

The author turns special attention to the synchronic and diachronic migration of motifs in contemporary legends as well as to the reality and beliefs. His findings are predictable: most of the motifs are to be found in different cultural and language areas. Contemporary legends travel through time and place, through languages and different places of identifications, and therefore both synchronic and diachronic migrations are extremely vivid.

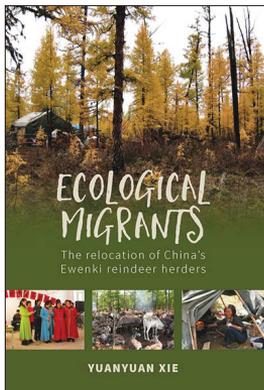
In the second part of the book, titled “Contemporary Legends in Slovenia: Examples with Interpretation”, Kvartič puts material into focus. Considerable attention is devoted to *interpretation* as a process of finding the meaning, which also gives us a deeper insight into the culture and underlines the characteristics of the contemporary legend: they change and adapt to concurrent history and chaotic social environment much faster than other folklore genres. He presents the material of contemporary legends, that was collected during fieldwork, and categorizes it by themes: *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*, *Trickster in Contemporary Legend*, *The Failed Stag Party*, *The Couple Caught in Flagrante Delicto*, *Tourist Experience*, *Foreigners/Other in Contemporary Legends*, etc. In all the themes Kvartič aims to find variations, a general motif, rationalization of legends, localization of the migration motif, and socio-historical context.

As a finalizing conclusion, Kvartič states that contemporary legends constitute a source for never-ending research – not only because of their huge variety but also because they change and adapt the stories to the context.

Contemporary legends were neglected in Slovenian folkloristics for a long time; therefore, this book, with its strong theoretical and highly professional approach, fills in a big gap in Slovenian folkloristics. But not only that – the book is also highly inspiring and interesting for a wider readership as the language the author has used is very fluent and vivid, with many examples and outlines of stories. Due to its good theoretical insight into the scholarship of the subject, it also provides valuable support to all researchers of contemporary legends and contemporary folklore in general.

Saša Babič

## STILL ECOLOGICAL MIGRATION? AN EWENKI CASE



**Xie, Yuanyuan. *Ecological Migrants: The Relocation of China's Ewenki Reindeer Herders*. New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015. 220 pp.**

The book under review is one in the already impressive list of the latest publications based on socio-anthropological research among the Ewenki – a relatively large but dispersed Tungusic-speaking ethnic group, which still retains the practice of reindeer herding in a number of places in Siberia (Russia), Mongolia, and China. Every year, for the last 6–7 years, one or two monographs on the Ewenki are published, which almost immediately evoke a lively response in the academic environment (Funk 2014; Napol'skikh et al. 2014; Ventsel 2014; Mamontova 2016).

The monograph of the Chinese researcher Yuanyuan Xie is dedicated to a small group of the Ewenki of China, known in the literature as Yakuts (Yakut Ewenki), Reindeer Ewenki, Reindeer Using Tribe, and other similar names (using the word ‘reindeer’), as well as Aoluguya Ewenki Hunters. The latter term, speaking of exoethonyms, is by far the most accurate, since it determines the ethnic identity of the group (Ewenki), and the place of their compact residence (Aoluguya, or Ao Township, Genhe County, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, China). However, it is certainly doomed to failure when it comes to defining the specifics of the economic activities of this group with one concrete term (it does not matter whether it is reindeer herders or hunters). And it is not only because the mono-economic group is, in principle, difficult (perhaps impossible) to imagine, but also because in the case of this group of Ewenki we are dealing with a marked change in all patterns of economic activities over the past 60 years: from the taiga hunting using the deer for transportation purposes, fishing, and gathering, up to the marginal position of the inhabitants of the stationary settlement, depending more on the state guardianship than on their own labour.

Xie’s work is a kind of complement to the earlier, also published in 2015, collective work, *Reclaiming the Forest: The Ewenki Reindeer Herders of Aoluguya*, edited by Åshild Kolås and Yuanyuan Xie (see review in Mamontova 2016: 141–143), but at the same time this is an entirely independent study, with its own logframe for the presentation of the material, and in general is purely an author’s study, based on a long stay in the field, and literally on every page imbued with a touching authorial attitude to the object of her scientific interest.

The monograph titled *Ecological Migrants* consists of a general introduction and five chapters, the last of which serves as a sort of detailed conclusion, as well as a list of literature and index.

The first chapter, “Living with Ewenki Hunters” (pp. 14–55), is entirely based on the description of the field experience (from September 2003 to October 2004) of the author who came across the “exotic culture” (p. 11), and the complexities she overcame herself and with the help of informants. Although sometimes the text is alarming, especially after the reader has learnt how the author prepared for her long fieldwork (“after briefly browsing through books about Ewenki history and their local traditions and customs, I packed up my things ...” (pp. 13–14)), on the whole, it nevertheless redeems itself by being open and frank, and thus it sets up a trusting attitude to what the author is going to tell forth in the future. The abundance of voices of informants inscribed in the narrative strengthens this trust.

The second chapter, “The Culture of Reindeer Ewenki and Historical Settlements” (pp. 56–84), gives a general idea of the main (from the point of view of the author) characteristics of the Ewenki society and its traditional culture (in the text they are called “historical characteristics”, p. 60), and also reveals, albeit briefly, the background of the ecological migration of 2003. The large first section of the chapter includes paragraphs titled “Population and Living Environment, Traditional Lifestyles, Ethnic Characteristics, Religious Beliefs”, and finally, separately, “Views on Life and Death”. Despite the presence, in some cases, of important ethno-historical information, the author’s comments would also be beneficial for the logic of the section. The text itself, in a number of cases, also raises questions. There are, for example, timeless adverbs such as *originally*, *later*, *in the past* (however, such ‘definitions’ of time are found throughout the text; see,

for example, p. 186), as well as terms not quite familiar in modern anthropological language, such as “early tribes” (p. 65), or stylistically awkward, such as “[they] believed in shamanism” (p. 66). The last section of the chapter, “Historical Settlements under New China”, shows the whole tragedy of the small ethnic group that has been exposed, it is difficult to say otherwise, to the “loving care of the (Communist – D.F., S.D.) Party and government”<sup>1</sup>.

The author consistently expounds the history of the first two migrations of this group of the Ewenki, to Qiqian (Rus. Ust'-Urov) along the Argun River in 1957–59 and from Qiqian to (Old) Aoluguya in 1965. Nevertheless, without focusing on this, the author was able to show how great was the strength of the collective irresponsibility of the country's governing bodies of the time; for example, she could not find in the published sources a detailed description of the event (the so-called Surrender-to-Revisionism-Treason Incident), which, according to the Ewenki themselves, became the reason for the second resettlement, and therefore Xie had to rely entirely on the memories of her informants.

The third and fourth chapters, “Ecological Migration Path” (pp. 85–124) and “Post-migration Issues” (pp. 125–182), can be considered as the main part of the study under review. In the third chapter, the author consistently presents the views of officials and ordinary Ewenki on the reasons for the origin of the resettlement plan and on the very process of preparing and implementing this plan, including a description of the celebration of the success of the whole event, which took place on the 40th day after the resettlement, on September 28, 2003. The chapter concludes with a brief description of the social transformations that have occurred among the Ewenki who found themselves in New Aoluguya, in comparison with what is known about the inhabitants of Old Aoluguya. The about 260-kilometre-long path within the same province, Genhe County, led, as can be seen from the author's data, to a significant transformation of the social structure of society. The next chapter, like the previous one, is filled with the author's materials. These materials show what opinions about resettlement and related problems different participants in the process had, what contradictions and conflicts there were, what measures the local government took to resolve the problems, in particular, in reindeer husbandry and, especially, in the process of cutting and marketing reindeer antlers. Long stay in the field allowed the author to reveal a number of essential details. For example, Xie managed to find out that cutting reindeer antlers and purchasing them from the Ewenki for “medical use” was always a kind of profanity, because “according to the traditional *Chinese Medicine Pharmacopoeia*, reindeer antlers cannot be used as a medicine” (p. 180). These antlers were purchased solely for mixing with the red deer antlers (whose uncalcified antlers are called velvet antlers), which allowed to increase the overall mass of antlers and to sell them at the price of red deer antlers (p. 178 ff.). We can only guess why the local authorities decided to support the process of cutting and purchasing deer antlers.

No less important are some of the author's remarks, sometimes unexpected and with no detailed explanations, which, however, seem to be important for understanding the essence of the whole process, which has been defined as “ecological”. Thus, it turns out that in order to ensure the resettlement of 62 Ewenki households to New Aoluguya (previously called Sanchejian), local authorities evicted (yes, indeed!) more than 100 families from there – they were “primarily migrant workers, drifters, or family members of the township government employees” (p. 120), to whom compensation was paid and who found housing in other settlements. However, we cannot say that we

as readers were satisfied with the explanation proposed by the author: “It is evidence of the government’s attempt to provide special assistance to this [Ewenki – D.F., S.D.] ethnic group” (p. 115). What this confidence is based on and why the good of one group of people should be provided by eviction to another group, is not explained in the text.

Even more important for characterizing the process of ecological migration is a small fragment of the text on pages 95–97, almost entirely represented by the translation of one of the administrative documents and the comments of an anonymous official, as well as a couple of other comments, scattered all over the book. Judging by these comments, this process of resettlement was only a convenient way for local officials who, using the existing state environmental and socio-economic programs (in particular, the Grand Western Development Plan, proposed in 2000 by the Central Committee of the party; p. 12) and the rhetoric of the preservation of ecology in the western regions of the country (it is worth noting that Genhe County is not to the west, to put it mildly; it is the extreme north-east of Inner Mongolia), as well as the rhetoric of “development”, could thus fit in one of the state programs and obtain additional funding for the region. This migration, in fact, had nothing to do with the environment (p. 97). The information, given by the author in one of the notes to the third chapter, looks as a mockery of people – a toy in the hands of Big Brother:

*The county government clandestinely sold the old Aoluguya site to a real estate development company. Ironically, the land and ecosystem “protected” through the ecological migration plan will now be used by the real estate company to open a for-profit trophy-hunting ground for rich urbanites. They will undoubtedly claim this will stimulate economic development.* (p. 124)

The final chapter, “Aftermath and Future” (pp. 183–210), is a summary of the author’s reflections on the essence of the occurred ecological migration, and its role in the preservation or transformation of the Ewenki culture, and also, in general, about the meaning of the planned modernization.

In general, the book makes an ambivalent impression. On the one hand, it is certainly important for a better understanding of the ethnic policies that have been and are being implemented in China and, of course, it is significant in terms of bringing a good amount of relatively fresh field material into indigenous studies. On the other hand, there remain questions concerning, first, the language of description in which the party and/or the government are represented as a kind of collective body that can *believe, initiate or develop plans, take steps, assist*, etc.; as it seems to us, that is why some of the passages in the text resemble the style of newspaper texts in which argumentation is not required; and secondly, the lack of comparative material on other small ethnic groups of China and/or the Ewenki in other regions of Asia,<sup>2</sup> which would certainly help to better understand the social processes reviewed by the author, and place the material in the context of contemporary debates, for example, in the field of indigenous studies, Siberian anthropology, applied or practising anthropology, migration studies, and, particularly, forced migration. And yet we would recommend reading this book. It will be extremely interesting to everyone who studies other groups of the Ewenki, or – more broadly – ethnic groups that are under the influence of the state and/or business. Being filled with unique field materials, this work itself can become a source for further comparative studies of a similar orientation.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Quotation from the monograph of 1994 by F. Kong, given in the book under review (p. 76).
- <sup>2</sup> The only exception is the seven lines in the fifth chapter, referring to the example of the Oroqen ethnic group in connection with reflections on forced lifestyle changes (p. 189). However, reference to other reindeer-breeding groups is also found in the introduction; although it is accompanied by a reference to individual publications of anthropologists, it is too general and contains inaccuracies (for example, the Buryats and Eskimos are listed here as reindeer breeders) (p. 4).

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