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## Historical Changes in Reindeer Herding by the Chukchi and Preservation of the Identity

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### INTRODUCTION

Two different approaches can be seen in studies on the identity of the Chukchi. One approach is that taken by Gray (1998) in her study on traditional rites such as the Sun Festival, that have been maintained by Chukchi living in Soviet government-organized collectives who are not involved in reindeer herding. Gray discusses the post-Soviet-era native movement organized by Chukchi living in Tavaivaam, near Anadyr, the capital of the Chukotka Autonomous Okrug and describes the Sun Festival as one example.

The other approach is that taken by the author and Gray in studies on changes in Chukchi identity as seen from changes in traditional reindeer herding practiced by the Chukchi (Ikeya 1999; 2001; 2003; Gray 2000). The author investigated the means by which reindeer herding was maintained by the Chukchi following the collapse of the Soviet Union, through the reorganization of reindeer grazing territories and intermarriage with members of neighboring camps in order to maintain sufficient numbers of herders in each camp (Ikeya 1999; 2001). Gray reported the political and economic change at the local level after Russia's privatization program broke up collectivized reindeer farms into privatized enterprises (Gray 2000).

This report, which is an extension of the author's previous report (Ikeya 1999; 2001), describes how the Chukchi who raise reindeer have managed to maintain their identity in the face of spreading Sovietization. Economic changes experienced by the Chukchi through three periods of history (pre-socialist era, socialist era and post-socialist era) are discussed. This report is based on two surveys conducted by the author at Rytkuchi Village, located in Chaun District of the Chukotka Autonomous Okrug of the Russian Federation, over a period of 30 days from October to November in 1997 and over a period of 25 days from January to February in 2000.

### OUTLINE OF THE STUDY AREA

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Chukchi split into two groups, one group tending herds of reindeer (reindeer Chukchi) and the other group living along the coast and depending primarily on hunting sea mammals (Schweitzer 1999). However, as a result of the settlement and modernization programs carried out by the Russian government in recent years, the Chukchi have now been split into those living in villages and those engaged in

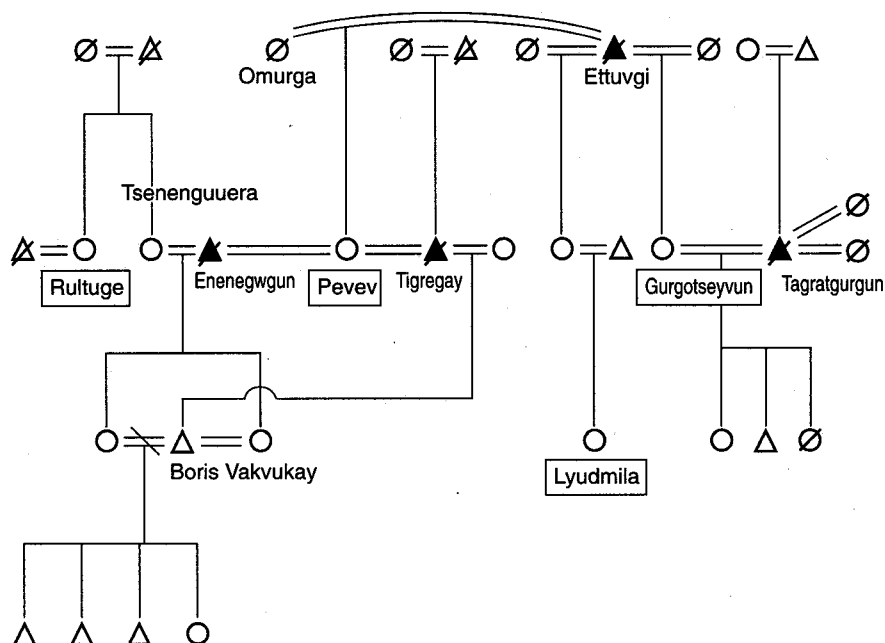
reindeer herding on state-run farms or working in the state-run fishing industry.

The site of the two surveys carried out by the author is Rytukuchi Village (lat.69 N and long.171 E), located at Chaun Bay in Chaun District, a bay leading to the Arctic Ocean, in the northeastern part of Siberia. The population of the village in 1997 was 493, of which 323 (65%) were Chukchi and the remainder being mainly Russian and Ukrainian or other nationalities. (Ikeya 1999: 6).

The first census was conducted in the village in 1939. In 1940, the first *kolkhoz* (collective farm) was established. In 1941, a teacher from Moscow came to the village, and a culture center and clinic were set up. The first *sovkhos* was established in 1957. A census conducted in 1959 showed that the majority of the 80 inhabitants of the village were Russian. Twelve brigades were established in 1965, each owning a *vezujhot* and a tractor. In 1980, the manufacture of traditional Chukchi handicrafts was started in the village, and a museum was opened in 1986.

### FAMILY TREE OF CHAUN CHUKCHI AND THE CHUKCKI IDENTITY

There have been several owners of large reindeer herds among the Chukchi, including Gelairgin ("Marmot"), who was known as the Reindeer King in 1812 (Bogoraz 1909), Yatirgin and Amrawkurgin. However, their relationship to the family tree described below is not clear.



**Figure 1** Family tree of Chaun Chukchi

Note: ▲ : Owner of large reindeer herds in pre-socialism era (1900–1940s)

□ : Informant

The family tree shown in Figure 1 was based on information obtained from interviews with five randomly selected village elders (one man and four women) in Rytkuchi. These village elders were wives or children of past owners of large reindeer herds like Ettuvgi, Tigregay and Enenegwgun (Fig.1), each of which had two or three wives. The fact that all five of these village elders could speak Chukchi more fluently than Russian—some in reality could not speak Russian at all—is an indication of their strong feeling of Chukchi identity.

People of other ethnic groups in neighboring villages, such as Even and Koryak, who married Chukchi became assimilated in Chukchi society and were regarded as Chukchi. For example, Vakvukay, the leader of No. 9 Brigade, and Nochin, a member of the same brigade, were both regarded as being Chukchi despite the fact that their mothers were Chukchi while Vakvukay's father was Even and Nochin's father was Koryak.

The feeling of Chukchi identity also seems to be strong among young people. Although many Chukchi women in their thirties are married to Russians, their children have a strong feeling of being Chukchi even though they can not speak the language.

## ECONOMIC CHANGES EXPERIENCED BY CHAUN CHUKCHI

### Pre-Socialist Era (1900 to 1940s)

#### *Distribution of Chukchi Camps around 1900*

Bogoraz conducted the first survey on the distribution of Chukchi regional groups on the Chokotka Peninsula around 1900 (Bogoraz 1909; Fig.2). According to his survey, there were about 1,100 maritime Chukchi living along the Pacific Ocean coast, about 1,600 maritime

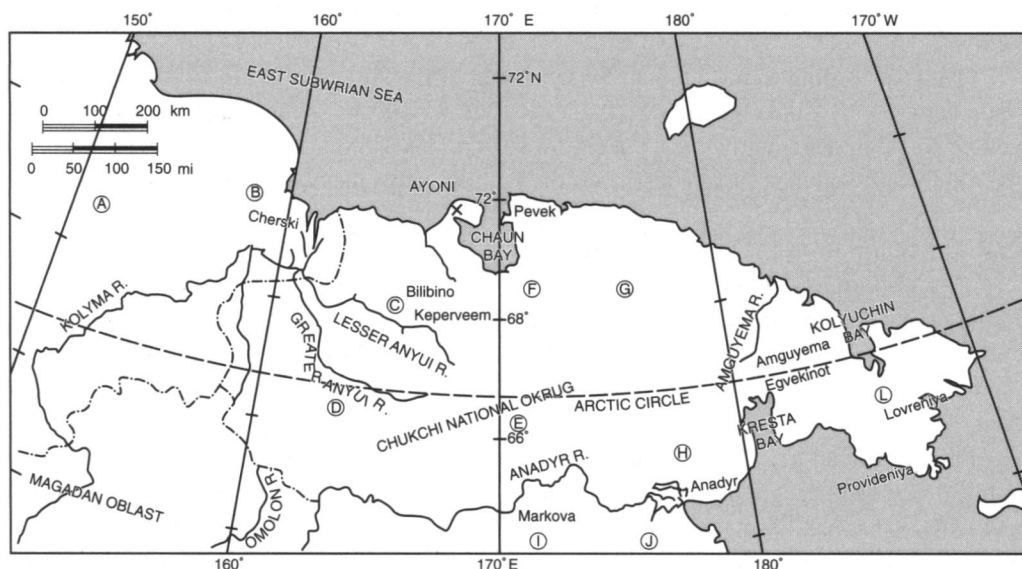


Figure 2 Distribution of regional groups among the Chukchee around 1900

Chukchi living along the Arctic Sea coast, and about 10,000 reindeer Chukchi living inland. The population of coastal Chukchi at that time was in decline due to the migration of many Chukchi families living on the coast to reindeer camps. Many Chukchi families living near the shores of Chaun Bay were also migrating to reindeer camps inland. There were about 50 reindeer camps located inland from Chaun Bay at that time (Bogoras 1909: 26). Some Chukchi joined Anui groups living in mountainous areas. Each group of Chaun Chukchi at that time owned 400–500 reindeer (Bogoras 1909: 26).

*Trading between Chukchi and Americans in the 1930s*

The following directly quoted accounts of changes in the Chukchi society in the first half of the twentieth century are from interviews conducted with six elders (Cases 1 to 6) in Rytkuchi village.

Case 1: Lyudmila (female, born in 1945)

“My mother knew a few English words such as ‘one,’ ‘two,’ ‘three,’ ‘soap,’ ‘rice,’ ‘money’ and ‘tobacco.’ My mother told me that when I was five years old, she used to barter arctic fox and reindeer pelts for such things as iron pots, axes, kettles, tea, candy and tobacco in bazaars near Pevek. In winter, she would travel to the bazaars by a reindeer-pulled sled. At that time, there were a few Americans in the trading business living near Pevek, but there were no Russians. There were no houses in Pevek at that time, and the area was used by the Chukchi for grazing reindeer.

At that time, just like now, there were summer base camps and winter camps. Women, children and the elderly stayed in the summer base camps, although some women went with the men to tend the herds of reindeer. Most men had two or more wives. There was a shortage of male herders. My grandfather had a large herd of reindeer and employed many herders.”

Thus, according to the account by Lyudmila of the situation in the 1930s, there was trade between the Chukchi who raised reindeer and Americans living near Pevek. Reindeer pelts were being bartered by the Chukchi for such things as iron pots, axes and kettles from the Americans, and the Chukchi learned some English words that were used when trading.

Case 2: Rekurin Boris (male, born in 1930)

“I was born near Baranikha, located by the Paunchua River. My family later moved to the upper reaches of the Patu River. When we went near Keperveem, I can remember collecting wood from the forest to make a house and sled. Since I was a child at the time, I did not actually have the chance to meet any Americans, but I was able to see the things that Americans used for trading, such as pipe tobacco, tea, kettles, pots, and rifles. Rifles were the most highly valued items. The Chukchi used arctic fox and reindeer pelts to trade for these items. Foxes were caught using wooden traps in winter, when the quality of the fur was best, and wolves that had been caught in traps were shot with rifles bought from the Americans. My father did not have a large herd of reindeer, and we ate fish such as trout (*kharius*) and salmon as well as reindeer meat. Reindeer meat was also bartered for seal meat from Chukchi fishermen in Ayon. Seal blubber was spread on dried or frozen reindeer meat before

eating. Seal skins were used to make summer boots. Walrus tusks were used as handles of the whips used when riding in reindeer sleds, and walrus skins were used for the soles of summer and winter boots. At that time, tags with the owner's name were attached to the ears of all reindeer when they reached two years of age."

This account by Rekurin Boris of the situation in the 1930s indicates that Chukchi who owned only small herds of reindeer also traded with the Americans. The other interesting points in this account are that traps were used to catch foxes and that rifles bought from the Americans greatly changed the methods of hunting used by the Chukchi.

Case 3: Pepev (female, born in 1908)

"I was born in Markova. My father's name was Ettuvgi and my mother's name was Omruqay. My father had a large herd of reindeer and traded hides at bazaars near Pevek. Before I was married, I moved to various places together with the herders, but I stayed in the base camp after I was married and had given birth to a baby. I am not sure where my grandfather came from, but I heard that he migrated from somewhere near Markova to Chaun. I don't know exactly how many reindeer he owned, but I heard that he divided his reindeer into three herds and that he employed many herders. I have never seen any Americans, but I can remember many things that were bought from the Americans, such as tobacco, black tea, shovels, and Winchester rifles (which both my father and husband had). The Americans came by dog sled and bought arctic fox and reindeer pelts (from us). My first marriage was to a man named Enenegwgung, who had his own herd of reindeer. After Enenegwgung died in Letuveen, I was remarried to a man named Aygent and later again to a man named Tigreqay, who was the leader of the area we lived in. Tigreqay died in 1983."

According to this account of the situation in the 1930s by the daughter of the owner of a large reindeer herd, trading with Americans was conducted not only near Pevek but also in more inland areas.

Case 4: Gurgotseyvun (female, age unknown)

"I was born near what is now the camp of Brigade No. 9. My father told me that he saw two Americans traveling by dog sled near the upper reaches of the Anadyr River. The Americans were carrying tobacco, tea, pots and Winchester rifles to trade for arctic fox pelts. My father owned many reindeer, but they were taken to a *sovkhos* in Anadyr after he died."

This account of the situation in the 1930s is further evidence that there were some Chukchi who owned large herds of reindeer and that there was trading between the Chukchi and Americans.

Case 5: Rultuge (female, born in 1910)

"I was born in what is now the camp of Brigade No. 2. Tigreqay (the leader mentioned in case 3) was my cousin. He had three wives and employed many herders. He was originally at Lesnoy (the present location of Brigade No. 5), but he moved to Karanapa (the present location of Brigade No. 9) when the ground at Lesnoy froze after a snowfall and there was no food for the reindeer. Omrogurgun was at Putyuveem River (the present location of Brigade No. 1), and Tagratgurgun was at Lesnoy but later moved to Ettuveer River. These

three men all owned large herds of reindeer, many of them inherited from my father. My husband did not have many reindeer but managed to make a herd from the reindeer owned by family members. The reindeer all had ear tags showing the name of the owner, and the reindeer were passed down from father to his children.

During the autumn, I sometimes saw a dog-pulled sled in the Chaun. They came from the coast of the Biringsuki to exchange the skin and oil of seals for reindeer meat. I was very impressed at their behavior as they controlled the dogs, saying 'Pu Pu Pu Pu.' They visited the more remote camps to take poles used by the hut."

This account by Rultuge of the situation in the 1930s indicates that there were large differences in the sizes of reindeer herds owned by Chukchi, with large herds being tended by hired herders and small herds being tended by family members. The significance of the ear tags is also clear from this account. According to Rultuge's account of the situation in the 1930s, there was also trading between reindeer Chukchi and maritime Chukchi.

**Case 6: Anna (female, age unknown)**

"I can remember a group of eight to 10 Americans who came by ship to a small fishing settlement. Many Chukchi from reindeer camps came to trade with the Americans. One man living in the fishing settlement who was not Chukchi acted as a go-between in the trading. I can remember that the Americans only took pelts from reindeer that had been slaughtered. Chukchi from reindeer camps also brought arctic fox pelts to trade with the Americans.

Since my parents had died, I was brought up by my uncle (my mother's brother). According to my older brother, who was born in 1936, my grandfather lived on the coast of the Biringsuki and hunted seals and walruses. Reindeer and fox pelts were traded with the Americans for such things as pots, tobacco, tea, canned butter, Winchester rifles, steel traps and shovels. There were no longer any American traders when I started elementary school, but I do remember seeing some Americans in the autumn before I started elementary school."

This account by Anna of the situation in the 1930s indicates that there was also trading between maritime Chukchi and Americans. The use of a non-Chukchi man as a go-between in the trading is interesting. The items obtained from the Americans mentioned in the account by Anna are similar to those mentioned by the other five elders. Since reindeer Chukchi also traveled to the coast to trade with the Americans, an ethnic network of Americans, maritime Chukchi and reindeer Chukchi was formed at that time.

It is clear from these six accounts of the situation in the 1930s that trade with Americans was an important economic factor in the lifestyle of the Chukchi at that time. The items obtained through trading with the Americans, such as rifles, pots and axes, greatly changed the lifestyle of the Chukchi. It also appears that various factors related to the trading with Americans, such as the use of rifles obtained from Americans to protect reindeer from wolves and the commercialization of reindeer pelts, contributed to the ownership of large herds of reindeer by some Chukchi in the 1930s.

**The Socialist Era (1950s to 1980s)**

In 1933, only 3 percent of the total population of reindeer Chukchi had formed collectives, while 60 percent of the maritime Chukchi had been organized into collectives

(Forsyth 1992). In 1939, 95 percent of the maritime Chukchi had been organized by the Soviet government into collectives, while still only 11 percent of the reindeer Chukchi had formed collectives. In 1940, about 80 percent of the reindeer on Chukchi land were privately owned (Nuvano 2003:9). Most of the reindeer Chukchi refused to accept the new collective system offered by the Soviet government and continued with their traditional nomadic lifestyle. Some Chukchi owners of large reindeer herds, such as Venikano (who owned about 50,000 reindeer in 1930), provided jobs for many poor herders (Forsyth 1992: 340). Refuge for the remaining reindeer Chukchi lay in withdrawal from Anadyr basin to the great area of upland tundra in the north between Chaun Bay and the river Amguema where they roamed with their herds until the 1950s (Forsyth 1992: 340).

#### *Nationalization of Reindeer Ownership by the Soviet Government*

##### **Case 7: Lyudmila (female, born in 1945)**

"I heard from my grandmother that ownership of reindeer was nationalized with the establishment of *sovkhozs* in the 1950s. My grandfather, who owned a large herd of reindeer, protested against the moves by the Soviet government to nationalize the ownership of reindeer, and he was arrested and sent to prison. Apparently, he escaped from prison, but was chased by police with dogs and committed suicide.

Many Chukchi protested against the Soviet government's plans to nationalize reindeer ownership, and some, like Lyudmila's grandfather, ended up committing suicide. Even after the nationalization of reindeer ownership, some Chukchi regarded the reindeer used to pull sleds as being privately owned. Ear tags showing the name of the owner were no longer used."

This account by Lyudmila recalls the changes introduced by the Soviet government and Chukchi reaction to it.

#### *Construction of Schools, Hospitals and Settlements*

As part of the Soviet government's modernization plan, schools and hospitals were also constructed for the Chukchi. However, there were five children who had to return to the reindeer camps before completing elementary school, in Rytkuchi Village, due to the shortage of herders. Boris Vakvukay's son Aryusha gave up school in the second year and his son Vitamik gave up school in the fifth year. Sergey's two sons and the son of the leader of Brigade No. 3 also had to give up elementary school.

#### **Post-Socialist Era (1990s)**

The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, and the Russian Federation was established. However, the new capitalistic reforms started in the Russian Federation did not extend to northeastern Siberia; the state-run farms established in the Soviet era continued to operate in the study area after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

#### *Decline in Reindeer Numbers and Integration of Brigades*

Reindeer numbers declined dramatically in many brigades from 1997 to 1999 (Table 1): from 1,452 to 893 in Brigade No. 1, from 2,568 to 1,940 in Brigade No. 2, from 1,481 to 1,265



**Table 1** Changes of reindeer head per brigade from 1997 to 1999

no.of brigade	1	2	3	5	8	9	10
Oct. 1997	1452	2568	1481	2216	370	4197	874
Jan. 1999	974	2402	1386	1675	—	3294	—
Dec. 1999	893	1940	1265	1373	—	3327	—

Souyce=Date provided by statistics of the state-run farms

in Brigade No. 3, from 2, 216 to 1, 373 in Brigade No. 5, and from 4,199 to 3,327 in Brigade No. 9. These declines in the numbers of reindeer were due to deaths from starvation when large areas of grazing land became covered with ice. The damage to grazing lands was particularly severe in November and December of 1998. Some brigades were combined due to the declines in reindeer numbers. No. 8 and No. 10 brigades were incorporated into Brigade No. 2 and Brigade No. 1, respectively, leaving a total of only five brigades (No. 1, 2, 3, 5 and 9).

#### *Reorganization of Brigades*

Case 8: Tono (male, born in 1960)

"In June 1998, discussions began on the integration of Brigade No. 10 with Brigade No. 2 according to the directive of the *Sovkhoz* Office in Rytkuchi Village. It was decided that two herders from Yanranay would work in Brigade No. 2 and that the older herders would retire. Sergey, who is very skillful at reindeer sledding, was also transferred from Brigade No. 3 to Brigade No. 2. With this reorganization, Brigade No. 2 came to possess a total of 50 reindeer for pulling sleds."

According to Tono's account of the reorganization of brigades, the *Sovkhoz* Office in Rytkuchi Village had the sole authority to decide which brigades should be integrated and the herders could not take part in any decisions. The brigade leaders, however, had the authority to decide which herders would be employed in the newly combined brigade.

#### *Attempt to Break away from the Sovkhoz System*

In 1995, the leader of Brigade No. 3 (Andrenikhi) together with his brother, Bakvukay, and some other Chukchi tried to break away from the *sovkhoz* system and start their own business. However, they were not able to obtain permission from the Chaun District Office.

## CONCLUSION

The Chukchi have traditionally lived a nomadic life, herding reindeer. However, the Chukchi population has recently been split into two groups owing to the Russian government's settlement and modernization policies. Some of the Chukchi have settled down in villages and others work on state-run reindeer farms. The author conducted two surveys (over a 30-day period from October to November 1997 and over a 25-day period from January to February 2000) in Rytkuchi, a village in the Chaun District of the Chukotka Autonomous Okrug of the Russian Federation. The purpose of these surveys was to determine how the Chukchi have managed to maintain their identity with the settlement and

modernization policies of Russia being forced upon them.

In the Soviet era, the Chukchi who owned large herds of reindeer were strongly opposed to the government's policy of transferring ownership rights to the government. Some of the Chukchi who were opposed to the Soviet government's policies fled, and a few even committed suicide, to avoid being sent to prison. The camps of reindeer herders were transformed by the Soviet government into so-called production groups ("brigades"). Various changes in reindeer herding, such as the integration of herds and state ownership, which meant the disappearance of ear tags indicating ownership, were also forced upon the Chukchi. Traditional slaughtering rites, however, were maintained.

However, in the post Soviet era, with the breakup and privatization of state-run farms, management difficulties led to dramatic reductions in the numbers of reindeer and the disappearance of brigades (Ikeya 2003). Rites that had traditionally been held by the Chukchi were also stopped. The numbers of reindeer even on the farms that continued to be run by the state decreased, leading to the integration of herds and a reduction in the number of brigades.

Although there has been a general decline in reindeer pastoralism in the post Soviet era, some groups of Chukchi have managed to maintain their identity through efforts to re-popularize reindeer pastoralism and revert back to their traditional way of life. Such efforts include having their children quit school and work as herders, increasing the number of brigades through promoting marriages with neighboring groups of Chukchi, and using the traditional reindeer-pulled sled as a means of transport instead of snowmobiles.

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