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MINISTERSTVO OBRAZOVANIIA I NAUKI ROSSIISKOI FEDERATSII; BURIATSKII GOSUDARSTVENNYI UNIVERSITET: *MONGOLII I BURIATIIA: GEOKUL'TURNYE OBRAZY PROSTRANSTVA*. ISSLEDOVATEL'SKII AL'MANAKH. [*MONGOLIA AND BURYATIA: GEOCULTURAL IMAGES OF SPACE*] ULAN-UDE: IZDATEL'STVO BURIATSKOGO GOSUDARSTVENNOGO UNIVERSITETA. 2006. ISBN 5-85213-932-7, 135 PAGES.

Mongolia i Buriatiia: geokul'turnye obrazy prostranstva is a remarkable book that provides fresh insights into ongoing discussions about various representations of space. It contains ten contributions by undergraduate and doctoral students as well as professors—from various Russian (mostly Siberian) universities and with diverse disciplinary backgrounds—who work together in a research group. Most of the articles are based on recently undertaken field research and offer insights into topics that would not otherwise be accessible. The authors share a fruitful interdisciplinary outlook on their common research topic: the signs and symbols of space and culture in a transnational region inhabited by people with a shared ethnic background. Thus, Mongolia and Buryatia present fascinating cases for the investigation of whether ethnic belonging encourages spatial integration or rather follows the traditional division between taiga and steppe.

While most of the contributions focus on space discourses and their formation, some widen their scope to overall questions of (Buryat-)Mongolian-Russian relations in the past and the outlook for the future, inviting readers to cross spatial and temporal boundaries. The authors' mostly unconventional approach sheds light on non-evident discursive constructions of spatial representation. Nevertheless, the collection has its flaws: references are not always complete and consistent, and the four sections of the book (*Discourse, Border, Space, Mongolosphere*) lack profound theoretical substantiation. Another shortcoming is the authors' limited reference to existing research and ongoing discussions of the issues they study. More systematic analysis of discourse formation would have provided an even stronger foundation for understanding regionally developed frameworks of space.

Anatolii Breslavskii examines the images of Mongolia evoked in Ivan A. Efremov's famous narrative *Road of Winds*. Efremov participated in a joint Mongolian-Soviet paleontological expedition through the Gobi desert at the beginning of the 1950s. He viewed the journey through the eyes of a visionary writer broadly inspired by philosophy. Breslavskii characterizes Efremov's style as "figurative geomorphology." He carefully analyzes how Efremov created archetypal representations of the Gobi, enriched with emotions created predominantly by the changing forces of nature. This article is a good opening for the collection, as it shows how representations of Mongolia have been based on notions of remoteness and contrasts (or even paradoxes) which inevitably take the visitor on a journey not only through a landscape but also to the self.

Vera Galindabaeva and Nikolai Karbainov investigate strategies of representing the region via the virtual reality of the Internet. Unlike in a previous work which their study is based on, they attempt to use a discourse analytical approach rather than content analysis. The authors convincingly show to what degree the images of Mongolia on web sites primarily visited by tourists are based on stereotypes inspired by exoticism. The country is represented as the periphery of civilisation. In contrast to that predictable finding, the Buryat sites analyzed by the authors offer an almost diametrically opposed perspective: They show Mongolia as the cradle of a unique

culture which appears to be the joint heritage of all Mongolians. However, this second part of the analysis would have been more convincing had it been contextualized within the discourse of Buryat nationalism.

In his second article, Anatolii Breslavskii analyzes how Mongolia is represented in Buryat mass media. His findings show a picture of glorification: Mongolia appears as the blessed country, if not the Promised Land. Be it history (Chinggis Khaan), the endless landscape (eternal blue heavens), or current politics (pure democracy), the omnipresent leitmotif is an orchestration of togetherness, belonging, and unity of the Mongolian people on both sides of the border.

Vladimir Rodionov undertook biographical interviews with former members of the Soviet military as well as their families. He investigates the whole period of (official) presence of Soviet forces from 1966 until 1991 in order to find out what geocultural images his interviewees developed. Interestingly, the retrospective approach generates lucid insights into the tensions between former images of the two countries' brotherhood and today's feelings of being "divorced." Although the article lacks context, it may certainly be seen as an important contribution to ongoing research on entangled histories—especially with its focus on a period that is still heavily understudied.

Svetlana Aksenova and Ekaterina Maksimova also examine representations of space through the prism of two in-depth biographical interviews with former Soviet soldiers (from Buryatia) who did their military service in Mongolia in the 1970s and 80s. Both interviewees offer fascinating, albeit controversial images of Mongolia and its inhabitants. The authors' findings draw a vivid picture of ambiguity, of oscillation between alienation and trustfulness, against the backdrop of broader philosophical questions concerning the interviewees' role as soldiers in a specific geopolitical setting. This chapter could have been improved with a discussion of the extent to which the interviews may be seen as representative case studies.

Aleksei Mikhalev's field research focuses on the present situation of Russian language teachers in Mongolia. Interestingly, many of his respondents apparently share an outlook on their host country that is predominantly shaped either by monuments of history or by classic tourist areas. Nevertheless, the very notion of being in the "heart of Asia" has a major impact on their perception of space and cultural traditions. One wonders to what degree Russian expatriates sustain this rather distant attitude in an ordinary, everyday setting such as schooling. It would have been interesting to learn more about how teachers' image of Mongolia is reconciled with their real-life interaction with Mongolian students in the classroom.

Klimentii Fedorov is concerned with the spatial and geocultural images of Mongolia developed by different actors associated with the community (*sangha*) of Buryat Buddhists. Against the background of key historical events and assuming that the experience of a sojourn in the neighbouring country leads to an expansion of consciousness, the author shows how those encounters influence the perception of Mongolia as the center of Buddhist renaissance. Particularly interesting is the author's discussion of the cross-border nature of contemporary Buddhism. What is missing from the article, however, is an account of the history of interaction between Buryat and Kalmyk Buddhists within the Russian Empire.

Tat'iana Breslavskaiia's article approaches interaction in the region from the other side: her research deals with citizens of Mongolia who live in Buryatia. She chooses her respondents among different social groups: the Buddhist clergy, the business world, and the cultural sphere. In addition to differences in educational background, their images of Buryatia are therefore formed mainly through their different professional activities. This article is an inspired attempt to shed light on the various ways in which entangled history is enacted in contemporary settings. Nevertheless, in order to develop the argument further, the author could have included more information about the history of the three spheres discussed, and a wider perspective on changes in them.

Erzhena Guntyanova investigates how Mongolian students experience the Buryat capital Ulan-Ude. She starts her research from student hostels as specific types of inhabited spaces and as a vantage point from which to explore the town. Designed as a case study, her work deals with a symbolic spatial orientation toward certain places, all of which are associated with the students' homeland. This fairly exclusive focus appears to be somewhat reductionist.

Innokentii Aktamov uses a similar approach, but focuses on Mongolian teachers and their ways of disseminating information within a “strange” environment. Interestingly, most of his respondents share an image of Mongolia as the ultimate homeland with their Buryat colleagues. One of the questions that remain unanswered here is what “strange” means in such a setting and how “strangeness” is informed by the interaction of colleagues who share the same ethnic and professional background. Rather than reducing the focus on the “here” and “there” in a geographical sense, it would have been intriguing to explore how the outlook of Mongolian teachers is informed by the notion of professional space.