
Daily life and party ideals on late Soviet-Era radio and television : programming for children, teens, and youth in Buryatia

La vie quotidienne et le parti des idéaux vers la fin de l'ère soviétique à la radio et à la télévision : la programmation pour les enfants, les adolescents et les jeunes en Bouriatie

Melissa Chakars



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/emscat/2572>

DOI: 10.4000/emscat.2572

ISSN: 2101-0013

Publisher

Centre d'Études Mongoles & Sibériennes / École Pratique des Hautes Études

Electronic reference

Melissa Chakars, "Daily life and party ideals on late Soviet-Era radio and television : programming for children, teens, and youth in Buryatia", *Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines* [Online], 46 | 2015, Online since 10 September 2015, connection on 13 July 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/emscat/2572> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/emscat.2572>

This text was automatically generated on 13 July 2021.

© Tous droits réservés

Daily life and party ideals on late Soviet-Era radio and television : programming for children, teens, and youth in Buryatia

La vie quotidienne et le parti des idéaux vers la fin de l'ère soviétique à la radio et à la télévision : la programmation pour les enfants, les adolescents et les jeunes en Bouriatie

Melissa Chakars

- 1 The history of late Soviet broadcasting for children, teenagers, and youth in the Buryat Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic demonstrates what authorities expected of their youngest citizens and at the same time presents snapshots of their everyday lives. Broadcasting was both aspirational and reflective. From the 1960s to the break-up of the Soviet Union, radio and television became increasingly widespread in eastern Siberia. The spread of broadcasting meant that people had new ways to spend their free time and survey data from around the Soviet Union, including from Buryatia, shows that broadcasting was quite popular (Dagbaev 1995 ; Golubev 1974 ; Golubev 1989 ; Paasilinna 1995 ; Roth-Ey 2011). Knowing that many were tuning in, local officials therefore sought to present programming aimed at specific audiences that provided the messages that they wanted to convey. Broadcasting, like print media, was to serve as a method to relay information as well as act as a pedagogical tool.
- 2 This article explores locally produced radio and television programming in Buryatia aimed at young people. In particular, it analyzes transcripts from the radio shows *Pioneer Buryatia*, *Youth of the Republic*, *Teenagers and the Law* and the television programs *Let's Think Together*, *Khamar-Dabaan [Hamar-Daban]*, *Gorn*, and *What Are You Up To, Student* ?¹ Several of these shows ran regularly from the late 1960s to 1991 and some of their content reveals the political shifts of the time from the conservative policies of Leonid Brezhnev to the reform-era ones of Mikhail Gorbachev. Two of these programs

— *Teenagers and the Law* and *Let's Think Together* — were created during Gorbachev's perestroika campaign and tackle the problems of youth crime, drinking, and hooliganism. These were topics that were previously taboo in Soviet media, but under Gorbachev had become issues for open discussion and resolution.

- 3 Soviet authorities devoted great attention to the education of children and youth for the purposes of political socialization, creating useful and capable members of society, instilling patriotism, and legitimating authority. Officials encouraged these goals to be taught in schools and appear in various forms of media ranging from literature to newspapers to broadcasting (Kelly 2007; Kuebart 1989; O'Dell 1978). On Buryat republican radio and TV, these goals were manifest in four themes that appeared as most prevalent on the shows discussed here. One of these themes is the idea that young individuals should constantly work to improve their minds through intellectual activities and their bodies through sports and exercise. A second is the value of practicing good citizenship by being helpful and useful members of society. A third is a building of feelings of loyalty, patriotism, and belonging, and the fourth major theme is the condemning of bad behavior and teaching right from wrong.
- 4 These themes were conveyed on television and radio programs through regularly showcasing children and adults who exhibited behavior that should be modeled as well as behavior that should be avoided and denounced. Explicit commentary was usually provided to make clear to audiences what was acceptable. Narrators, hosts, and invited experts often provided information, advice, and analysis that encouraged young people to be hard-working, moral, patriotic, and useful citizens. Programs also used literature, music, history and geography lessons, interviews, or letters from viewers and listeners for conveying the four themes.
- 5 Most radio and television programming produced in Buryatia was aimed at all ethnic groups in the region and was largely conducted in the Russian language. Russian programming reinforced the growing trend toward Russification that occurred under Leonid Brezhnev (Kreindler 1989; Szporluk 1986). However, there were Buryat language programs. For example, the radio show *Pioneer Buryatia*, broadcast shows in both Russian and Buryat. There was also special programming in Buryat such as a 1969 children's radio show titled *A Word About Lenin* on which the host read a poem in Buryat by Shirab Nimbuev about Vladimir Lenin as part of the upcoming celebrations to mark the centenary of his birth in 1870.² Buryat language programming was practical in that it provided shows to viewers who knew Buryat, but it had political significance as well. It, along with other Buryat-language media such as newspapers and literature, helped authorities legitimize the Buryats as an individual nation within the Soviet Union and supported the logic of their designation with an autonomous republic (Chakars 2014).
- 6 Broadcasting for children and youth in Buryatia also conveyed messages meant specifically for the ethnic Buryats. Sociologist Vladimir Shlapentokh has argued that Soviet authorities employed different strategies toward Russians and non-Russians in order to gain legitimacy and support for the state. While propaganda aimed at Russians emphasized patriotism and national traditions, for non-Russians emphasis was placed on how progressive the Soviet system was and how it offered more advantages than alternative ones. This was done in an attempt to stymie separatism or non-Russian nationalism (Shlapentokh 1986). This strategy is evident in Buryatia where radio and television programming regularly conveyed the idea that Buryatia had benefitted from being a part of the Soviet Union through economic and technological development,

increased social mobility, and a higher standard of living. The programs also sought to demonstrate that Buryatia was an indispensable part of the USSR's brotherhood of nations by emphasizing Buryatia's Soviet history and not its pre-Soviet or pre-Russian past. Programming for children and youth highlighted significant Soviet historical events and showed how Buryatia shared much in common with the USSR as a whole. These messages were meant to give Buryat viewers and listeners a sense of belonging, pride, and loyalty toward the Soviet Union.

Television and radio broadcasting in Buryatia

- 7 The first radio station in the Buryat Autonomous Republic was founded in 1926 and Buryat-language programming began in 1931. However, the spread of radio was rather slow. Although campaigns started in the 1930s to bring radio to the countryside, it was not until the late 1950s that many small towns in the republic could supply their residents with the opportunity to hear radio either at home, a club, or over a loudspeaker. The case was quite different with television, which was introduced to Buryatia in 1961 (Golubev 1974). Authorities in Buryatia devoted much support to the technology and television spread quickly throughout the republic. Television was introduced at a time — much later than radio — when the republic had the resources to devote to its development and when Party officials in Moscow had decided it was one of the most important new technologies for the country (Chakars 2015).
- 8 Historian Kristin Roth-Ey has argued that the Party supported television because it was a symbol of modernity, it represented “the socialist ‘good life’,” it showed that the Soviets could compete with American technology during the Cold War, and, unlike radio, with television, Soviet citizens could only get Soviet-produced programming (the major exception was in northern Estonia where people could watch Finnish TV). She explains that in many regions throughout the Soviet Union, local “enthusiasts” worked to bring television to their locales even if there were few people who could actually run the television stations (Roth-Ey 2007). This was true in Buryatia as well. Many Buryat leaders wanted the new status symbol for their residents and brought the technology to Ulan-Ude. In the beginning there were few television specialists and the station could not even provide daily programming. However, only a few years later in 1966, the Ulan-Ude television station employed numerous people and provided five hours of daily programming.³
- 9 In addition to authorities' enthusiasm for broadcast media, audiences were excited as well. By the late 1960s, thousands in Buryatia had become regular radio listeners and TV viewers. The increasing availability of broadcast media in Buryatia in the late Soviet period reveals a shift in the way that average people in the republic regularly gained information and spent their free time. Local scholar Evgenii A. Golubev conducted two large surveys — one in 1968 and one in 1984 — of radio listeners (around 60 percent of those surveyed were Russian and 25 percent were Buryat). Both surveys revealed that 90 percent of radio listeners listened at least two hours a week and most listened three or more. Programs for young people and those on the topics of sports, entertainment, and music received the highest ratings (Golubev 1974 ; Golubev 1989). While there are no studies of television viewers in Buryatia, sociological research conducted in other parts of the Russian Republic in the late Soviet period points to the medium's popularity with many viewers watching on average as many as 12 hours a week

(Hollander 1972 ; Hopkins 1970 ; Mickiewicz 1981 ; Roth-Ey 2011). Although surveys about television were not conducted in Buryatia, it is most likely that patterns among viewers in Buryatia were similar to those in other parts of the Soviet Union with many people enjoying much television viewing in their spare time.

- 10 The rapid spread of broadcasting in Buryatia in the late Soviet period also meant that residents could participate in the creation of television and radio programming. Many Buryats came to dominate jobs in local media. In 1979 for example, 60 percent of the republic's journalists, editors, and writers were Buryat even though they made up less than 25 percent of the republic at the time.⁴ Although local officials could not ignore central directives that influenced what were acceptable topics for broadcasting, they did design their own programs that presented life in their region. Given the multi-ethnic population of Buryatia, as well as its official designation as an ethnically based territorial unit within the USSR, television and radio programming for young people also helped to promote a regional identity by providing shows in both Buryat and Russian that taught local history and showcased the environment.
- 11 In the case of both radio and television, republican residents also received national broadcasting from Moscow. For republican residents with radios, there were up to five hours of programming a day in the 1960s and by 1974 they could choose from three channels – two republican ones and one from Moscow. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Buryat television viewers could watch one Buryat channel and one all-union one from Moscow. A second channel from Moscow became available after 1981 (Golubev 1989). Young people, therefore, could – and probably did – regularly listen or view broadcasting produced outside of Buryatia. At the same time, the types of shows produced locally were aimed specifically and uniquely at them. They presented regional topics and highlighted their communities. Young people could tune in and learn much about their home and the people who lived there.

TV and radio programs to enhance body and mind

- 12 One of the most prevalent themes on radio and television in Buryatia in the late Soviet period was encouragement for young people to involve themselves actively in school and extracurricular programs that would strengthen body and mind. Authorities told young people to participate and challenge themselves in academics, in clubs, and in sports and exercise. Television viewers and radio listeners were regularly provided with model pupils and students excited about learning and improving their lives.
- 13 Television and radio programs examined life at school from kindergarten to the university and highlighted students who enjoyed their studies and were successful. For example, on the January 22, 1974 evening television episode of *What Are You Up To, Student ?*, the host interviewed a young woman named Ira Khromaya who talked about how much she loves to read, study, and relax with friends.⁵ Similarly, the January 17, 1982 radio show of *Pioneer Buryatia* interviewed a student named Tanya Semenova who explained that “More than anything, I love math.”⁶ Many programs also promoted the most successful students by describing academic competitions. For example, on the March 20, 1982 show of *What Are You Up To, Student ?*, Buryat State Pedagogical Institute students came to the television studio to discuss winning a competition against students from other universities.⁷ On a 1990 radio episode of *Teenager and the Law*, students discussed competitions for those enrolled in courses on Soviet government

and the law and a 1982 program of *Pioneer Buryatia* described school competitions for younger students.⁸ On each of these three shows, students talked about how hard they worked and many also discussed their planned future professions.

- 14 Radio and television programs for young people also examined concerns from or about students. For example, on a 1970s episode of *What Are You Up To, Student ?* a student asked, “Why do we have to study English when we are in a major that doesn’t need it ?”⁹ On a 1990 airing of *Pioneer Buryatia*, a high school student complained that there should be more freedom in choosing classes.¹⁰ And, in another example, a professor argued on *What Are You Up To, Student ?* that while students have greater opportunities than they did in the past, they are too passive and do not prepare as well as they should.¹¹ In each instance, the shows’ hosts used these comments and questions as an opportunity to offer advice and explanation. In these cases, the hosts explained the importance of academic requirements for professional and higher educational preparation and discussed how students could be more active in their studies.
- 15 Broadcasting in Buryatia also encouraged young people to participate in extracurricular activities. Local officials especially touted the importance of joining the Soviet mass youth organizations of the Octobrists for children 7 to 9, the Pioneers for children 10 to 14, and the Komsomol for those 15 to 28. Broadcasting in Buryatia therefore provided the radio program *Pioneer Buryatia* and the TV show *Gorn* for the younger children and the radio program *Youth of the Republic* for the teens and young adults of the Komsomol. These programs regularly supported the activities that these organizations facilitated such as excursions around the country, celebrations to mark important anniversaries and holidays, clubs for various hobbies, summer camps, choirs, art projects, sports competitions, and dance performances. Young people were encouraged to keep busy with activities that enhanced their minds and kept them in shape. For example, on the January 9, 1982 Buryat-language episode of *Pioneer Buryatia*, the host dedicated much of the show to describing numerous activities to keep busy during winter vacation.¹²
- 16 *Khamar-Dabaan*, a 1970s television program for young people, also emphasized the educational and physical benefits of extracurricular activities through its subject of travel and tourism. The program profiled local young people who traveled around Buryatia, the Soviet Union, and its allied nations. Sometimes there were school, Pioneer, or Komsomol trips and on other occasions they were ones made by individual families. The show also promoted sports tourism. For example, the March 5, 1974 program highlighted skiing trips and lauded the benefits of such exercise.¹³ Others promoted activities such as photography by highlighting students who had participated in a photo competition titled “Our Land, Buryatia.” The students discussed the art of photography on the show and described the trips that they had taken to get the perfect shots.¹⁴
- 17 Officials used television and radio programming in Buryatia in an attempt to get young people to value learning, knowledge, and good health. Shows provided examples of students winning academic competitions, singing in choirs, attending Pioneer summer camps, and traveling around the country. The ideal young person presented on radio and TV was diligent, active, and passionate about academic subjects and extracurricular activities. However, for officials, ideal young people should not only improve their own bodies and minds, but needed to work to better their communities as well.

Radio and TV promote being helpful and useful to society

- 18 Television and radio programs in Buryatia constantly aired messages about the value of helping others. They suggested that young people should help their family, neighbors, and friends, as well as people they had never even met. They were encouraged to take initiatives, but also to follow directives that led them to conduct volunteer work around Buryatia, in other parts of the Soviet Union, and on occasion even outside of the country.
- 19 The theme of helping others was especially pronounced on the radio show, *Pioneer Buryatia*. Similar to Scouts or other youth organizations around the world, the Pioneers were instructed to be helpful members of society and *Pioneer Buryatia* regularly demonstrated this. For example, episodes in the 1970s featured Ulan-Ude Pioneers from the sixth grade helping an elderly communist woman with her chores and a seventh grade Pioneer named Ira Dorzhieva helping a kindergarten teacher put on concerts for children. On another episode, the show's host read a letter from a woman who wrote into the program to tell about her neighbor, a boy and Pioneer named Volodya Kazakov, who was helping her because she had fallen and broken her leg. She explained in the letter that he visits her every day and that she "wants everyone to know what a good boy and real Pioneer he is."¹⁵
- 20 In addition to helping neighbors and teachers, Pioneers also aided regional officials in various ways such as helping the police patrol the streets in local villages.¹⁶ Programs also often brought on adults who talked about how they had been helpful in their youth. For instance, the May 27, 1978 airing of the TV show *Gorn* interviewed an elderly woman who discussed her experience as a child when she was a Pioneer. She described how she had helped with the Buryat Republic's literacy campaigns in the 1950s by reporting to authorities about neighbors and family members who did not know how to read.¹⁷ These and other examples were commonly presented on radio and television, providing the lesson that helping officials was valuable and that young people could contribute positively to the prosperity and stability of their country.
- 21 Programming for teenagers and young adults also showed how to be useful to those far away. For instance, early 1980s episodes of *What Are You Up To, Student?* presented interviews with students from Buryat State Pedagogical Institute who had spent their summer in Mongolia working on a construction brigade and others who had worked over the summer on a collective farm in Nizhneangarsk, north of Lake Baikal.¹⁸ The radio show, *Youth of the Republic*, also regularly featured members of the Komsomol volunteering their time outside of their local communities. For example, the September 29, 1968 radio program featured a story about urban students helping with the fall harvesting and making bread on collective farms.¹⁹
- 22 For authorities, encouraging young people to be useful and helpful members of society had practical benefits such as gaining extra help during harvest season. However, the work was also intended to create better citizens who cared for others in their communities and beyond. Episodes of *Pioneer Buryatia* in 1990 reveal that some felt that it was the value of helping others that was the most important part of the Soviet youth organizations and it was this aspect that justified their existence. Under Gorbachev's

reforms in the late 1980s, people were permitted to form their own independent organizations without state sponsorship — something that had not previously been allowed in the Soviet Union. The result was that many began to leave official organizations such as the Pioneers and Komsomol. *Pioneer Buryatia* aired discussions over the future of the organization. On June 10, 1990 a Pioneer leader named Erzhena argued that the organization was necessary because of the valuable charity work it conducted.²⁰ In another episode, Dulma Vladimirovna described how important the Pioneers had been to her when she was a child. She made a passionate argument that the organization should continue.²¹ While it is probable that the radio program of the Pioneers would not have aired many people who called for its demise, the opinions expressed by those interviewed were probably sincere. Nevertheless, despite their efforts, the Pioneers and the Komsomol were disbanded when the Soviet Union broke up in 1991, leaving such radio and television programs as part of the historical record of their past.

Programming to encourage loyalty, patriotism, and belonging

- 23 Radio and television programming for children and youth in the Soviet Union was often educational and it reinforced subjects such as history and geography taught in schools. In Buryatia, as previously mentioned, these lessons also served as a method to teach young people about their region's place within Soviet history and the country's family of nations. By presenting the role of Buryatia in the most glorified periods of Soviet history such as the October Revolution and World War II, as well as local residents' involvement in important national celebrations, radio and television were teaching young people that Buryatia was an integral and important part of the Soviet Union. Stories of hardships and war also provided young people with heroes who were devoted to the common good and sacrificed for the betterment of their country.
- 24 Teaching history on local broadcasting involved showcasing individuals who had experienced it. It also emphasized the problems of the past, contrasting them with the more stable, comfortable, and reportedly better present. The television show *Gorn* and the radio program *Pioneer Buryatia* commonly featured children and teens who were studying local residents who had participated in the October Revolution, the Civil War, and WWII. For example, the host of *Pioneer Buryatia* on an episode in February 1974 read a letter from a child in Barguzin who explained that his school was studying local revolutionary and Civil War heroes. The host of the show commented on their work, stating that those were very difficult times when “no one studied in nice schools... many had to fight, many were hungry.”²² The May 28, 1982 episode of *Gorn* was similar. The show featured Pioneers from School no. 6 in Ulan-Ude who were learning about the history of WWII by studying division 277 because it had “sons from Buryatia, Chita Oblast', and Irkutsk Oblast'.”²³ Both programs also regularly brought veterans on their shows to describe their own experiences and elaborate on historical topics. Stories of war showed how residents from Buryatia were brave, loyal, and willing to lay down their lives for communism and the Soviet Union. They emphasized that Buryatia and the people who lived there were significant and invaluable Soviet citizens.
- 25 Another method to teach about history was to celebrate important local and national anniversaries. The March 13, 1982 television episode of *Gorn* provided a story about

how schools in Ulan-Ude were preparing for the 60th anniversary of the Pioneers. The program also featured Buryatia's local Pioneer history.²⁴ Both of the radio shows, *Pioneer Buryatia* and *Youth of the Republic*, made much fanfare over the 1970 anniversary of 100 years since Vladimir Lenin's birth. Programming described the preparations and celebrations and the role of Pioneers and Komsomol members around the republic in the process. One particularly notable show was a 1968 episode of *Youth of the Republic* that presented local music about Lenin in honor of the upcoming festivities. The program opened with the explanation that there are more songs on this planet about Lenin than anything else and that today's show would feature songs about Lenin and the Buryat people. The host explained that while professional musicians had composed some of the songs, herders, tractor drivers, and many ordinary people wrote others that used traditional Buryat musical composition. The program then played several of these songs from the Buryat Autonomous Republic, Chita Oblast', and Irkutsk Oblast'. One of the songs included the lyrics "Lenin brought happiness and the sun" and "Thank you Lenin for giving the Buryat people freedom."²⁵ While excessively fawning toward Lenin, these songs and the show that aired them were intended to highlight Buryatia's connection to the founder of the Soviet Union, reinforcing the idea that the region was a natural and important part of the country. Furthermore, Lenin was commonly used in children's literature in the Soviet Union as a father figure, as well as a model child (O'Dell 1978). Therefore, this kind of depiction of Lenin that appeared on youth radio in 1968 was not exceptional.

- 26 In addition to history, geography was another subject featured on local broadcasting in Buryatia that consistently reiterated local history and the theme of belonging. The most illustrative example of this is the 1970s program, *Khamar-Dabaan*. Opening with a friendly and inclusive announcement — "Good evening television viewers! We continue our meetings of Club Khamar-Dabaan" — the show featured young people traveling around Buryatia, the Soviet Union, and abroad. For instance, one episode told the story of a school trip to Kyakhta to visit the house-museum where the Mongolian revolutionary, Damdin Sükhbaatar, had once stayed while seeking support from the Bolsheviks. Buryats were taught that Russia had helped Mongolia with its communist revolution and this kind of school trip reinforced this lesson. Student also learned about other regions in the USSR on episodes about trips to other parts of the country such as Yakutia and Georgia. On occasion, *Khamar-Dabaan* also featured young people traveling abroad as in one episode about a student trip to Bulgaria that highlighted visits to WWII monuments to honor Soviet and Bulgarian soldiers.²⁶ On this occasion, this show also provided a history of Soviet-Bulgarian relations.
- 27 The subject of the friendship of peoples also appeared regularly on programming for children, teens, and youth. For example, *Pioneer Buryatia* aired a show in 1982 that discussed how "together a friendly family" of various nationalities had gathered in the early 1970s to build the massive Gusinozerskii power station south of Ulan-Ude.²⁷ On another episode of *Pioneer Buryatia*, the program reported on how central authorities had bestowed the Buryat Autonomous Republic with a national honor, the Order of the Friendship of Peoples Award. The program highlighted the celebrations taking place at the Buryat State Academic Opera and Ballet Theater that included a speech by republican First Secretary Andrei Modogoev. The show's host explained what a great honor this was for the republic.²⁸

- 28 The friendship of peoples did not just take place within the Soviet Union, but also between allied nations, which for Buryatia commonly meant with its neighbor, Mongolia. A November 1970s episode of *What Are You Up To, Student?* focused on Mongolian students studying in Ulan-Ude. The host interviewed students as well as Dashi Zhalsabon, the secretary of the Soviet-Mongolian Friendship Institute of Culture. Zhalsabon discussed student exchange programs and the upcoming 50th anniversary celebrations to mark the founding of the Mongolian People's Republic. The host also interviewed the Mongolian student Tsyren-Bat, who was studying library science and described how hard it was when he first moved to Ulan-Ude because he did not know Russian. The host ended the segment by explaining that these Mongolian students are "the future of their country" and the representatives of "a new Mongolia."²⁹ It was supposedly their valuable studies in Buryatia that were helping them with this.
- 29 For much of the late Soviet period, Buryat republican radio and television often presented heroic historical stories and positive examples of the friendship of peoples. Under Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost'*, Soviet media institutions were permitted to present alternatives to the typical rhetoric, but radio and television were still controlled by the state and overseen by the Party. Soviet officials generally had a cautious attitude about broadcasting and more slowly implemented *glasnost'* on radio and television than in print media (Paasilinna 1995). Therefore, the standards of Soviet ideology were still commonly found in broadcasting and new and previously taboo topics were only carefully introduced.
- 30 An episode of *Pioneer Buryatia* that aired on January 28, 1990, makes this abundantly clear. The show started with a piece on the upcoming preparations for the 120 years since the birth of Lenin. For the most part, the host presented information that was not that much different than what had been offered 20 years earlier on the shows discussed above. Listeners learned about different schools and museums around the region and heard about their preparations. The host also asked young people to write into the radio station about what their schools were doing, as well as facts about Lenin that they found most interesting. The host also interviewed a woman named Lena Radnaeva who oversaw the Lenin Room at a middle school in Zakamensk, a town in southern Buryatia. She explained how she had prepared topics for student projects and many were about Lenin. However, she also listed other topics such as revolutionaries in Buryatia, local WWII heroes, and one titled "Our village in the years of repression" —meaning the purges and terror conducted under Joseph Stalin in the 1930s. When she was done talking, the host paused to ask her more about the subject of repression —a topic that would not have been discussed openly in youth programming only a few years earlier. She then explained that not many from the region had been repressed, but she had researched one Party worker named N. M. Lobtsov who was killed in 1937. This episode shows the workings of Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost'* that reduced censorship and even allowed Soviet citizens — in this case Radnaeva and the radio show host — to examine once prohibited subjects, but at the same time doing so within a discussion of celebrating Lenin.³⁰
- 31 In another example from that same *Pioneer Buryatia* episode, the host raised the issue of the friendship of peoples, yet also commented on what was happening in the country at the time : demands from many different ethnic groups for autonomy, sovereignty, and/or independence. He states, "We want to bring your attention to the question of the relationship of different nationalities. A growth of national self-consciousness has

occurred, but at the same time not all of us respect and value the people of other nationalities. To value others one has to learn this from childhood.”³¹ His words revealed that times had changed. At the same time, they were words of caution calling for Soviet citizens to show tolerance and appreciate diversity. In addition, his message for children — the main audience of the show — was that as a child one learns to be considerate of others.

- 32 After such opening remarks for this segment of the show, the host then interviewed a woman named Sveta Dement’eva who described the opening of a Evenki National Center. She explained that when she was a kid, Evenki children studied Evenki in the lower grades, but that unfortunately this no longer happens. A Evenki language teacher at the center spoke next explaining that people do not use the language very much anymore and those who know it do not know the standard, literary Evenki.³² While not explicit in this show, criticism of language loss, increasingly common in the Gorbachev era, was often criticism of Soviet policies that had emphasized the Russian language over native ones. Likely any viewers watching this episode would have understood this to be implicit in the Evenki interviewees’ comments even if the subject had not been directly addressed.
- 33 Even with some new analysis of historical and contemporary issues, radio and television programming for young people in Buryatia still consistently promoted loyalty, patriotism, and a sense of belonging in the late Soviet period. They did so through the teaching of history, geography, and the friendship of peoples. While some of the specific subjects for discussion changed in the late 1980s era of reform — such as openly discussing the purges of the 1930s or Evenki language loss — the promotion of Buryatia’s logical position in the USSR and the encouragement of its residents to be faithful, dignified, and loyal Soviet citizens continued.

Teaching right from wrong

- 34 Officials in the Soviet Union used radio and television to teach children, teens, and youth how to behave in society (Kruk 2015). In addition, many officials increasingly complained in the late Soviet era that the younger generation was not as hard-working and dedicated to state values as previous ones had been (Bushnell 1988). In Buryatia in 1966, for example, Modogoev expressed concern that Buryatia’s youth were lacking in patriotism and morality and that instead they subscribed to only individualism (Kolmakov 2004). A lengthy report from the republic’s Ministry of Education described rising rates of crimes committed by young people in the 1970s and explained that in most cases they committed criminal offenses in groups while consuming alcohol.³³ Officials blamed parents for these problems as well as “government administrations in various regions for not teaching teenagers correct behavior.”³⁴ Authorities called for better education to teach right from wrong. In addition to schools, radio and television programming served that function through promoting good behavior and denouncing harmful activities.
- 35 Prior to Gorbachev’s reforms for Soviet media, radio and television rarely reported on especially deviant activities such as youth drinking and crime, relying instead on largely positive examples of behavior to teach right from wrong. Shows like *Pioneer Buryatia* grappled with more ordinary instances of bad conduct. For example, the host of a 1970s episode read excerpts of winning essays by children from a competition

titled “Discipline in the Street.” In an essay by Liuda Butukhanova, she described how she tried to quickly cross the street to beat an oncoming car. In the process, she fell and would have been run over if not for the help of a nearby woman, who saved her. The essay explained how she realized her grave mistake and she promised to never do it again.³⁵ In another example, the host of *Pioneer Buryatia* read a letter from a boy named Sergei Lubkov who told a story about how his dad scolded some boys on the street who were playing hockey with a loaf of bread and laughing as it broke into pieces. His father told the boys that it takes a lot of work to make bread and that there are many hungry people in the world who could eat that.³⁶ Occasionally, *Pioneer Buryatia* would contend with more serious issues such as smoking. An episode from 1982, for example, aired a story about a boy who lived by the aviation factory in Ulan-Ude. Refusing to give his name, the host described how the boy had been pressured by his peers to try smoking. The show then condemned this behavior and encouraged young listeners to resist such pressures.³⁷

36 With the advent of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, Gorbachev sought to use media to help reform society by allowing for a space to discuss the country’s problems and introduce new solutions (Gorbachev 1988). Radio and television broadcasting in Buryatia was suddenly permitted to take this on by discussing youth crime, drinking, and hooliganism. These policies are evident in Buryatia where local officials introduced the radio show *Let’s Think Together* and the television program *Teenager and the Law* in an effort to openly engage young people and fix such problems. For example, the January 29, 1990 episode of *Let’s Think Together* began with a report of statistical data from the Buryat republican police that showed that crime among youth had risen 23 percent since 1983 and that one in every five crimes committed in the republic was done by someone under the age of 18. In addition, the host explained that 37 percent of the crimes committed by young people were done by those who were under the influence of alcohol. After presenting this information, the host then turned to a discussion about how to solve these serious problems. He interviewed educators and officials who argued that young people needed more productive and useful ways to spend their free time. Many complained that the republic needed better clubs with greater adult supervision. The host of the show then examined regional clubs for young people, discovering that some were places where teens were listening to “loud music,” getting alcohol, and smoking cigarettes. Others, however, were exemplary places where children and teens participated in useful activities such as sports, chess, photography, dancing, and sewing. The value of good extracurricular activities was discussed and then the show ended with the statement : “Let’s think about this problem together.”³⁸

37 Seemingly picking up on this request, local broadcasters introduced a new radio program in the summer of 1990 titled *Teenager and the Law* to teach young people about the republic’s laws with the hope that this would cut down on youth crime. The first program aired on June 24, 1990 and interviewed teenagers, such as Alyosha, who explained that he did not think he could get into much trouble because he was under 18. This was followed by the comments of another teen, Natasha, who argued that if teenagers better understood the laws, fewer crimes would be committed. Another teen named Olga contended that there should be more courses in school to teach teenagers about the country’s laws. She also complained that there were not enough extracurricular activities available to young people and so they do not have anything to do with their free time.³⁹

- 38 Radio and television shows that taught right from wrong were also intended to supplement lessons that officials hoped young people were getting at home and at school. They were meant to provide instruction such as respecting elders and how to correctly cross the street. In addition, especially in the last years of the Soviet Union, they became spaces to discuss and debate what to do about more serious conduct such as committing crime. The programs used children, teens, parents, educators, and authorities to carry out these discussions and determine right from wrong.

Conclusion

- 39 It is difficult to know on any large scale exactly how young people interpreted the messages provided on Buryat republican radio and television for children, teens, and youth in the late Soviet period. Were they inspired by the examples of heroic WWII veterans, helpful Pioneers, and diligent students or did they find the suggestive models patronizing ? Did they accept the versions of the history of Buryatia provided for them or did they question their validity ? Were they energized to become more patriotic with feelings of loyalty to the Soviet state and its institutions or not ?
- 40 Undoubtedly, radio and television programming created a variety of responses and messages presented on programs resonated differently among individuals. Some peoples' responses to the content of radio and television programming may have fit into what anthropologist Caroline Humphrey has termed "evocative transcripts" – alternative versions of history drawn from official ones (Humphrey 1994). Stories about WWII heroes, Lenin, or Evenki language loss may have elicited different accounts than what was presented on radio or TV. Some of people's alternative renderings may have been critical of Soviet policies. However, for other people, the official versions may have been acceptable and contributed to, for example, an increased feeling of patriotism and loyalty for the Soviet state as authorities intended.
- 41 The shows themselves also drew from real life examples. Those highlighted were people who were exhibiting the behavior that officials sought and who may also have been regular listeners and viewers. From those who were interviewed, it is possible that many were sincere such as the child who explained that she loved math, those who defended the Pioneer organization from dissolution, and the teenagers who made suggestions about improving their leisure activities. At the same time, others on radio and TV may have been, as historian Stephen Kotkin explains, speaking Bolshevik – using specific state language to regularly interact in Soviet society (Kotkin 1995). Many broadcasting hosts and interviewees such as educators, scholars, and veterans, may have told stories with an official approach as expected by authorities and listeners, even if, perhaps, they thought about them in contrasting ways.
- 42 Although authorities could never control exactly how messages were internalized, they nevertheless intentionally designed programming for young people to provide them with precise and definitive messages. This information was intended to help define the future generations of Buryatia even as some of it changed over time. The programs provided model children, teens, and adults for listeners and viewers to emulate. They provided advice and delineated good, bad, and exemplary behavior. While aimed at an audience of young people, the shows messages' could also easily be seen as intended for parents and educators as well. The programs sought to build better communities with members who were thoughtful, helpful, and caring. In addition, local

television and radio in Buryatia depicted the region's place in the nation as an intrinsic part of the Soviet Union with legitimate and highly valued citizens.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bushnell, J.

1988 Urban Leisure Culture in Post-Stalin Russia : Stability as a Social Problem ?, in T. L. Thompson & R. Sheldon (eds.), *Soviet Society and Culture : Essays in Honor of Vera S. Dunham* (Boulder, Westview Press), pp. 58-86.

Chakars, M.

2014 *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia : Transformation in Buryatia* (Budapest, Central European University Press).

2015 *Flowers, Steppe Fires, and Communists : Images of Modernity and Identity on TV Shows from Soviet Buryatia in the Brezhnev Era*, in S. Anderson & M. Chakars (eds.), *Modernization, Nation-Building, and Television History* (London, Routledge), pp. 147-164.

Dagbaev, E. D.

1995 *Pressa i natsional'no-politicheskii protsess regiona* (Ulan-Ude, Rossiiskaia akademiya nauk, Sibirskoe otделение, Buryatskii nauchnyi tsentr).

Golubev, E. A.

1974 *Radio i ego auditoria* (Ulan-Ude, Buryatskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo).

1989 *Aktivizatsiia sotsial'noi roli radio* (Ulan-Ude, Buryatskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo).

Gorbachev, M.

1988 *Perestroika : New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (Glasgow, William Collins & Co.).

Hollander, G. D.

1972 *Soviet Political Indoctrination : Development in Mass Media and Propaganda since Stalin* (New York, Praeger).

Hopkins, M. W.

1970 *Mass Media in the Soviet Union* (New York, Pegasus).

Humphrey, C.

1994 Remembering an 'Enemy' : The Bogd Khaan in Twentieth Century Mongolia, in R. S. Watson (ed.), *Memory, History, and Opposition Under State Socialism* (Santa Fe, School of American Research Press), pp. 21-44.

Kelly, C.

2007 *Children's World : Growing Up in Russia, 1890-1991* (New Haven, Yale University Press).

Kolmakov, D. M.

2004 *Obshchestvenno-politicheskaya zhizn' BASSR vo vtoroi polovine 1960-x – 1970-x gg.*, Ph.D. dissertation, Buryatskii nauchnyi tsentr SO RAN.

Kotkin, S.

1995 *Magnetic Mountain : Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, University of California Press).

Kreindler, I.

1989 Soviet Language Planning since 1953, in M. Kirkwood (ed.), *Language Planning in the Soviet Union* (London, Macmillan Press), pp. 46-63.

Kruk, S.

2015 Television Changing Habits : TV Programming in 1960s Soviet Latvia, in S. Anderson & M. Chakars (eds.), *Modernization, Nation-Building, and Television History* (London, Routledge), pp. 89-109.

Kuebart, F.

1989 "The Political Socialisation of Schoolchildren," in J. Riordan (ed.), *Soviet Youth Culture* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press), pp. 103-121.

Mickiewicz, E. P.

1981 *Media and the Russian Public* (New York, Praeger).

O'Dell, F. A.

1978 *Socialisation Through Children's Literature : The Soviet Example* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).

Paasilinna, R.

1995 *Glasnost and Soviet Television : A Study of the Soviet Mass Media and its Role in Society from 1985-1991* (Helsinki, YLE Finish Broadcasting Co.).

Roth-Ey, K.

2007 Finding a Home for Television in the USSR, 1950-1970, *Slavic Review*, 66/2, pp. 278-306.

2011 *Moscow Prime Time : How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press).

Shlapentokh, V.

1986 *Soviet Public Opinion and Ideology : Mythology and Pragmatism in Interaction* (New York, Praeger).

Szporluk, R.

1986 The Press and Soviet Nationalities : The Party Resolution of 1975 and its Implementation, *Nationalities Papers*, 14/1-2, pp. 47-67.

NOTES

1. Pioneer Buryatii, yunost' respubliki, Podrostok i zakon, Davaete podumaet vmeste, Khamar-Dabaan, Chem zhivesh' student ?, and Gorn in Russian. Khamar-Dabaan refers to the Khamar-Dabaan mountain range in southern Buryatia. Gorn refers to a horn-shaped pibgorn instrument used by children in the Pioneer organization for those aged 10 to 15. The transcripts for these shows can be found in the Natsional'ny arkhiv Respubliki Buryatii (National Archive for the Republic of Buryatia) (NARB).

2. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 720. The archival document where the show can be found lists the title of the show in Russian as Slovo o Lenine. However, the show's transcript is in Buryat.

3. NARB, f. P-1, op. 1, d. 7415, ll. 10-12.

4. NARB, f. R-196, op. 1/8, d. 118, ll. 62-66.

5. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 1168, l. 1, 30.

6. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 2086, ll. 28-29.

7. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 1224, ll. 1-7. Buryat State Pedagogical Institute is now Buryat State University.

8. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 2900, l. 2 ; NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 2086, ll. 28-29.

9. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 1168, ll. 1-5.
10. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 2893, ll. 1-10.
11. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 1168, l. 20.
12. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 2086, ll. 1-11.
13. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 1166, ll. 2, 24-25.
14. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 1166, l. 6.
15. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 1132. The quote is from page 44.
16. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 1132, l. 3.
17. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 2614, ll. 2-5.
18. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 2114, ll. 21-24.
19. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 632, ll. 1-4.
20. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 2893, l. 92.
21. *Ibid.*, 69-70.
22. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 1132, l. 22.
23. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 2111, ll. 35-38. The quote is on page 38.
24. *Ibid.*, 1-6.
25. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 632, ll. 36-38.
26. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 1166.
27. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 2086, ll. 104-115.
28. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 1132, ll. 18-32.
29. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 1168, ll. 39-48. The quote is on page 48.
30. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 2893, ll. 11-14.
31. *Ibid.*, 15.
32. *Ibid.*, 15-16.
33. NARB, f. R-60, op. 1, d. 1736, ll. 49-52.
34. *Ibid.*, 52.
35. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 1132, l. 28.
36. *Ibid.*, 21.
37. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 2086, ll. 30-32.
38. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 2917, ll. 1-12.
39. NARB, f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 2900, ll. 1-10.

ABSTRACTS

This article analyzes radio and television programming for children, teenagers, and youth in the Buryat Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic during the last decades of the Soviet Union. It contends that four themes appear as most prevalent on such programming: the value of improving mind and body through educational activities and sports; the importance of being helpful and useful members of society; the encouragement of loyalty, patriotism, and belonging; and teaching right from wrong. The article argues that authorities designed these themes to create thoughtful, useful, and diligent citizens who supported state goals and understood and valued their individual role in society, as well as Buryatia's position in the Soviet Union.

Cet article analyse la programmation à la radio et à la télévision pour les enfants, les adolescents et les jeunes dans la République socialiste soviétique autonome de Bouriatie au cours des

dernières décennies de l'Union Soviétique. Il fait valoir que quatre thèmes apparaissent comme les plus répandus : la valeur de l'amélioration de l'esprit et du corps à travers des activités éducatives et sportives ; l'importance d'être des membres utiles à la société ; l'encouragement à la loyauté, au patriotisme et à l'appartenance ; et l'enseignement du vrai du faux. L'article affirme que les autorités ont conçu ces thèmes pour créer des citoyens réfléchis, utiles, et diligents qui soutenaient les objectifs de l'Etat et comprenaient et appréciaient leur rôle individuel dans la société, ainsi que la position de la Bouriatie dans l'Union Soviétique.

INDEX

Keywords: Buryatia, Buryats, children, media, radio, Russia, Siberia, students, television, youth

Mots-clés: Bouriatie, Bouriates, enfants, médias, radio, Russie, Sibérie, élèves, télévision, jeunesse

AUTHOR

MELISSA CHAKARS

Melissa Chakars is an assistant professor of history at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, USA. Her research centers on the 20th century history of Buryatia with a focus on education, media, and socio-economic development. Three publications : Stewart Anderson & Melissa Chakars eds. 2015 *Modernization, Nation-Building, and Television History* (London, Routledge). Melissa Chakars, 2014 *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia : Transformation in Buryatia* (Budapest, Central European University Press). Melissa Chakars & Elizabeth L. Sweet, 2014 "Professional Women and the Economic Practices of Success and Survival Before and After Regime Change : Diverse Economies and Restructuring in the Russian Republic of Buryatia," *Geojournal* 79/5, pp. 649-663.