

# みんなのポジトリ

国立民族学博物館学術情報リポジトリ National Museum of Ethnology

## 2. The Reality of the Koryaks

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## 2. The Reality of the Koryaks

### 2.1 Meeting the Koryaks

On the fourth morning after we arrived in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii, we were still at the airport lobby. I remembered how Mikhail had told us the day before that today would be a long day. It would be interesting to see how we were going to continue our trip northward in a situation where we couldn't get air tickets.

At the airport, Mikhail went to the office to negotiate as usual. Sergei and I waited with our luggage in front of a temporary box-shaped ticket booth made of wooden boards, set inside the waiting room. There were a lot of people waiting to go to smaller villages further northward from Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii. They had also gathered in front of the ticket booth to get their air tickets.

A little Russian girl stood with a dog tucked up to her chest. There was another girl who seemed to be a Chukchee or a Koryak with black hair and black eyebrows and looked like a Japanese. She was probably about 15 years old and was wearing bright red lipstick and black eye shadow around her eyes. She also made strong impression on me due to the fact that her hair was tied up high with a red ribbon. There was also another Russian girl with blond hair, who was wearing a gold jacket and black tights that clung to her legs. The earrings and the bracelets she wore shone brightly. She would not have stood out if she was walking in a big city, but here at the waiting room in the airport it seemed quite odd. A lady who seemed to be her mother let her lean her head on her shoulder.

Sergei left me with the luggage and went to see Mikhail and Vasha negotiating at the office. He came back shaking his head as if to tell me things weren't going well. Then he went off again. Mikhail came back to where I was waiting looking gloomy too. I waited, thinking it wasn't going to work, but soon became tired of standing there and squatted, and finally I took a seat that someone happened to leave. People suddenly rushed to the ticket booth when an attendant appeared, and waved their domestic visas over the heads of people standing in front of them and handed out bills and started to get their tickets.

Among the luggage piled up inside the waiting room there was a small cardboard box with many small holes poked in it. "What could it be inside?" "Was it a kitten or some other young animal...?" While I was thinking about it distractedly, Mikhail and Vasha came rushing back and told us to collect our luggage and we all went with our bags to the check-in room that led to the boarding gate. Apparently, Mikhail had managed to get the tickets directly at the office.

The aircraft was a small-sized jet plane for 28 people. The rear part of the body under the empennage opened vertically, which turned into a staircase for boarding as it unfolded to the ground. Mikhail was helping to load not only our luggage, but the bags of other passengers too – he might have been doing it in return for our

seats. As the plane moved toward the runway, I saw through the window a black reconnaissance plane parked as if it were being hidden. What's more, there were two MIG fighters in front of each of the several hangars standing further back from the runway. "War." Mikhail said to me as he pointed out the window and winked. Although the small-sized jet plane was holding its full capacity, perhaps due to its power it took off and cut through the clouds, reaching above them as soon as it had sped across the runway. At long last, we started flying northward.

After an hour's flight, the aircraft descended. It had to refuel on its way, at a small town called Usti-Kamchatskii where the Kamchatka River flowed into the Pacific Ocean in the middle of the Kamchatka Peninsula. The airport was a small wooden building made of planks. It was at the very point where the Kamchatka Peninsula ran into the Komandorskiye Islands. Komandorskiye is at the west end of the Aleutian Islands, which spreads like a chain from Alaska on the American continent. From the Aleutian Islands northward, the Pacific Ocean becomes the Bering Sea.

After a short break here, we headed towards the north again. The coastal area was a flat marshland and a small river meandered into the sea. Flying further, the inland area of the Kamchatka Peninsula became higher and soon turned into a mountainous zone. A volcano could be seen above the clouds piping out white smoke. After another hour's flight, our plane landed again at a small airport facing the Pacific Ocean at the northern end of the Kamchatka Peninsula. Here was a small gulf named Korf where, according to Mikhail, Japanese fishing vessels were often moored. A joint enterprise between Russia and Japan was exporting processed salmon roe (*ikura*) to Japan.

Our destination Pakhachi was about 200 kilometres further east, but the flight ended here and all the luggage was unloaded. Mikhail negotiated again for the onward air ticket. From Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii he had called ahead to an attendant at the airport here, so the negotiations went well.

I was later told that Mikhail had bought the tickets directly from the pilot. In order to get a ticket, you had to negotiate not only with the attendants of the airline company but also with the director of the airport, the pilot of the flight or sometimes even with the person in charge of refuelling. The tickets were sold in cash, but the pilot would not sell it to a stranger. So Mikhail had to get his friend – who was also a friend of the pilot's – to act as a go-between in order to persuade him that this negotiation was not a dangerous one. Mikhail said this was how things worked in Russia and that naturally the relationships between your friends became important. Without friends, not only could you not get air tickets but also you couldn't buy necessities or food, and your daily life could not function. Sergei, looking as though he could care less, mumbled that nobody thought this was a good way to do things, but that was the reality.

This time we continued our trip on a twin-engine propeller plane. Previously you could fly from Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii to Pakhachi on the same flight, but recently, due to the fuel shortage, the small-sized jet plane stopped in Korf, and you had to get on a still smaller propeller plane from there on. And on its return journey this small plane would bring back other passengers, who would then catch the small jet plane to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii. Apparently, this system had started a few days before. The small propeller plane was for 13 passengers, but 15 of us got on and two passengers – one of them Mikhail – had to stand without a seat. Mikhail sat down on the luggage that was loaded in the cabin's passage and the other passenger opened the door to the cockpit and stood there talking to the pilot.

The propeller plane was quite old and the engines made an awfully loud noise as they turned over. It ran across the runway jolting terribly and stopped at the end of the runway to get ready for takeoff. While he hit the brakes, the pilot brought the engine up to full power and even though the engine's roar oscillated between loud and soft, it somehow kept going. The aircraft shook so much that I started to worry that some bits might fall apart. A story came back to my mind about the joint French-Russian expedition party that chartered a military helicopter and crashed; everybody was killed. When the pilot released the brakes, the aircraft was pushed forward and my body was pulled backward and within 15 seconds we were airborne. In addition to excess passengers, the plane was loaded with a huge number of bags, but the engine was powerful enough to take off.

The airplane flew at a low altitude through the clouds. I was worried if the pilot was all right because the visibility was poor. From time to time, I could see through the clouds the flat wilderness and the coastal terrace that looked as if it went down into the sea. Beyond them was a mountain range. The Koryak Mountains and the river that flowed into the Bering Sea from it, and the wilderness that spread among them; they were the lands of the Koryak that we were about to set foot on. The wilderness here was a damp marshland during this season, but normally was tundra covered with moss, used as grazing land for reindeer (Plate 1).

After flying about an hour, we were over the skies of Pakhachi, which was our landing point. Along the flat coastline, there was a thin line of houses. The topography was almost the same as the coastlines of the Okhotsk Sea in Hokkaido. I could easily imagine from the bare treeless shores and the row of houses that stood low and tight together, the long winter sealed with drifting ice, the short summer and the strong icing wind that never stopped blowing. This place is located farther north than the Aleutian Islands, at latitude 60 degrees north. It is 2,700 kilometres away from Sapporo, and 3,600 kilometres away from Tokyo.

When we landed, I saw a small wooden building like a hut. It was the airport office and the waiting room. I could feel we were advancing step-by-step northward, on our trip to the far north, as the airport buildings and aircrafts got obviously

smaller. Mind you, Pakhachi was still not our ultimate destination. After taking a short break here, we were going to travel upstream, by boat, to a small Koryak village situated halfway along the Pakhachi River.

As we waited at the airport, a motorcycle with a sidecar arrived. It was Mikhail's Russian friend. I put my bags on it and got on the back of the motorcycle. From right to left the sidecar avoided the puddles that were scattered all across the street and we reached a small apartment. His Russian wife and a little girl greeted us. In the small living room, a brown bear's skin that looked three meters long was hanging on the wall. The Russian said he had already caught four bears that season. We dined lightly on a piece of salmon fillet and bread in the dining room where there was a small table and chairs. The room was decorated with flowers. They told me they had gathered two buckets full of cranberries in just a few hours on the tundra nearby. The berries were made into jam. Thus it was that a Russian family led its life in such a small town here in the far north.

As we talked, they told me that six Japanese had been working in this town at a joint fishery enterprise, between Japan and Russia, until a few days ago. They had processed and exported to salmon roe (*ikura*) to Japan from June. They said the Japanese were good, kind people. The Russian tried to remember some of the names of those Japanese and told them to me. What's more, he gave me a small metal ring that he had found on the leg of a wild duck he had caught hunting. On the ring, the words "Nihon, Tokyo, Kankyo-cho (Japan, Tokyo, Environment Agency)" were spelled, and it was numbered. This meant the wild duck had flown from Japan, migrating to the northern tip of Kamchatka. While I knew nothing about the people living here, they were already a little bit familiar with Japan.

When we finished our meal, Sergei and Mikhail loaded the sidecar with our bags again and went ahead to the river mouth. Vasha and I waited at the house until the guide came.

I was standing in the doorway when suddenly the door opened, and a short but solid built man with a Japanese look on his face came in.

"Alekseev," he said to me in a loud voice and reached his hand out to me, so I reached out my hand too and we shook hands firmly. His grip was strong and hurt my hand. Alekseev was his name and he was the Koryak man who was going to take care of us from now on. He had a short moustache, high cheekbones, thick eyebrows and bright eyes that shone lively beneath them. And more than anything, his brisk movements told us that he was a good hunter.

At the wharf on the river mouth, were Sergei and Mikhail who had arrived before us; there were two small boats with outboard motors. The Russian who was the owner of the house where we had rested navigated the one, in which Sergei and Mikhail rode together. Alekseev and his wife Natalia – she helped us out a lot during this expedition as well – navigated the other boat for Vasha and I. I was wearing

rubber boots that came up to my thighs, and had a coat over my wool sweater with a poncho over the coat in case I got wet. I huddled down on the middle of the rear seat, while Alekseev and his wife sat at the front and Vasha sat in between us facing me in order to protect me from the wind and splashes.

We went up the Pakhachi River as it meandered through the tundra, and a range of mountains could be seen in the distance. The river was as wide as 500m at the mouth, but after a while narrowed to about 50 meters. The bends formed deep pools and the current was strong. The river widened where there was a sandbank and the current branched into two directions. The exposed soil on the right riverbank was about two meters high, indicating how the water level had risen from the spring thaw. Along the bank, the small willow woods went on and beyond that spread gentle undulations of the treeless, moss-covered tundra. At several points along the riverside, I saw camps that were probably set to shoot bears. In addition, there were people pulling up the gill nets they had cast in the river from their little boats. Fences for drying salmon and the wooden frameworks left from the camps came to my sight as well. I could tell from the movement of her lips that Natalia, Alekseev's wife, was asking me if I was all right as she turned my way every now and then. I raised my hand a little and signalled to her that I was fine. The large marshland and the vast sky, the mountains far beyond and the wind from the river that brushed my cheek; these were the touches of the north that I hadn't felt in a long time.

After we had been travelling for about an hour, the boat engine had some trouble and slowed down. Alekseev pulled the boat up to the riverside and checked the engine. Apparently, water had leaked in so he took off the fuel tube and started to mend it. This kind of scene was something I often saw on my trips to northern regions. When the engine started again, it did a good job and this time sped upstream against the current. After a while, slight drops of rain started to spray against my face and my poncho was wet. Vasha offered to lend me his jacket but I said no. A little bit of rain felt rather good to me now.

From upstream, the boat that the Russian man had been driving ahead of us was coming our way. He had already dropped the two Russian researchers off at the village and was on his way back, but, being worried that we were late, had come to see us. When we passed his boat, he turned around and came after us; as he caught up and ran side by side, he signalled with his hands that he was going back downstream at once. Then he pulled away from our boat again, made a U-turn in the river and sped off downstream.

Soon I saw a village on the right side (Plate 2). The first thing that came to my eyes was a construction that looked like a triangular bird's nest built on top of high stakes. This was covered with a net and I was later told that it was a high-grounded stockade for desiccating salmon or reindeer meat. Then I saw a triangular-pyramid-shaped tent for smoking fish; a small modern house built of wood and behind it

a wooden two-storied building that looked like a school building. We went into a tributary behind the village and moored the boat there. Sergei and Mikhail who had gone ashore earlier were waiting with their luggage. We climbed the narrow path that was muddy from the slight rain and arrived in front of a wooden house. It was one-storied, but had an attic that looked like it was used as a storage room, judging from the way a ladder was hanging on the outside. This was Alekseev's house. In fact the Russian researchers, Mikhail and Vasha, had visited a village 100 kilometres away from this village ten years ago, and Alekseev was the village chief's brother. We were going to live in this house during this expedition.

The house was nice and clean inside. It was a little different from the traditional Koryak house that the Russian researchers had told me about. Actually, it was the first time for the Russian researchers themselves to enter this village. There was a TV in the living room and a simple carpet spread on the floor. The beds were put along the wall where a bright-coloured carpet hung. On the other side of the room, there was a glass-covered shelf with some 20 books and a graduation photo. In front of the photo there stood about 15 lipsticks, and next to them a small bottle of perfume and nail polish – about ten of them. Furthermore, the shelves also housed five large tea cups with handles, three larger handle-less ceramic tea cups, a small bottle of vodka and some glasses, and two round red ornaments for decorating Christmas trees. In addition, there was also a small transistor radio. The binoculars and the traditional Japanese lacquered cigarette box that I was to give to them afterwards would also be displayed here.

Soon, Alekseev's wife Natalia brought in a girl. She had a lean and quiet looking face, very similar to that of some Japanese girls. She was Natalia's eldest daughter and her name was Nina. She was studying law at a university in Tomsk and was in her junior year. Her sister was studying commercial science at a school in Vladivostok. They were staying at home now, but said they were returning to school next year. And Natalia's eldest son was working among the reindeer herds. I gave Nina a key ring with a small thermometer and a compass, after discussing it with the Russian researchers. She shook her head shyly and wouldn't receive the gift at first. I didn't know what to do either and since I couldn't take it back now, I handed it to the mother because that was the only thing I could do. The mother seemed to suggest to her to take it, but Nina hid in the kitchen and started to get ready for that night's supper with her mother.

It was probably true that Nina did not know what to do in front of this Japanese man that had suddenly visited them; in the same way that I strongly felt when I first met the Koryaks. However, I felt there must have been something behind the specific attitude she displayed. I later found out little by little that receiving a present was part of the long ceremonial manners specific to them when preparing for marriage. What's more, Nina was in the middle of preparing to marry a Russian man that

Nina's mother did not necessarily want her to marry. Actually on this first occasion of meeting the Koryaks, I could only feel that behind their visibly modern life-style, they had something invisible – their own way of thinking.

## 2.2 Natalia's Tears

That night, we had a luxurious dinner that Alekseev's family had prepared for us. To start off with, we had salad with cucumbers and tomatoes, then fish soup and salmon meuniere; a Russian-styled meal cooked with fresh and rich local ingredients. A bowlful of *ikura* - so much it was almost overflowing the bowl - was served and we ate it with bread. And we drank the blueberry jam in our tea.

What surprised me the most was that we had rice. Since they were receiving a Japanese, Alekseev had specially ordered it through a state-run store in the village. Because he had heard that Japanese live on rice, he had bought plenty of it so that I would not feel uncomfortable. What's more, he had believed that Japanese people ate only rice, so he kept worrying if I liked the salmon or bread. I explained to him that Japanese people ate food other than rice, and told him not to worry because I could eat anything served here happily. Then he asked me how guests are received in Japan, so I told him we invite them for a gorgeous meal, just like this. They all looked relieved and smiled when they heard this, and added that the Koryaks say when you receive a guest, the family prospers.

Small glasses of vodka were handed out, and we drank a toast - though Alekseev's family usually doesn't drink. His father's family, that lives a little distant from there, doesn't drink either. They say there have been many people in this village that could not continue their work due to drinking too much alcohol. Those people became poor because they failed to breed reindeer. Apparently, they seem to have alcoholic problems in this village too. In fact, legal vodka is rarely brought into this village. It is only brought in from time to time, by merchants who exchange it for animal fur. Consequently, they usually distil their own homemade vodka "moonshine" from sugar. It may be because it contains many kinds of flavourings and is easy to drink, but when you drink too much it causes headaches and other nasty after-effects due to the impurities it contains.

After dinner, the Russian researchers and I went out to the wooden steps outside the doorway and stood there smoking. Of course, they had put out ashtrays in the room, but the Russians had always gone outside to smoke as an act of etiquette. Later, as the Russians went back inside, Natalia came out. She pointed out to me the hill that spread in the darkness beyond the village. Then she drew a large semi-circle over her head with both hands, and put her hands together tilting her head on those hands as she closed her eyes. After that, she put her hands on her chest and made a relaxed and satisfied expression, and said to me in Russian "*Kharasho* (wonderful)," as if she was explaining to me how relaxing it was. Then she pointed at the house in



which we were standing and said "a Russian house" as she shrugged her shoulders and spread her arms out. She repeated this gesture over and over trying to give me - who didn't understand the language thoroughly - her message.

She was obviously drunk on vodka, but I could understand well what she wanted to say. She was trying to tell me how their traditional life on the tundra that spread beyond the hill - i.e. living in the semi-spherical tent made of reindeer hide - was relaxing, and how their life here in the Russian-styled house was uncomfortable on the contrary. That also meant that she believed in the traditional Koryak culture and rejected the Russian culture. I felt uneasy watching her say "Russians" as she shrugged her shoulders and made faces repeatedly when she dropped her arms down. I wondered what the Russian researchers would think when they saw this obvious attitude of dislike towards them.

In fact, the Russians eventually realized Natalia's dislike for Russians as she drank repeatedly. But they acted as calmly as they could, saying that the problem of alcoholism existed throughout the Siberian minorities, and made a face as if to say they couldn't do anything about it. Natalia acted very friendly to me contrary to how she acted toward the Russians. As is often the case with other Koryaks, she only gave vague answers to questions the Russians asked. But she told me not to hesitate to ask her any kinds of questions. What's more, she ordered the Russians in a strong voice to translate into English right away the unique Russian the Koryaks spoke, and to explain it to me accurately. She sometimes even complained that the Russian researchers were not explaining the Koryak culture and their present situation to me accurately, and that they were trying to cheat me.

Actually, it wasn't that Natalia herself didn't have any problems. She wouldn't stop drinking, which was what Alekseev wanted her to do the most. But at least in front of us he acted cool. He would just look at Natalia drunk and would make an expression as if to say this was inevitable. When you thought about the life she had led up to now, it seemed as though this was not something extraordinary and that she had a good reason to rely on alcohol.

Natalia's parents were Chukchees. The Koryaks originally occupied this region, but the Chukchees that bred reindeers came down south from the Chukotskii Peninsula located further north. So two ethnic groups coexist here. In fact, Chukchee and Koryak belong to the same linguistic family and though there are slight differences, they say they're almost the same. In addition, their life-style of herding reindeers is roughly the same. Her husband, Alekseev's father was a Koryak, but his mother was a Chukchee. And he recognized himself as a Koryak.

Due to Russia's Northern Minority Policy, they have to register the ethnic group they belong to. Each individual has to decide officially whether he or she is a Chukchee or a Koryak. But in fact, the two peoples are becoming mixed and it is difficult to classify them precisely from the viewpoint of physical anthropology.

Their culture has mixed here as well and it is hard to tell one from the other. However, it isn't that an ethnological borderline does not exist between the Chukchee and the Koryak. While they have a very wide range of common features, they actually have a distinct boundary between them in their minds. For instance, Alekseev would laugh at a silly TV program and joke that it was made for the Chukchees. But he never forgets to say right afterwards,

"But the Chukchees know a lot." He makes a compliment saying that the Chukchees know a lot about daily life. Although this region is classified as a family of Koryak Culture called "Olyutor-Koryak", it has formed a unique culture that could be called a "Nomadic Chukchee-Koryak Culture" as it has fused again with the Chukchee culture, which shares its origins.

However Natalia's problem didn't have anything to do with this ethnological border between the Chukchee and the Koryak. In spite of their slight sense of rivalry, they have had no clashing problems living within the village. Her problem had something to do with the relationship between their traditional culture and the Russian culture, or that is to say it was related to the problem of their traditional life-style becoming more and more Russian.

Natalia had three children. The eldest son was born from a relationship with a Russian man who had come here to work from the Caucasus Region. Her son was a young man running about the tundra, breeding reindeer. He didn't have the look of a Russian except for his slender body, high nose and sharp features. The second child, Nina, was born between her and another Russian who was a seasonal worker. As I said about her when I first saw her, she was a young lady who looked just like a Japanese and was studying law. The third child's father was another Russian. She was studying commercial science though she had come home to the village as Nina had. So the present husband, Alekseev, was Natalia's fourth, but they didn't have any children between them. I asked her if it was common for a woman to get married many times, and she told me that it happened a lot.

Looking back at Natalia's life, it seemed natural for her to have a liking for Russians. At any rate her three children had been born to Russians. However, she had a strong feeling of hatred against Russians and the Russian culture now. Her attitude must have changed at some point, and she was returning to her traditional culture.

The next day, Natalia, Mikhail, Vasha and I climbed the hill at the back of the village, and walked around the tundra that spread there. There was a tent shaped the same way that Natalia had shown me the previous night, drawing a big semi-circle over her head spreading both of her arms; it was the traditional dome shaped tent made of patched-up deer hide called *yanana* (Plate 3.). An old lady was living there alone (Plate 4.) There were no televisions or radios, and instead there was a fireplace in the middle that smoked away endlessly and a round blue sky that could be seen

from the hole in the middle of the ceiling for letting out the smoke. On this hill, there were many other huts made of wood planks, tents and high-grounded storage rooms. There was a village with Russian-styled houses on one end, and traditional houses of the Koryaks were built sparsely around it.

Natalia was in a good mood because she had shown me a part of their traditional culture. She gave me the blueberries she had gathered on the tundra and told me not to drink tap water, but eat two to three spoonfuls of these when I got thirsty. At night, she brought me a candle. Apparently there was going to be a blackout in the village for a month from today, since the diesel generator was not going to work due to a fuel shortage. So the candle was set in their bedroom where I was going to stay. They were going to sleep over at the house of Alekseev's father. I told them I could sleep on the bed or the floor with the Russians in the living room, but they wouldn't let me.

The next morning, Natalia came in the room calling me "Takashi-san." Someone had told her that Japanese call each other by putting "san" at the end of their names. Since then, we practiced together the Japanese greetings "Ohayo-gozaïmasu (good-morning)," "Konnichiwa (hello)," "konbanwa (good-evening)," upon her request. She said she was sorry she couldn't bake any bread because of the blackout. Then she started to talk of her complaints about this Russian-styled house. They had started living in a Russian-styled house for the first time when this village was founded. At first, they had things like a furnace where they could burn wood - actually this furnace still exists at Natalia's house - but eventually electricity was generated in the village and when they could use electric devices, people started to destroy their furnaces. They said they were troubled because they couldn't burn wood using the furnaces that had been destroyed, on occasions like this when there was a blackout and you couldn't use electric devices.

In addition, there were radiators in the Russian-styled houses that heated the rooms by vapour that was sent from the centre of the village. But these were not enough to warm up each of the parted rooms. Consequently, some people pulled down the walls that parted the kitchen and the other rooms so that the heat from the burning wood and the cooking would circulate inside the house. They had a piped water supply here, but it sometimes stopped. Natalia pointed at the thick rusty water pipe and said "Russia" as she frowned. She said every morning when she got up and saw the peeling cracking tiled wall in the kitchen, she felt uncomfortable. Natalia went to the window and pointed towards the tundra where the dome-shaped *yanana* was, which we had seen earlier, and told me it was better sleeping there. Over there, she said everything that came into your sight when you got up in the morning was "*Kharasho*," and she gestured a semi-circle with both her arms as if she was imagining the interior of the tent.

Then the Russian researcher, Mikhail, told us that not only the electricity but

also the water would be stopped the next day. In the past few years, due to the Russian economic failure, living in Siberia had become difficult and many Russians had been returning to their hometowns in the mainland, such as Moscow or the regions of Ukraine. He told Natalia that if the electricity and water service went out in this village, even the Russians who had come here to work from the mainland would have to go back to their hometowns, because it would be difficult living here. But she said baldly in return that she wouldn't mind if all the Russians went back, and that it was all right so long as they, the Koryaks and the Chukchees, could go on with their traditional life-style.

This dislike for the Russians seemed as though it was not just Natalia's problem alone. The Koryaks behaved calmly in front of the Russians, but concealed the emotions that had been heaping up deep inside their hearts. Then I appeared on the scene from Japan - the country they had heard so much about. When they saw me they found that we looked similar in appearance and, given the help of alcohol, all their emotions they had kept back suddenly burst forth. So this was why many Koryaks who wanted to take a look at the Japanese man came to Alekseev's house one after another.

One of them - an old lady - was brought down here all the way from the tundra by Natalia. The lady's mother and Natalia's mother were said to be sisters. The old lady was over 70-years old and had lost the roundness around her cheeks and her bones were showing on her skinny face, but she had a firm look and narrow kind-looking eyes. When she saw me, she said "Japonskii (Japanese)" and hugged me. I stood there being hugged because I couldn't do anything else. When I looked at her, tears were flowing out of her eyes. She was trying to tell me something desperately. Natalia brought Sergei in with her so he could translate what she was saying for me. He came unwillingly into the kitchen where we were, and would not translate immediately what she said. Natalia urged him to interpret every time the old lady's talking paused. But he tried to interpret it in a summarized form at once after hearing all that she had to say, so I felt irritated and couldn't understand her intentions immediately. In addition, Natalia would desperately urge Sergei to translate because she wanted me to understand the old lady's words as she spoke them. In the end, she lost her patience and brought in Mikhail who was smoking outside and tried to make him translate, but he wouldn't do it considering Sergei's feelings.

Natalia, who was a little drunk, repeated clearly sentence by sentence what the old lady said and almost forced Sergei to translate it. According to what he reluctantly translated, the story went like this: She had been living in a coastal village about 100 kilometres to the east, called Apuka, since she had been five years old. When a Japanese fishery base was built there, she used to go there to play. A number of Japanese people worked there, and they had a motorboat. There was also

a Russian ranger who had another motorboat. Whenever she visited the Japanese, they gave her something to eat and were very kind to her. The food they gave her was something soft like porridge made of cooked grain, and it was really delicious so she always ate until she was full.

While she told me this, she lifted my face with both her hands and looked into my eyes smiling. Then she closed her eyes and still with a smile on her face, recalled her memories of when she was a child. Now, she said, she lived on the tundra with her family and reindeer. Natalia added that the old lady who lived on the tundra was always smiling. She said they had Japanese tableware inside the tent. Apparently they were made of plastic. What's more, according to what she said, the Japanese later left and Americans came, and then finally, the Russians came.

She started talking to me enthusiastically again. Natalia asked Sergei to translate again, but he yelled at her in return. What Sergei told me later was that the old lady was saying the same thing over and over again - i.e. that she had fun visiting the Japanese when she was five. Natalia asked Mikhail, who was standing near by to translate it, but he too would just point at Sergei. Finally Natalia ended up wandering behind me with her eyes filled with tears. The old lady kept talking to me regardless of the situation, so I could see how Natalia felt looking at her eyes.

Then the old lady asked me how handicapped people who had problems with their legs were living in Japan. Vasha, who had come into the kitchen and was listening to our conversation, brought the crutches that were in the doorway and showed them to me. Her legs were weak and she needed the crutches to get around. I explained to her that in Japan they used crutches like these and wheelchairs, and she nodded. Sergei and Mikhail went into another room; they might have felt insulted. Natalia, who was all depressed from quarrelling with the Russians, wouldn't come out of her bedroom. Vasha sat next to me and translated sentence by sentence what the old lady wanted to say. She asked me where Japan was. I showed her the map I had bought in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii, but the map on a scale of 1 to 2,000,000 only showed largely the Kamchatka Peninsula. Vasha said it was impossible to explain to her where it was on this map. So I held the map that showed the Kamchatka Peninsula high up with my right hand, and pointed below the map.

"There are small islands here that stretch like a long chain. And there's a big island below that. That is Japan." I explained how Japan was located below the Chishima (Krile) Islands. Then I also added that the ice that gets to the Kamchatka Peninsula, shown on the map, flows southward in winter and that Japan's northern tip is covered with this drifting ice. The old lady's eyes suddenly looked serious and she stared at me. She had fully understood my answer. Then she said,

"We are neighbours of the Japanese." And she held my hand as if she was trying to remember something with her eyes shut. Her smile told us that she was now inside her memories from when she was five years old; memories that she had

locked up deep inside her mind.

Then she drank a glass of homemade vodka that was on the table and ate her meal. Then a little drunk, she filliped Nina - Natalia's daughter who was cleaning up the dishes nearby - on her hips with her fingers, ruffled Vasha's hair and fooled around. After a while, Nina told the old lady to stop drinking, but she got angry with her. Natalia came into the room still excited and told her in tears to stop drinking.

I went outside. The memories of the kind Japanese when she was five; the change in life-style brought in by the Russians; and alcohol. I could fully understand her present mind and heart. Soon the old lady came out from the doorway as she yelled something, held under her arms on both sides by Natalia and her daughter Nina. Actually, to be precise she was dragged out of the house. When Natalia went back inside the house, I grabbed the old lady's arms and Nina supported her from behind to get her - as she had walking problems - down the steps. I could see Nina wanted her to go home because she was drunk, so I handed her the crutches, but at this point she couldn't walk. Or she hadn't the will to walk and she sat down at the last plank of the steps, somehow leaning her collapsed body against the stairway. She wouldn't move.

When a culture undergoes change, it is painful for some people. Some of the elderly, the middle-aged and even the young lose themselves in alcohol not knowing what to do with their future. I was seeing before my eyes a situation in which people were going through changes in their traditional life-style and the sense of values that supported it. What I had seen in Canada 20 years ago, and what had happened in Japan a hundred years ago, was now happening here. I remembered how Natalia had tried to somehow show me by her gestures and by the expressions on her face that the tent on the tundra was very comfortable in contrast to the Russian-styled house, on the first night I met her.

When a culture is forced to change from the outside, people suffer for it. Finally, Nina went back inside the house troubled with the old lady. I stood a short distance away from the old lady, and gazed at the sacred ground, "Shaman Hill", whose name Nina had taught me. With the night sky in its background, the gently sloping hill looked black and still. After a while, the old lady started singing alone behind me. The song sounded so sad, and was sung in Russian. As I heard her sing, I felt my heart moving closer to the heart of these people.

### **2.3 Traditional Culture Still Living**

Natalia decided to take me to where people lived on the tundra, because she wanted to show me what their traditional lifestyle was like. At the entrance of a hut just at the foot of the hill that stood beyond the village, a woman was tanning reindeer fur. I was secretly surprised when I saw this, because she was scraping the fat off the reindeer hide using a stone implement (Plate 5). In the middle of a slightly

curved stick, a carved stone about 6 cm long, 4 cm wide and about 2 cm thick at its thickest point, was embedded. She was holding this stick with both hands, moving it forward as she scraped the stone blade over the reindeer hide that was spread out over her legs. Four or five of these tools made from quartz or obsidian were thrown about on the floor (Plate 6). In addition, there were tools that had semicircular iron blades. In the room at the back, there were furs painted on the reverse with a liquid mixture of urine and red fluid taken from bark. The tanned leather was going to be cut, sewn together with thread made from the reindeer's spine and was to be made into clothes. I asked her why she used stone blades when she had iron blades too, and she told me the leather easily tore if she used iron blades. Indeed when I looked at the stone blade closely, it was carved carefully and finely. At the bottom front part of the blade where it came in contact with the leather, the stone lifted slightly; on the other hand, the top part increased its angle gradually, forming a blade angle of about 70 degrees. The entire blade was semicircular. It would be difficult to make an iron blade with the same characteristics, because it would be very thin. Apparently they got the stone to make this blade from a riverbank near a neighbouring village located about 100 kilometres westward. They had relatives living there, so they got the stones from them. Even today, they still need to make stone implements and trade with them.

We walked up the hill that led to the tundra. Tundra is land that is composed of permafrost strata, and climatically it refers to a region where the average temperature of the warmest month ranges between 0 and 10 degrees Celsius. It is located outside the northern coniferous forestland called Taiga, distributed in Northern Eurasia and North America above latitude 60 degrees North. Naturally no large trees grow there, and only a small numbers of shrubs, moss and lichen are seen on the ground surface, which melts during the short summer. In fact the tundra here in Northern Kamchatka was different from the dry lichenous tundra I saw in Northern Canada; water from the snowmelt had pooled at various points, making a thick layer of sphagnum. This was probably because there was a relatively moist maritime climate here, in contrast with the dry inland climate of Northern Canada. Looking down from the hill, you could see the willow woods about 100 meters wide along the river. These woods along the river acted as windbreaks to protect the campsites where they lived during the summer to catch salmon and the wood was turned into poles for the tents, storage rooms, reindeer sleighs, dog sleighs and firewood which was indispensable in winter. On the slopes of the hill, low dwarf Siberian pine trees grew thickly.

The southern side of this Olyutor region faces the Pacific Ocean. More accurately, the water here would be the Bering Sea, because it is further north from the Aleutian Islands. The inland is a mixture of low hills and the wilderness of the mossy tundra, while going further north there are the plateau lands and the mountains of the Koryak Range. Three wide rivers run from these mountains toward

the sea, and woods have formed along them. In recent times villages where people live have grown up near the river mouth and halfway upstream.

In addition, since the Koryak Mountains are located to the north of this region, it is protected from the wind that blows off the Arctic Ocean so the climate is relatively mild. According to what the Russian researchers say, this region must have been covered with trees even in the Glacial Period because the glacier couldn't develop here. They said that a few years ago when they were constructing a road, they had found in the soil at the bottom of a dried-up pond a prehistoric log that had not decayed. Anyway, I was about to experience how difficult it was to walk on the tundra. The bumpy ground would look as if it was covered with soft sphagnum, but would turn out to be a puddle that sank you to your knees. It was impossible to walk here unless you had long rubber boots that came up above your thighs to the crotch. Now I understood why the reindeer herders that had come back from the tundra were all wearing rubber boots with the top-halves folded down.

So we stood in front of the dome-shaped tent (*yanana*), shaped like an upside down rice-bowl. Large sized sleighs for carrying the tents were leaned against the wall on the outside. Next to the tent was a wooden triangular-pyramid-shaped frame for cooking food, and an iron pot was hung over the firewood. In front of the small entrance, they had put out tree roots to dry, which they had collected from the tundra - they were supposed to be good for some remedy. In addition to that, there were about ten mushrooms threaded on a string that was hung on the outer net of the tent in the abundant sunshine. The mushrooms had red heads dotted with white, and white brims surrounded the stems; this was fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*), which shamans use in North-eastern Siberia. In Russia, this poisonous mushroom is called "*mukhomor*". It grows on the tundra and in the groves. Later on I was told more about the *mukhomor* and ended up visiting the world of the dead, after eating the mushroom myself, just as I was told to do by the Koryaks. This experience is described in chapter 5.

As I entered the tent after Natalia, I saw an old lady sitting there. She said that this was where she lived. Her family lived in a Russian-styled house in the village, but she said they gathered here in the tent once in a while. I listened to the old lady and Natalia explain about this traditional residence, and Mikhail, the Russian researcher who came with me added some explanations too. This type of house is called "*yanana*" in Koryak, and "*yaranga*" in Chukchee. It is made out of reindeer hide and wood. Leather straps are used to tie the materials together, stones are used to stabilize the tent and branches with leaves on them are used to keep the tent round from the inside.

The dome shape is apparently effective for decreasing the wind resistance, because the strong wind that blows along the ground can blow along and over the hemispherical tent. Moreover, even in winter the snow doesn't pile up like it does on



the roofs and along the walls of the Russian-styled rectangular houses. Three main poles support the tent, but the top part where the three poles are tied together is not fastened tightly. By adjusting the direction and angle of the poles, they can change the form of the tent. For example, if the wind is blowing toward the north or the northwest, by changing the direction of the poles they can make the ceiling on the windward side longer and decrease the angle of the tent. As a result, the wind can blow over the tent more smoothly.

A fireplace is set in the ground towards the middle of the tent. It is actually a little closer to the entrance than the centre of the tent, because the bedroom is behind the fireplace, on the opposite side of the entrance. In general, the entrance faces the river on the leeward side. The tents are usually built in the valley near the mountains to avoid the strong wind as much as possible. However during the summer, the entrance faces southward or toward the southeast, which is the windward side. The purpose is to let the wind inside the tent and prevent the mosquitoes from collecting in one place, because there are so many of them in summer. At the same time, a small fire is burned to give off smoke in the tent. This has two purposes: to prevent mosquitoes, and to smoke the reindeer hide of the tent. As the entrance faces windward, the wind that enters through it pushes the smoke out of the hole in the ceiling.

Inside the tent, there is a small squared space surrounded by reindeer hide that might be referred to as a bedroom. This is called the *yorong*. They cover the bedroom floor with dwarf Siberian pine needles and spread reindeer fur over it. This reindeer fur is taken from a reindeer killed in autumn, which means the fur is thick and warm, and of high quality. The bedroom walls are made of reindeer fur as well. At night, they go into this bedroom and take off all their clothes. Here, in winter, they put a lamp with a stone saucer on which they burn reindeer fat or seal fat. According to Natalia, they heat the bedroom even more by taking the embers from the hearth and putting them on an iron board or a stone. By doing so, people can sit there without any clothes on. In addition, when they go to bed they sleep with another reindeer fur over them. If they get too hot, they sleep with their heads sticking out of the bedroom.

During the night, the embers burn in the hearth inside the tent and slight warmth is maintained. People don't feel cold because they sleep with their heads pointing towards the hearth. Inside the bedroom, it is even warmer with the heat of human bodies and the stone-saucer lamp. Clothes are hung on the horizontal poles inside the bedroom to dry once they are taken off. The reindeer fur used inside the bedroom is hung outside every morning - though sometimes every two to three days depending on the weather. The fur gets damp with moisture from the bodies and the stone-saucer lamp. The water drops freeze outside and became drops of ice. Then a woman beats the drops off with a bone cane. Preparation for meals is done outside

the tent, as they don't burn a big fire inside: the furs would get wet. The hearth inside the tent is only used to make tea in the mornings and evenings. Consequently even during the winter, they work outside in the daytime except on extremely cold days.

In the bedroom they have a special wooden container for urinating so they don't have to go out of the bedroom to urinate. Moreover, there is a pile of snow inside the tent - but not inside the bedroom - over which every morning they pour the urine and which the reindeer herders then take outside and make the reindeer eat, because urine contains salt.

To make one tent, they needed 35 to 40 reindeer furs. The furs are sewn together with thread made of ligaments taken from the spine. The hair on the fur is cut off with a knife and they put it together so that the furry side faces the outside and the fur is pointing down. This makes it easier for the snow to fall to the ground from the outside walls. When it snows heavily, they beat the tent from the inside with a cane to make the snow fall. They sometimes even scrape the snow off from the outside. The construction of the tent is so firm that a woman can climb on top of it. Stones are put outside on the ground to hold down the reindeer hide. In places where the wind is strong, they anchor the tent from the outside with ropes held down by stones. In addition, they lean sleighs used to carry goods on the exterior walls to protect against the strong wind.

The seal fat burned on the stone-saucer lamps inside the bedrooms gives off a lot of smoke. Reindeer fat hardly gives off any smoke, and is suitable to burn in the lamps inside the bedroom. However, only wealthy people can use this. As a matter of fact, taking in consideration the fact that they smoke the fur by burning fat, you can say that seal fat is more suitable.

The fresh fur spread on the bedroom floor is used all winter, which makes the fur softer. Later these furs are sewn together and used as bedroom walls. So fresh fur has to be used for both the bedroom floors and walls. Each strand of closely grown hair on the reindeer fur is hollow inside and is thus highly insulating. As a result, the reindeer can stay in snow or water easily. However, when the fur is used, the hair becomes bent or squashed and the insulating effect is weakened. In the bedrooms they have to protect themselves against the severe winter cold, so it is extremely important for the inhabitants to use fresh fur. Still later, the fur used for the bedroom walls is used for the walls of the tent. The smoke inside the tent smokes them even more. The hide on the upper part of the tent gets smoked well because it is right above the hearth. Therefore, the furs used here are later used to make clothes. Wealthy reindeer breeders try to change the tent fur frequently, because it is thought in general that good husbands have new houses. This is how the reindeer hide is used to house and clothe them.

The old lady who lived there showed me many tools that they had inside the tent. Among them was a large drum that was kept inside a leather bag. Its round

wooden frame was covered with reindeer hide. They hold the strings stretched on the back of the drum with their left hand and beat the hide with a drumstick in their right hand, slightly tilting the drum downwards. People gather whenever they have a ceremony, where they would eat *mukhomor* and sing their songs as they play the drum. The old lady and Natalia laughed as if to say how much fun it was. I was feeling weird, wondering how to link modern technology like TV sets and motorcycles with reindeer hide tents, drums and the *mukhomor* ritual. I thought this was not something as simple as one culture transforming into another. I wondered how they felt about these various technologies and beliefs, and where they positioned these things within their daily lives. I wondered what their secret was to be able to live in a reality that obviously lacked consistency when seen from the outside.

When we went back to the house in the village, Alekseev said a herd of reindeer had come near by. He told us to get ready to leave so that we could take part in the reindeer ritual, which was going to be held before the herd crossed the river close to the village. The traditional reindeer ritual that I had assumed I wouldn't be able to actually see was still being passed on and practiced among them and was about to take place at that very moment. That was how I ended up going directly into their traditional life and spiritual world, feeling as strange as if I were going back and forth between the present and past.