

‘Relying on my own two’: Walking, Routes and Strength among Orochen-Evenki Hunters and Herders of Zabaikal’e (East Siberia)

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In the presentation, I will explore Orochen walking, sign-making and use of routes as being linked to powerful metaphors that reveal hunter’s and herder’s sense of belonging to the land. I will elaborate on the image of the ‘Walking Tungus’ (R. Peshyi Tungus), which was widely employed in a pejorative way in Imperial and early Soviet literature. Under the Tsar, Orochen-Evenkis were referred negatively as ‘wanderers’, but today Orochens consider their walking abilities to be their strength. Walking is, for them, both a means and a skill that is essential to hunting and herding activities. Hence, I will invert earlier negative images and replace it with the study of how the themes of pedestrian journeying and use of forest pathways provide central dimensions to the Orochen-Evenki worldview and moral code.