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The Eternal Cycle

**Ecology, Worldview and Ritual of
Reindeer Herders of Northern Kamchatka**

Takashi Irimoto

**National Museum of Ethnology
Osaka 2004**

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Publications Office
National Museum of Ethnology
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fax +81 6 6878-7503
email: hensyu@idc.minpaku.ac.jp

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General editor

Makio Matsuzono

Associate editors

Yasuhiko Nagano
Katsumi Tamura
Yasuhiro Omori
Shuzo Ishimori
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Epilogue

Bazarov and I were at Pakhachi, a town at the mouth of the river. We finished our investigation, waited for the helicopter, which we had no idea when it would arrive, to come to Srednie-Pakhachi Village, and finally flew out of the heliport at the river-mouth in the evening. We flew over the snow-covered tundra that spread to the coast and arrived at Pakhachi. We carried our luggage and finally got to the hotel. In fact, the hotel was merely nominal; it was a lonely old one-storied building made of wood. I traveled down the Pakhachi River in a boat and stayed in this same hotel the last time as well. I remembered how there was no heating, and had warmed the room with an electric cooking-stove. There was neither coal nor oil there and the lights went out at night. As a matter of fact, the hotel didn't even have a name and the place seemed like an abandoned town. Nevertheless, I was grateful that there was a place to stay in until the plane arrived to fly south.

Bazarov went to see the janitor of this hotel, who apparently lived in an apartment across the street, but came back as he was out. We were talking to the director of the district's administrative office to ask him if we could stay at the hotel, when the janitor arrived with the keys and let us in the hotel. The janitor was a woman, and took us to a shop nearby. We decided to buy some food there. It would be fine if the plane came the next day, but for reasons like the lack of fuel or the absence of vacant seats, we had no guarantee to get on the plane. In addition, no one knew when this shop would open again, so we had to make sure we had some food to live on for the meantime. We bought tea, a can of condensed milk, canned meat, instant noodles – this came in handy the most – cookies and bread. The food situation in this town had gotten a lot better than the last time I was here. Bread and canned food were the only things they had at the shop the last time, and they didn't have bread at all until that day; it had just arrived that day for the first time.

When we returned to the hotel room with just two beds, Bazarov tried to boil some water with the electric kettle he had borrowed from the janitor, but it wouldn't turn on. After checking the kettle out, we realized there was only one iron piece coming out of the plug, where there is supposed to be two. Then when we looked closely, we found the other piece that had broken off still stuck deep into the wall socket. However, since it must be electrified, it was too dangerous to take it out with our bare hands. Bazarov said as he gazed at the outlet, "This is ridiculous." But when he plugged the one-legged plug into the outlet, the electric kettle worked. By plugging it in, the other leg stuck in the socket touched the part left on the plug and the electricity flowed through both legs as it was supposed to. As a matter of fact, you had to hold the plug in the socket in order to make electricity run constantly. Bazarov smiled wryly, "It's almost like making a fire," and tried to boil the water holding the plug to the outlet. I too remembered how the old ladies dripping with

sweat turned the fire sticks as they held down the fire-making board at the *Kilway* ritual inside the *yanana*, on the tundra of Srednie-Pakhachi. Nevertheless, we somehow managed to “make the fire,” eat the instant noodles and drink tea.

The following day, we left the hotel and went to the small airport in town. As we had expected, the airplane was on standby at Tilichiki due to fog. At the airport, there was a small wooden building, which was the waiting room and ticket office. I waited here for the plane from morning till evening the last time as well. It wasn't until the small propeller airplane had taken off from Tilichiki that we knew the aircraft had surely departed and were sure how many vacant seats there would be on the way back. Consequently, tickets were not issued to the people waiting at the airport until then. Of course, a waiting list was made in advance for people who wanted to buy tickets, but the order of the list was not definite. In other words, passengers were decided upon negotiation. Furthermore, the official at the ticket booth does not issue the tickets even after the flight has taken off and is heading this way. He takes about 10 minutes per person to attend and chats to someone else inside the booth as he does his job – or rather, doesn't do his job. The people lined up in front of the ticket booth count their bills, put them down in front of the counter and look inside the small window as they wait for the ticket to be handed to them.

It was already in October when I was waiting for the flight the last time, and the waiting room without heating was so cold you could not stand still; I went outside from time to time to get the sun and walked around for a while. I also borrowed a portable water boiler from an official, put water into an aluminum container, plugged it in the corner of the waiting room, boiled the water and had tea. I had brought this container along from Japan as I thought I would use it camping, but the places I actually ended up using it were the hotels in Khabarovsk, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii and Pakhachi, and in the waiting room at this airport. A portable water boiler was about the size you can hold in your hand, and is made of coiled nichrome wire, which you immerse directly into the container filled with water to boil it. This was a very handy appliance that the Russians often traveled with. I ended up buying one in Khabarovsk on my way home.

In any case, I decided to wait at the airport with Bazarov. In the afternoon, the plane left Tilichiki and was flying over Pakhachi, but went back because it could not land due to heavy fog. In the evening, it left Tilichiki again and headed this way. Pakhachi had been covered with low clouds and fog all day, but just then, it suddenly cleared up like magic just above the airport and the sun was even shining faintly through the clouds. Finally, we could board the plane and left Pakhachi at 7 p.m. At Tilichiki, we changed to a mid-sized plane and flew down south along the east coast of Kamchatka Peninsula. At 11pm, the aircraft descended through the night fog and I could see the lights of the runway just beneath us; we then landed at the airport in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii.

My trip was near its end. The Koryak World, to which I had come with mixed feelings of hope and a kind of resignation, was full of surprises. I was able to enter their mysterious world through the little door-crack that opened up for a moment in the midst of a political turmoil after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The people of this Koryak world told me the answer to the problems I had wanted to solve when I started this trip – i.e. firstly, the relation between hunting and herding in Northern cultures; secondly, the changes in Koryak culture.

Herding was not a completely different lifestyle that would be thought of as the complete opposite of hunting – at least regarding the Northern reindeer herding. As I have categorized them as the “herding-hunting-fishing composite system,” their lifestyle consisted of a mixed system of various subsistence activities. The reindeer herding activity was just a part of this system. It was just another additional activity of herding that was added to hunting and fishing without radically destroying the hunting and fishing lifestyle. The social organization that made this composite activity system possible was a herding unit that consisted of a restricted cognatic descent group. The herding unit was a stable social organization due to the various activities done by individuals within the herding unit or the domestic unit, as well as the sharing of production. What was interesting was that the same cognatic descent group composes the hunting unit, which makes the reindeer hunting lifestyle possible, among the Canadian reindeer hunters. The flexibility of the cognatic descent group – they parted and gathered again according to the ecology of reindeer that migrate seasonally – was the feature of the society. On the other hand, in Koryak reindeer herding, the herding unit managed a certain reindeer herd in cooperation, which enabled them to do other various subsistence activities; it was a comparatively stable social organization.

Offering animals in the herding society was done based on a different concept from hunting. Koryaks offered reindeer to the guardian spirit called *Gichigi* and to the master spirit of the reindeer called *Koyavagin* as a sacrifice, in addition to offering them to the river and land. This differs from the relationship between animals and humans seen among hunters – i.e. reindeer offer themselves to humans, or they come to people to give them their flesh. Regarding that relationship in the case of herders, humans offer reindeer to the reindeer master spirit, *Koyavagin*, the *Koyavagin* reproduces reindeer and reindeer are brought to the humans. As a matter of fact, although very ambiguous, an abstract will of the entire reindeer species that transcends the individual reindeer is acknowledged among hunters as well. Thus the reindeer master spirit believed among the herders is a developed version of this abstract will, whose role has become much clearer.

At the same time, the herders entrust the role of spiritually guarding the reindeer herd to the *Gichigi*. The *Gichigi* is an idol symbolizing the fire, and is the guardian spirit of the humans' lives. People make offerings to the *Gichigi*, the

Gichigi protects the reindeer, and humans obtain the reindeer meat. The *Gichigi* is the guardian spirit of both humans and reindeer herds, and it can be said that it plays the role of a mediator who spiritually connects humans to reindeer.

The fact that reindeer are offered to various spirits as an *inawet* (offering) makes it look as if the reindeer is acknowledged not as a spiritual presence, but as property. Just as humans own and manage reindeer, the *Koyavaginin* and *Gichigi* spiritually own and manage the reindeer as well. Consequently, the direct exchange, which exists between hunters and reindeer, shifts to an indirect exchange through the master spirit and guardian spirit of the reindeer for herders, and the reindeer itself is used as an offering to the guardian spirit. At the same time, however, humans bury reindeer bones in the ground and believe in their revival. When the reindeer herds come back in autumn, they welcome them and are pleased to spend the winter together again. This indicates that reindeer herds are not just materialistic possessions, but are accepted spiritually as well. In fact, the *Koyavaginin*, the creator of the reindeer, is also a spirit that represents the entire reindeer species. Then, the spirit of reindeer after being sacrificed is also sent-off to the upper world of *Koyavaginin*. In other words, the worldview of the reindeer herders and that of the hunters are not completely different. In the worldview of the herders, although the spiritual relationship between humans and reindeer is relatively weakened, the role of the creator of the reindeer or of the *Gichigi*, the spiritual guardian, has been added on top of it, while still keeping that relationship. In this sense, in the same way as their mode of life and society do, the worldview of the reindeer-herding Koryaks indicates the features of the Northern cultures, which are based on hunting.

When discussing the origin of herding, it is essential to consider that reindeer herding is based on hunting. It suggests that it is possible to shift from hunting to herding on one opportunity or another. I think one of the opportunities was when the reindeer came to where the humans lived. When camping in winter, people urinate over a lump of snow at night inside the *yanana*, and take the lump outside in the morning. This is to gather the reindeer for the sleds. Apparently, the reindeer will not go so far because they come to lick the urine. Nowadays, they give salt to the reindeer in winter, and take them to the beach in summer to make them intake salt. I think there must have been a natural process between the reindeer and humans of coming close over a long period of time. In a way, humans were making the reindeer take to feeding, which is a process of getting used to each other. "Getting used to each other," means not to surprise each other. By nature, reindeer go near curious things that attract their interest, but if humans make a sudden move, they are startled and run away. They had to teach them that humans are not enemies, without threatening them. Furthermore, people can go close to the reindeer where they give birth to fawns in spring. If humans protect the mother and fawn from wolves, – they currently do so – a symbiotic relationship between humans and reindeer is made. In

fact, I think the act of coming close at the birth scene is something that happened in the course of managing the reindeer herd. That is because the birthplace is where they make ear-markings, which is left in the older women's hands to do. Coming close and getting used to each other in this way was probably the first step of the origin of herding.

As a second stage, people had to catch and train reindeer for the sleds in order to control the whole reindeer herd, because in winter, they go around the herds on reindeer sled and watch them. They probably converted dog sleds into reindeer sleds, because despite their minor differences, they are basically the same. Dogs were domesticated long ago, and dog sleds can be seen used among reindeer herding Koryaks as well as Coastal Koryaks. By using reindeer sleds, they can control reindeer herds, load *yananas* on the sled and easily transfer their campsites. They are able to drive the herds to an appropriate wintering spot and live together with them.

Evenks, who live in the Siberian Forest Zone and speak Northern Tungus, keep reindeer as well. However, they only herd a few to a several dozen of reindeer. In addition, they use saddles to ride them, and milk the reindeer. Such a kind of reindeer herding is rather close to the way horses are kept in Mongolia. It can be said that they have a different origin from the large-scaled reindeer herding of Koryaks or Chukchees on the tundra.

The third stage of reindeer herding is the establishment of the control system of reindeer herds. The characteristic of Koryak reindeer herding is that they utilize the reindeer as meat for consumption. They do not milk the reindeer, or make and consume dairy products such as yoghurt, butter or cheese, as the herders of Central Asia and Mongolia do. Regarding the management of reindeer, they basically give priority to does to make them give birth to fawns; they try to proportionate the herd by a ratio of 20 does to 1 buck. The bucks that are not slaughtered and left in the herd are gelded, with the exception of sires. However, in Mid-Kamchatka Peninsula, reindeer herding Koryaks say they do not castrate their reindeer. Castration may be a relatively new managing technique. They also control the number of reindeer by slaughtering, so that the herd will not grow too big to handle. Sickly and aged reindeer are picked out to slaughter, as well as does that do not look after their fawns. In autumn, the breeding season, they do not block wild bucks from joining the herd – these bucks are slaughtered later on – and obtain fawns that will become strong reindeer for pulling the sled. In this way, they breed and control healthy and vigorous reindeer herds by selecting stronger genes through the control of size, sex and age group, breeding and slaughtering. Once they could control and manage the reindeer herds, property rights must have been created. They make a cut in the fawn's ear as an ownership sign when it is born. Now the rules to property right and its social inheritance were created.

Controlling reindeer herds involved the development of spiritual control and rituals. The role of the guardian spirit as a spiritual mediator between various spirits of nature and the master spirit of a higher order, as well as reindeer and humans, was expanded and intensified. The reindeer were offered to different spirits as a sacrificial animal, and the relationship between humans and the spirits was strengthened, while its spiritual presence was weakened, as it became part of humans' wealth. The development of rituals enabled them to express more clearly their way of thinking in cycles and to interpret it. The cycle of life and death seen in funerals, in which people go to the "other side," the cycle of life and death seen among reindeer and natural life, the cosmic cycle which the sun represents; these cycles all developed into their grand cyclic ritual. In the ritual, humans are a part of nature and the universe, and act how they continue to go in cycles themselves. It can be said that the development of reindeer herding was also the development of the eternal cyclic ritual with their worldview in the background.

Furthermore, if I were to add a fourth stage to reindeer herding from the viewpoint of the size of herds, it would be the form of herding the Chukchees used to practice; keep a large herd of about 5,000 to 10,000 reindeer and live with the reindeer all year around herding them. In this case, the lifestyle combined with fishing and hunting changes to a herding-only lifestyle. This stage is reflected in the fact that the Chukchees expanded their living area further westward and southward from Chukotka Peninsula with their large reindeer herds. The Chukchees became a powerful combat group and fought the Czarist Russia that was expanding its territory to East Siberia at the time, before they went over the Koryak Mountain Range south of the Anadiri River, and fought the Koryaks.

The fourth stage of reindeer herding is the large-sized form of reindeer herding on the tundra, but it does not settled down at that stage. On the contrary, the herds become uncontrollable. The reindeer herds continue to self-multiply and the herd that has become too large loses a great number of reindeer from diseases; humans lose their reindeer in the end. People left without reindeer return to their lifestyle of hunting and fishing. They go back to the state before reindeer herding began, or so to say "level zero." They become settlers on the coast called *nyemran*, from reindeer herders called *chauchu*. Or they end up working as herders of other reindeer herding groups.

Needless to say, the stages of reindeer herding that I have mentioned does not proceed in a straight line. Even when possessing a small number of reindeer, you may lose them from illness or other causes. In addition, after herding a large-sized herd, this time they might try to control the number of reindeer in their herds so that it will not grow larger than a certain size. Or even if they lose their reindeer once, they can go back to the herder's life by obtaining a small number of reindeer and breeding them. Thus looking at reindeer herding from the viewpoint of the size

and way to manage them, it consists of various stages between “level zero” and the uncontrollable stage, and the dynamics of humans and reindeer herds in those stages. If the herds are properly managed, the number of reindeer will grow, but keep its appropriate size and continue to produce. On the other hand, if they do not work hard enough in management, the reindeer will become ill, run away, or excessively increase in number contrarily and become uncontrollable. Consequently, the herd goes back to “level zero.”

In addition, Natalia’s son Slava, who is a herder, says the size of a reindeer herd that is easiest to control is about 1,500 to 2,000. If such a herd were to be managed by a traditional herding unit that consists of five to ten domestic units, each household would own about 200 to 300 reindeer. Currently, Alekseev’s family and Vakhtangov’s family own a total of 100 reindeer, and steadily consume 15 reindeer a year as meat besides other composite subsistence activities. Considering these facts, the appropriate size for them to herd would be 100 to 300 reindeer per domestic unit and 2,000 reindeer at the most per herding unit. They will try to increase the number of reindeer if there are only a few in the herd, but will try to keep it below this appropriate size.

Talking of herding in Mongolia, I have been to Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Qinghai and Mongolia a few times, and have seen and talked to people about herding in each places. In our conversation there, I had never heard them mention that they try to control the number of domestic animals – not reindeer in this case, but sheep, goats, cattle, horses, camels and yaks – under a certain number. Of course, I had only talked to a limited number of people, and there might have been other cases in which they did. Nonetheless, they generally try to breed their livestock as much as possible. What’s more, their ideal is to watch their livestock, spread as far out as they can see, pasture in the field. As a matter of fact, I had seen herds of sheep spread out all across the field, mountains and riverbanks that looked like a moving carpet with white spots, and had seen herders watching them sitting down, or driving sheep that had wandered off from the herd on horseback.

In Mongolian herding, if humans try to maximize the number of livestock – of course, they might decrease due to natural conditions such as bad climate or illnesses – they will keep on increasing. On the contrary, I saw herding in the mountains of Northern Mongolia, where they herded a relatively small number of livestock in a small valley. In the woodland of the mountains, hunting could be seen as well as gathering various kinds of plants in the forest. This kind of herding is not the kind we imagine – the typical Mongolian herding in the grassland. However, if herding originated as a composite subsistence activity based on hunting, this may be the initial form of herding. Then due to the increase in the number of livestock, they might have made their way into the vast grassland from this small valley with

their herds of livestock. As a matter of fact, currently, there are a large number of livestock herds in the big valley and vast grassland just outside this narrow valley.

If the number of livestock grows in this way, they must keep moving to new grasslands over and over. In such cases, just as the Japanese investigation troop saw in Inner Mongolia several decades ago, humans would follow the migration of the herds, rather than humans controlling the movement of animal herds. They would often migrate over a hundred times a year. In other words, they move once every three days. In this case, the size and migration of the animal herd is being maximized. While the grassland spreads across a vast area and can continue to lead their lifestyle, in which the migration of the herd depends on the increase in the number of heads, they develop the nomadic way of life depending on the migrating herds. In Mongolia, they do consume domestic animal's meat, but they basically consume dairy products; their idea is that livestock animals should not be killed, if possible. This results in the further increase of domestic animals.

In this type of herding, in which livestock herds continue to self-multiply and expand to new lands, herders will naturally develop hostile relationships with other herders over the use of grassland. For this reason, herders will most probably become warriors, and the herders will turn into powerful combat groups. They will conquer or form a union with other herders and form a nation or an empire as a combat group under a powerful leader who may be deified. Contests to compete their ability as a combat team, such as equestrian games, wrestling or archery, will be emphasized in their festivals and rituals as well as reflecting their worldview. This is how the herding culture swept across Eurasia. It could have been the fate of herding. The herding style, in which they maximize the number of heads, had no other way but to keep expanding until it conquered other civilizations and the herding civilization itself dissolved.

This interpretation of herding does not contradict the history of North Eurasian civilizations. In addition, this indicates that herding is definitely not self-contained in a closed ecosystem, and is not in a static relationship between humans and nature. On the contrary, herding is the dynamics of human and nature that keep changing in an open system of ecology. Of course, not all types of herding are like this. Not to mention the reindeer herding in Kamchatka, in Mongolia and China today, in particular, controls and manages their herds within a limited area. What I am saying here is, as is the case with the production of food, when herding advances in a certain direction, the ecologic balance of nature and human tips at once, and a new human-nature relationship, which can be called a "civilization," is born as an outcome. This new civilization keeps growing without people being aware of it and eventually breaks up, just as many other civilizations do. It is interpreted that this actually happened for a certain period of time in the history of North Eurasian civilizations. Furthermore, the herding style, in which they control the number of

livestock and limit the migration area within a certain space, may be comparatively new – in the reindeer herding in Kamchatka, this might be started after the Soviet regime. Slaughtering is effective to control the number of livestock, and the distribution of meat as a product becomes necessary, whether it may be a planned economy or a market economy. Accordingly, speaking time-wise, after having gone from stage three to four, they may have shifted again from stage four to stage three, where their system of control and management was established. Herding is the dynamics between humans and animals as mentioned above, and it is the natural history of herding as a whole.

Now, speaking of the origin of reindeer herding in Kamchatka, the ecological condition, which made possible the approach of humans to reindeer, is essential. For instance, in the regions where the tundra and woodland spread across limitlessly like the Northern regions of Canada, reindeer migrate great distances of 1,000 kilometers between summer and winter. This is just the distance measured in a straight line, and the round-trip distance they migrate in a year is twice as far. Reindeer herds of tens of thousands gather and part as they run across the tundra and swim across rivers and lakes. Particularly in the migration in spring and autumn, the reindeer move long distances at once up north or down south. In winter, they decrease to a herd of a couple to a several dozen of reindeer and spread out within the vast northern forest. In the autumn breeding season, a buck competes with other bucks, brings in its herd a few does, and temporarily make a harem; they do not form a fixed herd beside this. Under such ecological conditions, humans cannot control or follow the reindeer herds. Therefore, the Canadian reindeer hunters lay in wait for the reindeer that come south in autumn and group-hunt the reindeer in masses as they cross the lakes and rivers. Then they make heaps of dried meat for the rest of the seasons as a survival strategy.

In contrast to this, from Northern Kamchatka to Eastern Siberia, mountains, the tundra and the coast coexist, which limits the area that reindeer migrate seasonally to relatively small areas. The migration distance per season is short, and the wintering places for humans and reindeer overlap in this limited area. In such places, reindeer and humans can come close to each other. The subsistence activities of humans when reindeer herding was just starting were thought to be the ones practiced from old times in this area – i.e. a complex activity of hunting sea animals, fishing in the river and hunting inland. They probably hunted sea-animals on the coast and fished in rivers from spring to summer, hunted in autumn, and went upstream and lived there during the winter. This is not so different in nature from the lifestyle of Koryaks today. It is an important fact that they hunted sea creatures such as seals, because the lasso used to catch reindeer is made of tough sealskin. In addition, by fishing salmons that come upstream, they can obtain a large amount of preservative food to survive the winter.

Under such conditions, reindeer and humans were probably able to come close to each other in the inland wintering spots. If the reindeer approaches the humans to get used to each other and they can be caught alive with a lasso and be trained to pull sleds, the herds can be controlled. Reindeer herds do not migrate so much during winter, so it is relatively easy to control them. In summer however, young herders have to run around the tundra to control the herd so it will not run off somewhere. During this period, the others leave the management of the herds to this herder and continue to hunt and fish as they have been doing. They part with the reindeer in summer, greet them in autumn, and live with them during winter; this ecologic rhythm of humans and reindeer has not changed so drastically from that of the original hunters. If you look at Koryak reindeer herding, a new subsistence activity of managing reindeer has just been added to their original lifestyle of hunting and fishing.

Then what was the motive in the formation of herding? I personally think it was games. As it is told in the myth, wasn't the children's "reindeer game" the beginning of reindeer herding? It is told that the children who were playing with reindeer made with sticks went home and kept thinking about them even in their dreams; then when they woke up in the morning, there were many reindeer in front of their house. Needless to say, a myth is a myth, and it does not tell the origin of reindeer herding in reality. It does not give a rational explanation that we would expect, but explains how they understand the origin of the relationship between humans and reindeer. They say the children's wish in their dreams in the "wonderful times" when the shamans still had power changed the stick-made reindeer into real ones. I have already mentioned how the reindeer come to lick human's urine on a lump of snow at the campsite in winter. In such situations, I think there really might have been occasions when children went near the reindeer and tried to play with them. The children wanted to make friends with the reindeer that approached them.

It would not be mysterious at all if there was a time in human history when people and reindeer came close and got used to each other. It was children who were playing with the reindeer in the myth. Adults cannot take their place. If it were adults, they would hunt and kill the reindeer. They could build a new relationship that did not exist before with the reindeer because they were children.

In addition, this myth tells the distinguishing relationship between humans and reindeer among herders. In a myth that tells the origin of the human-reindeer relationship of the northern Canadian hunters, an old lady raises a baby that came from a reindeer herd; when the boy grew up, he gave the old lady a reindeer's tongue and went back into the reindeer's herd. So a reciprocal relationship between the reindeer and humans was established, and the reindeer voluntarily comes to where the humans are to offer them their meat, as long as the humans pay respect to them. However, in the myth of the Kamchatka herders, the reindeer comes to where the

humans are by the power of dreams, and ends up staying there.

The common point with the concept of Canadian hunters is that the reindeer came to the people upon the spiritual negotiation between the reindeer and human. However, the reindeer stay there, and a direct reciprocal relationship between the reindeer and humans is not established. As I have mentioned before, the reciprocal relationship between them among herders is formed through the master spirit of reindeer, *Koyavaginin*, and the *Gichigi*, which guards the reindeer. Although people acknowledge a spiritual existence in the reindeer to some extent, they move on to a new relationship between reindeer and humans; the reindeer offer themselves to humans one-sidedly, humans use this reindeer, again one-sidedly, to offer them to the master spirit and guardian spirit, and the master spirit and guardian spirit conduct the reproduction and production of the reindeer.

In the myth about the origin of reindeer herding in Kamchatka – although it is not clearly told – the sticks, which the children were playing with, shows the implication with the upper world and the existence of the reindeer's master spirit can be seen there. Furthermore, the reindeer that the children were playing with become destined to be killed as offerings, when the herd-management and herding life were established. The playing of children and reindeer might have been something that occurred just once during a certain period, although that period may have been a long one. Once the skills are established to catch reindeer for pulling the sleds and to train them, it is easy to control the herds, regardless of how they are. So this technique spread across Northern Eurasia in a short period of time, where large-scale reindeer herding started to unfold.

The reindeer can be protected from wolves and bears by human beings, but they must pay a price for that to humans. Is herding a symbiotic relationship between humans and reindeer? Or is herding nothing but the management of animals performed by humans for their own sake? Whether it may be hunting or herding, could it be the same thing from the animal's point of view, since they are to be killed in both cases? If we were to find one, the difference would be being killed as a wild animal, or as a controlled animal. This could be the difference that lies in the fact that animals are on an even ground with humans or a higher spiritual presence for hunters, whereas to herders, they are sacrificial animals as well as property.

Reindeer herding started as a game and came to be a management. Needless to say, people do not feel bad about managing them. Even if it was the humans that took away the reindeer's spirituality, they acknowledged a stronger spirituality in the master spirit and guardian spirit of a higher order and gave them a new role. So, even if humans were to be positioned below those spirits and be controlled under new deities, people probably would not try to go back to the original state. The "wonderful times" that Maria mentioned in the myth of the origin of herding was a time when many people and shamans existed, and the powers of dreams were freely

exercised. Nevertheless, apart from that, the “wonderful times” was an era when children could play with the reindeer joyously; though it may be subconscious, this could have been what they wanted to convey in the myth.

Now, the second issue I was interested in before leaving for this trip was about the change in Koryak culture. When I first visited the village and saw the traditional lifestyle on the tundra that spread outside the village, I could not understand the inconsistency. Then, as I got to know about their mental world and social system through their various ceremonies, I realized their world underneath the superficial changes had not changed in essence. Through the history of the *kolkhoz* and *sovkhos*, I also understood that reindeer herding in Northern Kamchatka is a historical product, which consists of two forms of living – i.e. the modern village life and the traditional reindeer herding life on the tundra.

On the other hand, it was true that their culture, particularly after *perestroika*, was in the midst of a drastic change. However, the culture was not just being changed, but a new culture was being positively created. What’s more, it was mainly being done by women of the younger generation. The women, who are called “the lost generation,” were standing at a point where Koryak and Russian culture overlapped. They viewed the future, while they also took part in passing on the traditional culture. They were trying to pass on Koryak culture of the future to the children through education.

I remembered the painting which Bazarov’s daughter had drawn that was hung on the wall of his apartment in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii. There were three women standing in front of a man. When I asked Bazarov, he said it was a scene from the opera written by Rimsky Korsakov, a famous Russian composer. The main character, who visited a realm under the sea, is about to choose his princess out of the three Royal princesses. This was the same story as the Russian folk story I had read in Moscow. This opera, also called “Sadko” after the name of the main character, was originally based on the Russian epic poetry, *bylina*. Sadko, a merchant of Novgorod, a Euro-Russian merchant town between Moscow and Sankt-Peterburg, was thrown into the sea as a human sacrifice to settle the storm, and married a princess of the kingdom under the sea. However, he returned to Novgorod upon the god’s order, so the princess of the sea turned herself into the Volkhov River, Sadko happily reunited with his wife, and Novgorod became a prosperous town.

The relationships between men and women, and between the Russian merchant town and a distant alien country in this opera reflect the society of the 19th century, in which this was written. Needless to say, Moscow is still the center for Russians, and they might think of Kamchatka, which is at the far end of Siberia, as a distant foreign land like the kingdom of the sea from the story. Nevertheless, the Russians who came to work in this distant land after *perestroika* went back to the mainland one after another. What awaits them there is not the prosperity of Novgorod, but

the failure of the Russian economy. Furthermore, the modern “princesses of the sea kingdom” did not go after the Russians. What I saw here were men who tried to marry Koryak women, got divorced from their Russian wives who went back to the mainland with their children, were not allowed to marry the Koryak women after all, and lost everything. The “princesses of the sea kingdom” were the protagonists in this country and it was the Russians who were being flustered. These women impassively gave birth to Russians’ children, took in Russian culture, and were creating a new culture in this land. The reality that I saw here was the opposite to the story of “Sadko.” This was the truth of the new story a hundred years later.

Finally, the time had come for me to leave this kingdom of the sea. I was going home via Khabarovsk, located in the Russian Primorskii, and over the Sea of Japan. Had I understood a little about Koryak people? I will never forget visiting the same museum I had visited on the way, and standing in front of the same picture I had seen the first time I was there. When I saw the large picture painted by a modern Koryak artist for the first time, I felt nostalgia to the past from this painting that seemed to come out of ethnography, and it gave me a sad feeling. However, when I stood in front of it the second time, it seemed to me as if the people painted there – Koryak women dressed in traditional outfits were dancing and playing drums in front of a traditional semi-subterranean dwelling, with the sea in the background – were not filled with sorrow, but with happiness.

The scene painted here was not something of the past as I had thought in the beginning. It was a living reality that transcended “time” – i.e. present, past and future. It was, so to say, an integrated concept of “time.” As the *mukhamor* had taught me in my dream, people’s minds had the ability to integrate things beyond time. When the Koryaks painted the world of the dead on the “Other Side,” it was the traditional world that still exists today, and was definitely not the lost world of the past. Nothing else but this was the Koryak world and their worldview. They integrated traditions and modern life together within the changes without any hesitation, and are living in the universe that cycles eternally beyond “time.” Standing in front of the painting, I was feeling happy myself. I felt as if I had shared a little bit of their world with them.

Postscript

From August to October of 1993, just after the collapse of the former Soviet Union, and from April to May of 1995, I had a chance to visit the Northern regions of Kamchatka Oblast, Russia, which foreigners had never visited before. Then in March 1997 and November to December 1997, I also had the chance to visit Central Kamchatka Peninsula and learn about the people and nature of the region. This book is the shizenshi (spontaneous/natural record) of reindeer herders called Olyutorskii-Koryak, based on my experience from the first two fieldworks.

Shizenshi is a new anthropological paradigm that could be called the anthropology of nature and culture (Irimoto and Yamada 1994; Irimoto 1996). “Shizen” literally means “nature” and it signifies “as it is, or whole truth” in Japanese, and “-shi” means “record, or -graphy.” Thus, shizenshi is an account of human life and activities, in which culture and nature overlap. An empirical observational method – i.e. the observer integrates with the subject and experiences the inner world – was used here. In order to objectify the subjectivity of the account, I took the method of writing the process itself of the fieldwork, centralizing on the relationship between the observer and the subject.

As a result, I ended up weaving into this book the variation of the rituals and narratives that differed slightly from each individual. It became clear that culture was not a median or the greatest common factor as it was once thought to be, but was an integral part of individual traditions that overlapped as they went through variation. Each person has his or her culture. Furthermore, each tradition mingles upon marriage and continues to reproduce as a new tradition. This did not happen just in the rituals or narratives of the history, but also in the eternal succession of culture and the dynamics of alteration, which started in the origin of reindeer herding, through the formation of Olyutorskii culture, up to the fusion with Russian culture and the creation of a new culture. In the same way they repeat their rituals in the eternal cosmic cycle, I recorded this repetition in this book.

Shizenshi is different from ethnography. Ethnography describes society, which is positioned at the antipole of civilization in accordance to cultural items. Thus the aspects of living humans are not described in it. I did not use ethnographic materials, except the statistical materials, which the Russian researchers might have partly complied with. I could not get enough information from the Koryak ethnography written in the beginning of the 20th century to make any comparison in my research; in particular, the ethnography of Olyutorskii-Koryaks of the Pacific Coast of Northern Kamchatka did not exist at all. Rather, by putting down the process of the fieldwork itself, it became clear that the people who were the investigational subject were not just enclosed in a “traditional” society of the past like specimens, as they had been described in ethnography, but are indeed living in the same epoch and the

same world as us in Russia, in the midst of rapid changes after *perestroika*. I was able to understand the relationship between the ethnic group and the State from the frontline of cultural dynamics through the empirical observational method, in which the border between the observer and the subject is transcended.

What served as useful reference material was the diverse and innovative research on northern circumpolar cultures developed in the international symposium held three times over the last ten years with researchers from Canada, the United States, France, Finland, Sweden, Norway, United Kingdom, China, Mongolia and Japan. It goes without saying that the previous results of research in anthropology, ecological anthropology and cognitive anthropology contributed to the theory and methodology of this *shizenshi*. Furthermore, my knowledge and understanding of the culture of Northern Canadian reindeer hunters and of the Ainu were essential in comprehending the culture of the reindeer herders of Siberia. In addition, the eco-civilizational historic study on hunting and herding done by previous Japanese scholars taught me what herding was about, and led me to a new challenge. These documents are mentioned in the bibliography listed later in this section.

Now, the protagonist of this book is, of course, the Olyutorskii-Koryaks. They not only received me warmly, but also showed me their world and told me the secret of it by making big sacrifices. I would like to express my deep appreciation to them. In addition, the Russian researchers who went on the “expedition” with me always supported me, despite their difficult situations. I learned much from the long hours of discussion we had about the theme that interested us all in the same way. Above all, I would like to express my gratitude to these sincere researchers, open-minded fieldworkers, and warm-hearted people. All the names of the Koryak people and Russian researchers who appear in this book are fictitious to protect their privacy. Needless to say, their descriptions are totally subjective; they do not define or violate their personalities in anyway.

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Plates



Plate 1: Pakhachi River flowing through the snow-covered tundra, from the north to the coast of Pakhachi Bay.



Plate 2: Srednie-Pakhachi (Middle Pakhachi), on the tundra in northern Kamchatka.



Plate 3: A traditional *yanana*, a dome-shaped reindeer hide tent.

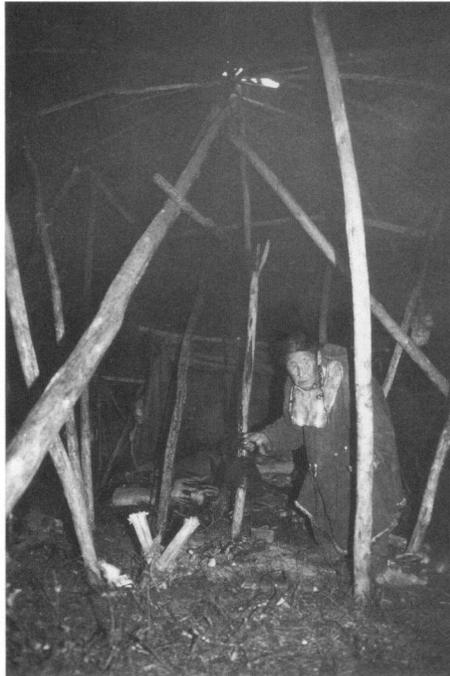


Plate 4: An old lady inside a *yanana*.



Plate 5: Woman scraping hide to soften it.



Plate 6: Koryak blades and stone tools.



Plate 7: *Tanteginin*, the memorial festival, in which reindeer are killed to be sent to the dead in the upper world. A small pile of food with a branch of willow in the middle is *inawet*, an offering to the deceased.



Plate 8: Wooden *Gichigi*, representing the fire deity and the guardian spirit of human life and reindeer, with assistant spirits.



Plate 9: A symbolic reindeer made of antlers and branches.



Plate 10: Circling the reindeer herd in order to separate the reindeer to be sacrificed from the rest of the herd.



Plate 11: *Inawet*, the offering of reindeer for the river.

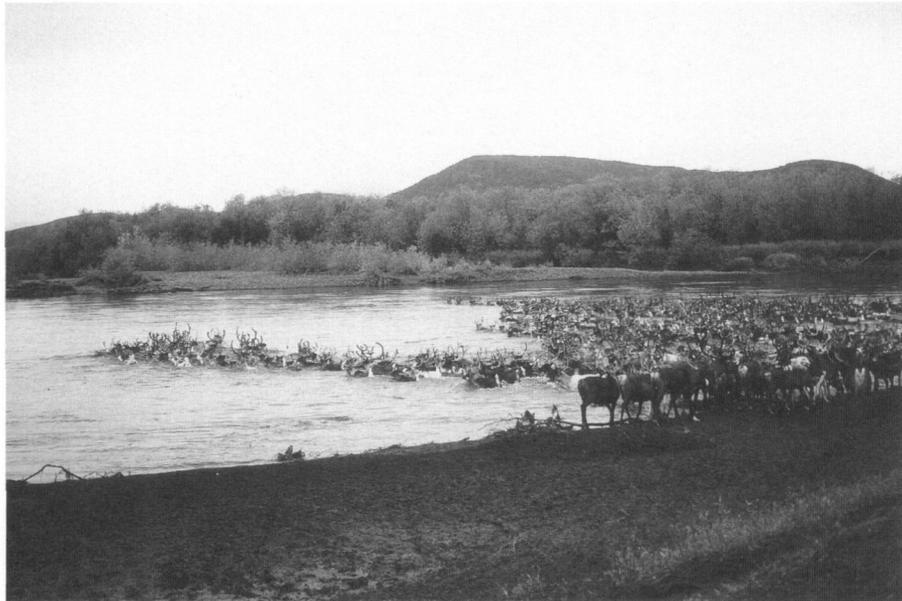


Plate 12: The reindeer herd swimming across the river after the sacrifice of reindeer to the spirit of the river.



Plate 13: Placing an *inawet* near the antlers as part of the offering to the Autumn Land.



Plate 14: Praying for the ancestral land before the sacrifice of the reindeer.



Plate 15: Sacrificial killing of the reindeer with a spear.



Plate 16: Woman "giving the reindeer water to drink", after it has been sacrificed.



Plate 17: Dissecting a reindeer.



Plate 18: The body of the deceased wrapped in reindeer fur.



Plate 19: Two women on the cremation platform, as the cremation starts.



Plate 20: Wrestling in front of the burning platform, during the death ritual.



Plate 21: Old women perform the fire starting ceremony on the *Gichigi*, for the *Kilway* (festival celebrating the birth of the fawns).



Plate 22: Circling around the *yanana* and throwing of *inawet* on to its roof for *Koyavagin*, the creator of life for the reindeer.



Plate 23: Feeding the *Gichigi* by women in the *Kilway*.



Plate 24: Author with students at the school in the village.

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