread, tea and so on) on the shamanic tree, drawing attention to these material objects in the Evenki everyday life. In their interpretation, these objects are the subjects, or actants. This takes one away from the shamanic tree, but brings one closer to the understanding of interconnectedness and integrity in the Evenki culture.

Evenki hunting is shown by Safonova and Santa as a cyclic process, in which a hunter, hunting dog and horse, as well as material objects, such as a hunting rifle, and prey are involved. It is stressed that each of them acts in its own regime. On the basis of photo analysis, the authors suggest four emotional characteristic phases of Evenki behaviour during hunting – anxiety, excitement, joy and calmness (p. 55). Judging from the photographs, these emotions are present, but they are not peculiar to all Evenki groups. The hunter's trip is preceded by a moment of preparation for the hunt and decision-making (it is necessary to take into account all the circumstances of the place and time, planning route, thinking over alternatives and so on) that receive no reflection in the visual images. Feeling only anxiety, a hunter would never find an animal track, and would not anticipate its or his own actions. Such an emotion as joy and its intentional expression, traditionally intrinsic to the Yakut and Buryat people, as well as to those Evenki who fell under their influence, was a manner of communication with the spirit master of the *taiga* of representatives of the Turk and Mongol world. One gets the impression that such behaviour is

characteristic of the whole Evenki hunting culture in general, which is not confirmed in ethnographical literature.

Safonova and Santa consider gathering as an egalitarian practice, but exclusively in the wide sense, as gathering not only food resources (berries, roots, eggs), but actually any resources (fire wood, ice for melting, reindeer blood taken for the veterinarian test). This approach lets them include into a gathering economy almost any practice for life support, if the distinction of one class of things from another is needed. Using this approach, the authors could have considered their own practice of gathering video material, which would have added spice to their analysis. The question remains, does Evenki's gathering have any special features? The proposition that gathering is not possible without mess and chaos (p. 103) sounds overly categorical, as Evenki do not live in a chaotic environment, otherwise they would not have traditional ecological knowledge about their land. The authors believe that "gathering does not need a concrete plan for the processing of gathered things . . . [the gatherer] can store the gathered things or postpone the decision about what to do with them" (p. 75). This does not always happen. For instance, gathering berries is usually preplanned and not a spontaneous action. In other words, Evenki do not waste their energy.

Photos in the section on reindeer herding are selected according to ideas about existing relationships between people/humans and reindeer. These relations are seen in Evenki herding practices, including the construction of fences and gates, feeding reindeer in the camp, watching, catching and killing them and so on, as well as images of reindeer in Evenki culture. The authors reveal some new nuances of the human–reindeer relations, such as pleasure and positive emotions experienced by humans towards their reindeer, both finding many benefits in living together. The authors comment that the herd is egalitarian, and "there is no leading animal that sets the direction for others to follow" (p. 109). Ethologists also believe that any reindeer with the high level of defensive motivation may find itself as a leader of the herd, but, nevertheless, an adult female reindeer more often than not plays the leading role (Baskin, 2011, p. 58).

The book well illustrates the use and repair of new technological devices, a combination of the parallel use of old and new technologies (for example, a hand saw and a motor saw, electric and kerosene lamps) in photographs and textual comments.

In the last section, T. Safonova and I. Santa pay attention for the first time to the organisation of the nephrite business by one Evenki community, which was involved in the extraction of light-coloured nephrite in 1997–2014. The shady nature of this theme limits the

possibility of making a deep study (scholars studying the extraction of mammoth tusks face the same problem), and also imposes restrictions on publication of the material. The authors do not go deeply into the history of the creation of the community, the social and ethnic structure of its members, or economic practices, but they share their own emotions and sense of the infrastructure, created in the taiga. The photos demonstrate the well-established system of nephrite extraction and transportation to Ulan-Ude at a time when there was no interest in or control over the nephrite business on Evenki lands on the part of the State.

It is paradoxical that in this work, sensitive to a variety of actants and details, one does not hear the voices of indigenous people. Since G. Bateson and M. Mead life and anthropological approaches have changed. Thanks to the authors, one can see the Evenki in their everyday environment, but today it seems not enough.

The selected photos and their interpretations provoke a response, pushing one to look at familiar and little-known themes from a new angle. The book gives occasion to think about the methodology and history of anthropological discipline, about the possibility of remaking the best samples of classical works and about the advantages and limitations which one might be faced with in this way. This beautiful book, richly illustrated and well-written, will be interesting for specialists in the areas of ethnography, anthropology, geography and visual art, as well as for a wider audience looking for opportunities to get to know and see indigenous Siberia and its diverse inhabitants. An electronic version of the book is available on the site: [http://www.kulturstiftung-sibirien.de/bibliothek\\_R.html](http://www.kulturstiftung-sibirien.de/bibliothek_R.html). This review is written with the support of the Russian Science Foundation (grant № 18-18-00309). (Anna Sirina, Department of the North and Siberia, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Leninskii pr., 32A, 117991, Moscow, Russia; Department of Siberia, Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Universitetskaya nab., 3, 199034, St. Petersburg, Russia ([annas@iea.ras.ru](mailto:annas@iea.ras.ru)))

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