

Kira Van Deusen, *Tigers and the Internet. Story, Shamans, History*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022. 154 pages. ISBN 978-0-2280-1114-9. \$37.95 hardcover.

Another fine book by Van Deusen, if unusual writing for those trained in the social sciences. The author has foregone academic writing for informal, first-person style in keeping with the content about the Udege people who live in eastern Russia. In many instances she is not just writing about the Udege but is a participant in their lives, their conversations and their stories; she does describe the context for the story telling events and includes other, sometimes startling facts about Udege lifeways. Who knew that some tents have a way to open the top for putting on skis or clothes? (22) After some decades of work exploring shamanism, Van Deusen is a cultural insider and carries the stories of the Udege; she was instructed to give her spirit figure, *sevekhe*, blue eyes. She recounts her own experience playing cello (41) which has deepened her awareness of the spiritual qualities of Udege music.

Her western origins show through in an implicit political timeline that shows us change over generation: the tigers are still there, but now there is the internet. The framework of the book's storyline resonates with all who have followed the repositioning of Indigenous people around the world, as their land, resources and lifeways have been consumed by outsiders. Over the centuries the Udege have accommodated Asian incursions that have left behind traces of Buddhism (indeed the Kalmyks, a western Mongol people, became Buddhists). The narrative of Udege life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century reflects Russian political turmoil such as the book burnings of the 1930s when the government changed their alphabet from Latin to Cyrillic. The Udege met Romany and Moldovians deported to their land during the Stalinist period and more recently Russians who are focused mostly on the natural resources of the taiga.

On the other hand, schools with Russian teachers brought love of outside education to the people. One grandfather published the first book, still popular, in the Udege language about life under communism. More and more books are being written in Udege language; one combines science with the folklore of a people whose memories were entirely oral. Van Deusen notes that stories are now told in very different settings and the stories change (70).

Yet the stories and practices of shamanism carry on in parallel with other beliefs. Van Deusen points out that some existing embroideries are similar to those on petroglyphs that may date to 12,000 BC (103). Indeed, the stories of the Udege share universal motifs with many of the world's Indigenous peoples. The centrality of animals, such as the tiger to mental and physical health, shows in stories replete with shapeshifting; with explanations of origins; and with the spirit masters that preceded shamans.

Van Deusen's many insights into shamanism show us its potential strengths for modern populations. In Russia, shamanic teachings have survived the persecution and even execution of shamans. Their spiritual values have carried forward emphasis on self-healing, on societal healing from drugs and alcohol, and on wise living that helps conserve the environment.

*Tigers and the Internet* concludes with mention of a takeover of Udege land in a more benign form, the creation of the Bikin National Park where the Amur tiger still lives. Strenuous lobbying by the Udeges helped create the Bikin National Park in 2015 (even noticed by the World Wildlife Fund) that includes significant Udege control of the area. The Udege also urge

collaboration with ecologists, perhaps a model for other Indigenous people who want control and wise use of their traditional land in the 21<sup>st</sup> century context.

And the stories are still being told.

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