
TAKAKURA, Hiroki: *Arctic Pastoralist Sakha. Ethnography of Evolution and Microadaptation in Siberia*. 2015, Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 254.

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Siberian studies have always occupied a central role in Hungarian anthropological scholarship, thus a monograph on ecological adaptive strategies in north-eastern Siberia fits exactly into the profile of this present number of *Acta Ethnographica* focusing on non-European studies in Hungary. A book published by a Japanese author is of particular interest for Hungarian scholars involved in the study of Siberian peoples, since in both countries Siberian studies have a rich legacy of research activities on Siberian peoples since the late 19th century. Furthermore, none of these countries belonged to the metropole centres of Siberian anthropology/ethnography, and thus they can be partly characterised with an independent epistemology. While mainstream anthropological studies found distant otherness in Siberian communities, Hungarian research tradition never theorized Siberian peoples as “others,” and Japanese research tradition has not referred to them as particularly distant communities either. Commercial relations, as well as political ones, were frequent between Yakutia and Japan, and it is no surprise that one of the usual pretexts for purging members of the local intelligentsia in rural Yakutia in the years of repression was their “affiliation to Japanese secret agencies.”

The book consists of the author’s previously published and thoroughly revised articles in English and Japanese. The introductory and concluding chapters are new, thus setting all materials and argumentation in a unified framework. Hiroki Takakura has conducted fieldwork in Yakutia since the early 1990s and has a vast experience in rural Sakha and Even lifestyles. Although his studies initially focused on reindeer herder communities in northern Yakutia, later he started to carry out research among cattle and horse breeder Sakhas of Central Yakutia as well. This current book is the summary of fieldwork done in a dozen village communities in Central Yakutia, mostly at the fluvial plains along the river Lena in Nam and Khangalas regions (to the north and south of Yakutsk).

The monograph intends to describe the adaptive strategies of Sakhas residing in probably one of the harshest climatic regions of the northern hemisphere. By doing so, the author tackles all important questions of local agriculture, i.e., obtaining ice and water, making hay and managing pastures. Rich ethnographic data (especially on hayfield and pasture management) support the author’s assumption that Arctic pastoralism cannot be restricted to reindeer breeding – a topic widely researched in current anthropological scholarship. I absolutely agree with the author that the example of Sakha and Northern-Tungus coexistence in north-eastern Siberia illustrates well that under the same climatic and similar geographic conditions two very different kinds of pastoralism may function at the same time. Besides Takakura Hiroki, so far only Susan A. Crate (professor at George Mason University, Fairfax, VA) has immersed herself in the study of Sakha horse and cattle pastoralism from an anthropological point of view. Therefore the importance of this book cannot be overemphasised.

There are two questions I would like to discuss more thoroughly. The first one is theoretical. I think the ways of pastoralism perceivable today in Yakutia do not only represent a form of adaptation to ecological conditions, but they are also the outcome of a nearly four-centuries-long coexistence with the Russian and the Soviet state. Although the author deals with this issue in the second and ninth chapters, in my opinion not enough attention has been given to this problem. The system of Sakha cattle and horse economy changed radically several times under Russian colonial legislation and later in the Soviet era. For instance, until the mid-18th century, good hayfields were intensively managed land plots and commodities to be sold and bought. Due to Russian land-tenure taxation system levied on Sakhas, the importance of cattle breeding grew steadily to the detriment of horse breeding. This process resulted in an increased demand for hayfields; therefore, in the 19th century Sakhas in Central Yakutia began to collect hay from territories formerly used as pastures as well.

As far as language skills are concerned, in current anthropological scholarship there is such a huge pressure on researchers to publish and to provide academic output that sometimes the core issue of anthropology (i.e., fieldwork) is overshadowed. Since it is more and more difficult for researchers to spend years on fieldwork, usually they do not have the opportunity to get immersed in the local vernacular (especially if coursebooks are hardly available). A limited command of the Sakha language may pose a number of problems during fieldwork and during the analysis of data. This common weakness (characteristic of the majority of current anthropological studies on Yakutia) is also detectable in this book. At the same time, these minor issues do not hinder the reader from getting a full picture on Sakha horse and cattle breeding. Current global climate change, in my view, will radically change the Sakha system of horse and cattle economy thoroughly described and analysed in detail by the author, and will thus trigger Yakutia's government to respond with new adaptive techniques to mitigate inevitable harms.