Introduction to the Special Issue on Siberian Demography

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This special issue of *Sibirica* features a selection of recent research on the demography of Siberians with a special emphasis on what Russian scholars call the *etnodemografiia* of the “sparse” (*malochislennye*) peoples of Siberia. Demographic analysis has occupied a privileged place in the study of Siberia serving interests that go well beyond the tallying of souls that one usually associates with this exercise. The very first Imperial-era surveys of Siberia, aside from providing a description of the geography, described the character and qualities of the people encountered (Castrén 1853–1858; Fisher 1774; Georgi 1799; Middendorf 1860–1869). Early scholars of Siberian peoples thought that they needed to understand both the size and social structure of local societies in order to tax them efficiently. Early registers of indigenous peoples in the seventeenth century tended to focus on the numbers of male hunters likely to provision the furs coveted by the Russian state (Bakhrushin 1955). However, by a very early date in the nineteenth century, the Russian state created regular tribute quotas matched to the “level of civilization” of specific nations (Raëff 1956). By contrast, what one today might recognize as a modern type of population survey based on the interviews of individual men and women came relatively late with the 1897 All-Russian Census and arguably was only implemented completely for the first time with the Soviet population census of 1926. The latter census incorporated an especially intensive survey of the “polar” and indigenous (*tuzemnoe*) population (Anderson 2006). The state curiosity in the populousness and professional structure of all of the discrete peoples in Russia continued as a constant concern throughout the Soviet period, and with a brief post-Soviet hiatus, is continuing in the Russian Federation. How can these three hundred years of surveying be best understood?

Like many expansionist states, the Russian state consistently showed an interest in the resources that it could acquire in its Siberian frontier. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries these were first and foremost furs—or resources that could only be procured through

the willing or unwilling cooperation of people who knew the landscape intimately. However balancing these economic interests were other mediating services. Arguably the roots of a Russian social welfare tradition can be seen in early surveys of lifestyles culminating in the establishment of bread warehouses (*khlebozapasnye magaziny*) or mission schools (Lantzeff 1943). Orthodox missionaries also played an important role in state surveillance (Anderson and Orekhova 2002). These attempts at social control and at social betterment have been common to all empires. What is unique to the Russian tradition of enumeration is the way that taxes and social resources have been, until recently, fine-tuned to specific nationalities. Unlike in other places, the tradition of demographic surveys in Russia has always been one of understanding the total population made up of a set of discrete groups, each with its own internal social dynamics.

These ethnographic ruptures traditionally recorded within the general population have long been coveted by ethnographers. Russian liberals during the Imperial period were especially interested in the “dying out” of Siberian aliens (*inorodtsy*)—a measure they thought served as an index to the level of humanity of the Imperial Russian state (Iadrintsev 1891, 1892; Kovalashchina 2007). In the Soviet period, this interest developed into a concern for demonstrating the democratic health of ‘small’ peoples as a proof of the achievements of the socialist state. The political priority placed on demography underwrote some of the best studies that we have of indigenous populations in the circumpolar North. Boris Dolgikh’s (1960) classic study of the “clan and tribal organization” of Siberian peoples was based on his reading of the seventeenth-century *iasak* tax-tribute registers, if not his own direct experience as one of the footsoldiers of enumeration during the 1926/27 Polar Census (Savoskul 2004; Ziker 2011). In the 1970s and 1980s the study of the level of integration between nationalities using the same sources defined the Moscow school of ethnography (Gurvich 1982, 1987; Gurvich and Dolgikh 1970a, 1970b). Then, on the cusp of perestroika, a team of northern geographers, notably Aleksandr Pika and Dmitriy Bogoyavlenskiy once again used a critical demographic study of the life chances of contemporary indigenous Siberians as proof that not all was well under the highly centralized Soviet state. English translations of these demographically inspired studies, as well as English-language publications, have been influential readings on the lists of a new generation of Siberianists in Western Europe and North America (Bogoyavlenskiy 1997; Pika 1993). This renewed interest in the fates of indigenous northerners grew into a new school of

ethno-demographers who took special note of local statistics. As Elena Volzhanina outlines in the introduction to her article in this issue, a new method arose wherein ethnographers took a close look at kinship dynamics and social structure of specific regional groups or even sets of families. This micro-demographic approach can be described as a new and growing field in Siberian studies.

This issue of *Sibirica* presents four articles highlighting different approaches to demography in Siberia. Tim Heleniak's article focuses on the geography of in- and out-migration across different regions of Siberia from 1989 to 2009. If in the Imperial and Soviet periods the issue of the populousness of various national groups was both a concern and a worry for the Russian state, in the post-Soviet period the "depopulation" of Siberia has been both a policy objective and a social challenge. The World Bank-sponsored Northern Restructuring Project intended to aid municipalities in the Russian North and to develop a national strategy for restructuring the economy of those areas. The project focused on voluntary out-migration of regions of intense Soviet industrial development and advise to municipalities on realizing the benefits of a decreased population. The shifting population characteristics of these depopulating regions can also be linked to recent bursts of growth in the population of indigenous nationalities, as Klovov and Khrushchev point out.

Konstantin Klovov and Sergey Krushchev provide an overview of the differential population dynamics of the indigenous nationalities of the North. Their article, which draws on a massive archive of longitudinal statistical data and different levels of enumeration, makes the argument that there is a need for scholars to focus on what they identify as "regional groups" within nationally stratified groups rather than assuming that all people bearing the name of one nationality have the same dynamics. This simple yet important insight signals a new departure in several centuries of study of ethnically stratified population dynamics and perhaps best expresses the spirit behind the new field of ethnodemography within Russia. The authors frame their argument within a policy prescription that state policies aimed at increasing the fertility of the population must take into account the manner in which a population reproduces themselves. They point to the fact that natural increase is only one way that populations change, with assimilation and "ethnic re-identification" being important mechanisms.

At a much more local level of analysis, Elena Volzhanina provides a case study of the impact of intensive industrial development in the mid-nineteenth century on a regional group of Evenki and Yakut

Figure 1. Konstantin Klovov and Elena Volzhanina during fieldwork with Zhuia River Evenkis in Bodaibo district, Irkutsk oblast, 2009, with the Maksimov family near Perevoz. From left to right, Aleksei, Egor Nikolaevich, Andrei, Elena Volzhanina (back row, center), Konstantin Klovov (front row, center), Irina Nikolaevna, Zina, Viacheslav.

hunters and reindeer herders in the northern part of what is today Irkutsk oblast. Her study is framed within what can today be identified as classic ethnodemography wherein she uses a variety of records, and her own field interviews, to describe a locally based kinship strategy which, she argues, has been misunderstood by demographers for 150 years as a “poor sampling strategy.” Volzhanina argues that as part of the adaptation to the dislocations of gold mining there is a constant gender imbalance in this regional society; nevertheless this imbalanced society has successfully reproduced itself. She offers this historical example as model with which one can interpret modern populations experiencing similar pressures.

The issue concludes with a classic study by Dmitriy Bogoyavlenskii on the demographic status of the indigenous peoples of Siberia. The author tests the idea that the demography of indigenous peoples of Siberia provides for a moderately optimistic outlook on their overall health and population stability. To the contrary, his findings illustrate much regional variation in the demographic health and population

stability, and an overall crisis of extremely high adult mortality, largely due to patterns of alcohol consumption.

All four articles explore how people in Siberia respond to large-scale economic and political developments. These studies not only provide a road map for future demographic studies in the region, but can have applied benefits to both indigenous peoples and newcomers to Siberia as well. Demographic data coupled with socio-economic information for households gives a complex illustration of land and resource use, social organization and identity, which can be useful in the formation of social policy. A prominent school of thought within Western anthropology places basic census taking and collection of micro-demographic data at the heart of comparative ethnographic research (e.g., Chagnon 1974; Hern 1995). On the applied side, tests of relationships between human behavior patterns and demography can be an important background source for public health initiatives (Sellen and Smay 2001).

We especially want to emphasize the importance of those studies, which make use of fine-grained studies to make generalizations about the population dynamics of indigenous peoples (also see Anderson 2006; Klovov and Ziker 2010). Due to a happy coincidence of large manuscript historical databases being made available online, and the development of relational databases to analyze them, there is a new field developing in Western Europe and America—indigenous demography. This field is on the surface similar to *etnodemografiia* and micro-demographic studies. However working from post-structural literature, indigenous demography also elaborates how different social and institutional systems have defined indigenous peoples, and how indigenous peoples can use historical demographic information to help understand the development of their identities within and relationships to states, and to inform efforts for self-determination. The articles presented here form part of a growing dialogue of Siberianists with this literature. Berghahn Books will be publishing in 2011 two edited collections within this field. The first, *The 1926/27 Soviet Polar Census Expeditions*, edited by David G. Anderson, contains eleven case studies across Siberia exploring the Russian archival statistical and documentary records of the early 1900s and making comparisons with the descendant of those communities today. The second, *Indigenous Peoples and Demography: The Complex Relation between Identity and Statistics*, edited by Per Axelsson and Peter Sköld, contains sixteen case studies across the circumpolar North, Australia, New Zealand, United States,

Siberia, and Britain, while specifically developing the concept of indigenous demography.

Although *Sibirica* has published on indigenous demographic issues in the past, this special issue presents this material in a way that underscores the qualities of these two parallel fields—*etnodemografia* and indigenous demography.

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