

spheres of life – former employees of the museum, pensioners, university students and alumni, schoolchildren with their teachers, as well as many others came to render help with the damaged materials. The Literary Museum is grateful to all the former and future voluntary assistants and its own staff members.

Astrid Tuisk

JAPANESE CULTURAL INFLUENCE AND YOUTH SOLIDARITIES IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

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In today's world no culture remains isolated and only within the borders of its original country. It is especially obvious in the case of popular culture. At the beginning of December a group of scholars gathered in the Higher School of Economics to discuss different aspects and features of Japanese culture in post-Soviet space. The conference was organized by Dr. John Schoeberlein, Program on Central Asia and Caucasus, Davis Center, Harvard University, Dr. Elena L. Omelchenko, Head of the Department of Sociology HSE - St. Petersburg, Director, Center for Youth Studies, and Guzel A. Sabirova, Deputy Director, Center for Youth Studies, HSE - St. Petersburg, with participants from the HSE but also from Estonia, Belarus and Ukraine.

It appeared that Japanese culture is strongly present in the post-Soviet space, sometimes even in forms we do not see anymore as distinctively Japanese, for example ikebana or Japanese martial arts. Sushi and some elements of Japanese religion have also been incorporated into various forms of everyday or popular culture in Eastern Europe. This and many other aspects of the movement of Japanese culture into former Soviet space were highlighted by one of the organisers – John Scheberlein – in his opening keynote speech. The majority of the presentations on the first day discussed the anime culture, which is extremely popular in Russia, especially in St. Petersburg. Several talks dealt with different features of this culture, from festivals to anime clubs. As nearly all presenters introduced their current MA research projects, their talks were sometimes not very theoretical, yet, full of interesting details. To sum up, anime culture in Russia seems to be quite paradoxical. While Japanese fans stress through this culture their relation with Japanese culture and traditions, then Russian fans learn the Japanese language and traditions to become “real” anime fans.

The second day of the conference was dedicated to different elements and features of Japanese culture and their meanings in post-Soviet countries. Aimar Ventsel started the day with his analysis of the wide spread of the Japanese youth fashion among Asian people in Russia, especially in Eastern Siberia, arguing that this way young people emphasise their Asianness. The following discussion was very intensive and the participants agreed that the Japanese youth fashion is a hip and elitist way of showing the race identity spread from Kazakhstan to St. Petersburg. Vadim Stetsyuk, Senior Lecturer

of the Kamenets-Podolsky National University named after Ivan Ogienko (Ukraine), presented an interesting talk about the samurai clubs and their activities in Ukraine, discussing also their controversial position within the Ukrainian reconstructionist club movement. We heard that samurais constitute a minority among the clubs that focus on reconstructing historical events and army uniforms. In the following discussion several participants also argued that such clubs greatly reflect the situation in society where rich people join clubs where one has to spend much money on clothes, while their not so wealthy fellow citizens prefer cheaper clubs and can make a political statement out of their preference. Some less spectacular features of Japanese culture were discussed by Alina Zakirov from the HSE and Sergei Sakuma from the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus. Healing, ikebana and other elements of Japanese traditional culture have long been adapted into Eastern European everyday culture and live “their own life” in a new cultural context.

The conference proved to be very fruitful and gave many inspiring ideas to the participants who agreed that Japanese cultural forms in the post-Soviet setting should be studied on a larger scale. In order to do that, they created an interest group “Japanese Eurasia” in Facebook to maintain and develop contacts and cooperation. Everyone interested is free to join this group.

Aimar Ventsel