

Fresh Eyes

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Once again, this issue of *Sibirica* is diverse and disparate. We move from understanding food security as a laboratory in the northern districts of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) all the way to a brief yet trilingual Tuvan geological glossary, with stops along the way to learn about an influential yet little-known Buryat activist, as well as cultural developments in Magadan in the 1950s and 1960s. However, what unites these varied pieces is a central theme of creativity, and the effects of approaching problems with fresh eyes and new ideas even amid restrictive conditions or systems—whether political or infrastructural.

We begin with Nikolai Goncharov's ethnographic exploration of food security in the Allaikhovskii region of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). He combines his own fieldwork materials with other sources on the region to shed light on how the precarity of the food situation in this Arctic region has led to many adaptations and innovations. Here he takes a fresh perspective by bringing in Bruno Latour's (1983) theoretical conceit of the "laboratory" to explain how inhabitants in the region are constantly at risk—and thus always engaging in "experiments" to improve their methods of food procurement. He provides numerous ethnographic examples and case studies to illustrate the way that people may never have absolute security in terms of subsistence, and thus must always think outside the usual parameters in order to find greater resiliency and reassurance amidst changing and unpredictable conditions.

Our next two articles are historical, and both focus on themes of cultural activism and transformation as individuals and institutions sought to work within the constraints of strict political control in different times and places. We begin with Robert Montgomery's detailed portrait of Bato-Dalai Ochirov, a Buryat activist and politician, who has not received attention proportional to his multitude of accomplishments. Ochirov had a rather brief but very full life. He was most active around the turn of the twentieth century, and engaged in myriad creative, bureaucratic, and political activities that sought to promote and maintain Buryat culture during a turbulent period. As Montgomery



notes, Ochirov strove to do what he could within an often-repressive system to ensure Buryat concerns would be heard.

Pavel Grebenyuk's article also focuses on the new and fresh—in this case, he discusses what I might call a “mini-perestroika” that occurred in Magadan oblast in the 1950s and 1960s, a culturally dynamic period during which the region transitioned away from the Dalstroy administration. As he stresses, this transformation was quite drastic in many ways, but it still occurred within a very rigid party-led framework. Like what we see in Montgomery's discussion of Ochirov's actions with the restrictive governance system of the State Duma, we see how actors attempted to create things anew within frameworks that often worked against them to curb innovation. In this article, Grebenyuk explores the creative and administrative tensions between the old and new ways of living in the Magadan region. He reveals how Dalstroy histories, still fresh in public memory, are balanced with the desire to move away from this prior association with the region and led to the expression of a novel regional identity by artists, writers, and other creative representatives.

Finally, we are also happy to present something a little different than our usual reports. Andrey Mongush's annotated glossary of Tuvan geological terms is a richly detailed sketch that assesses vocabulary related to geology in the language and suggests novel terms (either neologisms or repurposed words and phrases) for those items that do not currently have an indigenous Tuvan form. The original glossary was Russian-Tuvan, but it is presented here with an English translation as well. Mongush's discussion presents historical and current usage of the glossary items and provides thorough and thoughtful information on etymology and derivations of the words, as well their connections to toponyms and oronyms in Tuva. The creation of Tuvan terms to replace or complement Russian borrowings is an important step to bolster Tuvan language maintenance and allows for the indigenizing of geological sciences as well.

Thus, while we see a theme of newness emerge in the situations or spaces discussed in these articles, we can also see newness reflected in each of the writer's perspectives or frameworks too. Each of these authors approaches their subject with a fresh gaze, either bringing to light information that has heretofore gone undiscussed or undescribed, or taking a new theoretical perspective to better understand cultural patterns.