

# ЭТНОСЫ СИБИРИ



## Часть 1

Материалы международной  
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## C.A.R. Campbell (University of Alberta, Canada) Soviet stroitel'stvo and the Tura culture-base

The Evenkis, in a single nomadic migration, crossed a mountain of one hundred years from clan organization to socialism.

Uvachan, V. N. *The Road of the Northern Peoples to Socialism*. 1971. P. 4

This paper explores some of the issues surrounding the projects of Sovietization among indigenous Evenkis living near the Nizhnaya Tunguska river. The implementation of Soviet projects marked the first steps towards the imposition of a new landscape in the 20th century and were the beginning of a radical re-construction of socio-cultural and ecological relations. The implementation of these projects was dependent largely upon the organization of Soviet outposts called culture-bases. The first was built in the Turukhansk subarctic as a cultural and political centre for the Evenkis in the area. The site for the Tura culture-base [*turin-skaya kul'tbasa*] was chosen in part for its remoteness and was constructed between 1927 and 1928, not long after the civil war that raged across the former Russian Empire. The outpost was planned and constructed under the auspices of the Committee for the Assistance to the Peoples of the Northern Borderlands (Committee for the North). It was the explicit aim of the Committee for the North to undertake the *Sovietization* of the indigenous peoples of the taiga and tundra while 'helping' them in their cultural upbringing. The culture-bases marked one of the first concrete steps in advancing this goal. They were, however, also meant to be centres for regional development and scientific exploration (Parkhomenko, 1930, p. 125). For the indigenous Evenkis (then known as Tungus) living near the Nizhnaya Tunguska and Kochechum rivers, the Tura culture-base became the first major colonial project in the area. Indeed, for hundreds kilometres in all directions there had never been more than one or two small cabins or churches built by either traders and missionaries. To the hunters and herders this was a truly novel construction. And, as it would soon become evident, the Tura culture-base represented but the tip of a massive cultural, military, political, and economic effort that would lead to unimaginable changes in the social-cultural landscape of east-central Siberia.

## Sovietization and the City of the Tungus

If the 'revolutionary proletariat conducts systematic propaganda among them, and the Soviet governments come to their assistance with all the means at their disposal – in that event, it would be wrong to assume that the capitalist stage of development is inevitable for the backwards peoples.

Lenin V.I. 1920. P. 35

Culture-bases, as the first steps toward socialist culture, played a deciding role in the cultural progress of the Peoples of the North.

Uvachan, V.N. 1971. P. 168

The arrival of socialist culture in east-central Siberia initially mimicked Orthodox missionizing practices and other proven agitational techniques that had been developed in rural areas of Eastern Europe and Central Asia during the revolution and civil war (1). Literacy campaigns, agitational theatre, socialist reading rooms, film nights, and posters were all used extensively in propagandizing and agitational efforts. A 1921 statement from the All-Russian Central Executive Committee states that "through agitation, the exposure of all kinds of frauds, the revelations concerning relics and other facts, the consciousness of masses of workers and peasants was cleared of the rubbish with which it had been choked for centuries" (cited in Rosenberg, 1990). Exposure became key concept in the righteous path of socialism. But other techniques were also used, "beginning in the 1930s", writes one scholar of Soviet posters, political art "was to provide a visual script, an incantation designed to conjure up new modes of thinking and conduct, and to persuade people that the present and the future were indistinguishable" (Bonnell, 1997, p. 14).

Richard Taylor describes the first *agitpunkti*, located at railway termini and junctions as "a standard design for purpose-built *politdoma*... stationary centres for in-depth propaganda saturation of the local population... the design included a library, schoolroom, canteen, cinema and stage..." (Taylor, 1979, p. 247). Through journals, newspapers, radio, and other media, techniques of cultural agitation were shared among the community of Communist Party organizers and agitators. While agitational techniques were publicised in workers papers and specialist journals, some of the people involved in the implementation of the culture-bases brought with them their own personal agitational experiences. I.M. Sus-

lov—one of the key people involved in the location and construction of the Tura culture-base—was assistant-director of a Siberian Agitpoezd between 1921-1922 (2). The Tura culture-base borrowed heavily on these proven techniques and quickly became a model for Soviet development and discipline throughout Siberia (3); the techniques designed and developed there and in other early culture-bases would be exported and replicated in over twenty similar bases throughout the Soviet North.

Since the earliest days of the revolution in European Russia, methods had been devised for cultural agitation among peasants and workers. The techniques grew and changed over the years and established a practical base upon which culture-bases borrowed heavily. The library (or the centre for the "liquidation of illiteracy"), the veterinary clinic, games rooms, etc. were all established technologies of cultural agitation and ideological conversion. Publications such as the *Journal for the League of Militant Atheists* provided revues of films that had been produced explicitly in the battle against traditional religions. Suslov, for example published his works on agitating against shamanism in this journal (later published in book form). In 1931 a film titled *Dyliacha* was shot at the Tura culture-base by Sibkinofabrika director, Bulatov. A review of the film in *Sovetskii Sever* discusses its potential for both anti-religious agitation and political-enlightenment-work among the natives (Golubev, 1931, p. 146).

At the root of Soviet cultural construction was the assimilation of many nationalities under one Soviet banner – a process that was driven by the Party's perceived need to formalize socialist content. Amir Weiner describes the "overarching Soviet enterprise [as being]: the unfolding revolutionary transformation of society from an antagonistically divided entity into a conflict-free, harmonious body. The view of society as a malleable construct went hand in hand with a continuous purification campaign seeking to eliminate divisive and obstructing elements" (Weiner, 2003, p. 243). There is an interesting parallel in Weiner's discussion of the notion of purity. For instance, ethnographer Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov writes about an intentionally altered photograph from the late 1920s to talk about the construction of ideal images. In this case, an ethnographically unwanted detail was removed in the printing process so that a picture of ethnic 'purity' could be displayed in a museum setting. Ssorin-Chaikov makes a significant analogy to the social alteration of society, which parallels Weiner's discussion of purification: "The organization of

the clan soviets followed the logic of making 'ethnographically correct' photographs: it was to rid the scene of contaminating elements of the tsarist old regime" (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2003, p. 46). Part of this house-cleaning exercise entailed the displacement of the visual traces of Tsarist and Orthodox Christian culture.

Cleansing, however, extended beyond the icons of the Church and the coins of the Tsar: the shamanic practices of Evenkis were also targets for socialist defacement. In these acts the performance of destroying artifacts and debunking non-soviet beliefs were the symbolic and physical defacement of non-Soviet cultures. Non-conforming bodies were marginalized, ostracized, and jettisoned as the "Russian proletariat swept as a cleansing storm over the length and breadth of the Russian empire" (Uvachan, 1975, p. 14). The program of enculturation pursued the proposition that the Soviet Union would be National in Form and Socialist in Content. The logic of *sovietization* was predicated, initially on the cultivation of interclass conflict, which, in terms of an imagined pre-capitalist society, required some philosophical and ethnological craftwork but played out much the same as elsewhere in Russia (Slezkine, 1994): Religious leaders (in this case Shamans and Orthodox priests) were singled out as agents that served to obscure the real material basis of capitalist society and wealthy kulaks (in this case those who were perceived to be wealthy herders) as capitalist exploiters.

Some regional innovations in socialist enlightenment came in the form of techniques specifically designed to meet the social and environmental conditions of the central Siberian taiga. One Soviet era poster depicts a shaman and a kulak walking away from a Native Soviet meeting. The poster reads: "Choose workers in the native soviets. Don't tolerate shamans and kulaks" [*Vybirai v tuzemnyi soviet trudyashchikhsya. Ne pusakai shamana i kulaka*]. In a study on the history of aviation in the Soviet Union, Scott Palmer writes: "In literature and the arts, on film and in the press, Soviet leaders employed aeronautical imagery to combat the backwardness of the Russian countryside and to assert their authority across the nation's vast hinterlands" (Palmer, 2000, p. 3). Airplanes were used in the cultural revolution for more than their symbolic powers: "In an effort to eradicate peasant 'superstition', pilots took rural believers into the air in order to prove that the heavens held no God, no angels, and no other celestial spirits... pilots routinely detailed the number of 'air baptisms' (*vosdushniye kreshcheniya*) that they performed on their

routes" (Palmer, 2000, pp. 21-22). Similar efforts to use modern technologies and scientific discoveries to debunk animistic, shamanistic, and otherwise 'backwards and superstitious' beliefs were employed in Siberia. In spite of these more spectacular displays of propaganda, however, it is worth observing that the bulk of the effort at enlightenment and 'uplifting' seemed to rely more on the provision of practical services (medicine, veterinary services, food staples, and entertainment) than on regular stunts of modernity.

Nonetheless, how these techniques of socialist enlightenment came to be adapted and used in the context of Soviet Siberia is poorly understood and the apparently programmatic nature of socialist enlightenment projects may be partly an artefact of research that has focused more on bureaucratic and creative origins to the detriment of how these efforts were read or received. What is needed is a more nuanced picture of a local response to, and interpretation of, *sovietisation* efforts as well as a document of the inevitable variations and innovations that occurred.

In spite of the cultural agitation programs in the early years of Soviet power, the meaning of 'progress' to local Evenkis might have been less about an assault on their beliefs and practices than a promise of stability in the supply of imported foods and medicines. As Fitzpatrick notes in the context of European Soviet Russia, "[a]s far as we can tell, most people accepted the dichotomy of 'backwardness' and 'culture' and the proposition that the regime was helping the population to become less backward and more cultured that lay at the heart of the Soviet message" (Fitzpatrick, 2003, p. 174). Again, there is work to be done here, to better learn how people actually thought about these projects. For the intelligentsia and in the journals and newspapers of the time, the battle between Evenkis own 'cultural backwardness', or 'cultural impoverishment', and the goals of the larger Soviet society towards socialist modernity was characterised as a social-temporal hurdle. The impediment was time and the culture-bases were the primary vehicles used by the Committee for the North in over coming this hurdle. V.N. Uvachan, the Soviet-Evenki historian, mythologized push forward as a mountain across which the Evenkis, with the help of their Soviet brothers and sisters, had to cross: They traversed a mountain of one hundred years.

1. Bonnell's *Iconography of Power* (1997) and Taylor's "Agitation, Propaganda and the Cinema" are both excellent explorations into this subject. See also

Rosenberg (1990), Nilsson (1979), White (1988), Kenez (2001), Stites (1989), and Mally (1990). Anderson and Orekhova (2002) also note the similarities in 'enlightenment' techniques.

2. GANO 3 54-1-350.

3. The journal "Soviet Sever" was one of the key journals for disseminating information about the culture bases. The Tura culture-base is mentioned more frequently than any other. Both Petra Rethmann (2000) and Bruce Grant (1995) who work in the Russian Far East have written about the importance of the culture-bases in the development of the Soviet state.

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**Meeting Ancestors in Population Statistics.**

**The Soviet Polar Census 1926-27 and the ethnographical expedition of the Krasnoyarsk Museum of Regional Studies 2004 – report on an ongoing research**

The Soviet Polar Census is a very unique and wealthy ethnohistoric source, which can enrich our knowledge of the processes and changes that indigenous people of Siberia underwent in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This first soviet population registration was undertaken in 1926/27 by a large team of Russian scholars, which included the young B.O. Dolgikh. This census, which stretched throughout the polar and sub-polar regions of the Turukhansk region, allowed Dolgikh to develop his ethnographic skills whilst working as a registrar. A team of scholars based at the University of Aberdeen, the Krasnoyarsk Museum of Regional Studies [KKKM] and the State Archive of Krasnoyarsk Territory [GAKK] are now digitizing and publishing this archival material. In order to build a bridge between the historic census material and the current indigenous communities, a recent summer expedition was conducted along the Yenisei to interview descendents of those included in the '26 census.

The Polar Census was part of a bigger, union-wide census, but was designed to fit the specific circumstances of registering nomadic indigenous people in the North. The ethnohistorical value of this census is as immense as its statistical content. It consists of distinct multi-paged statistical forms, which record the socio-economic conditions of the local households, settlements and married couples, and give mainly numeral information (such as quantities of produce and equipment) as well as details of family composition. However, and perhaps most interestingly, these statistical documents are accompanied by an extensive archive of