

3. The Reindeer Offering

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3.1 Offering Reindeer to the Deceased

When the herd of reindeer came near the village, one of the reindeer herders came to let the villagers know. They apparently took this as a signal to start preparing for the ritual. According to Alekseev, it took two days for the herd of reindeer to move from the village to the ritual site, and a few hours on foot. The ritual site was about four kilometres away from the village. If we were going to walk through the tundra, I told them I was afraid it would take me more than an hour, but they told me not to worry about walking there because everybody would go there by boat. On the morning of September 8th a man came, he was the chief reindeer herder. He told us that 1,600 reindeer would arrive in two days. However, since it rained continuously during this period, the herd of reindeer did not arrive near the ritual site until three days later on September 9th. We decided to leave in the morning. We went downstream on a boat and went ashore near the willow woods where about 10 tents were pitched as some men from the village had spent the night there. They were relatives of the three men who had died during that summer. That day's reindeer ritual was to be held primarily in memory of these three. After their deaths, they had become residents of the country of the dead above the sky. People were going to kill a reindeer and send it to the deceased. This ritual was only to be held in memory of the ones who died this year; it did not include those who had died before then. They said that those who had died before this year didn't need any more reindeer because they already had enough. In the country above the sky or the upper world, people lived happily with many reindeer. Those who followed the traditional life-style and led their lives correctly could go to the upper world. If you didn't follow the traditions during your lifetime, you would get lost between this living world and the upper world.

The relatives of those who had died performed the reindeer ritual. Usually, the closest relative was the one who killed the reindeer. There was no special person to kill the reindeer as such. As long as they were relatives, it could be anyone. They would set up a tent at the ritual site and stay there from the day before. Because the actual spot where the ritual was to be held had to be kept pure, they would not put foot in it but would pitch the tents around it. They would prepare the meal for the next day and eat *mukhomor* at night. Apparently, by eating *mukhomor* they would hear their own songs, which were "given" to each of them by the *mukhomor*.

We went past these tents, through the woods where small streams flowed to the riverside, and got to the top of a flat but slightly elevated hill. The relatives of the dead had already gathered and started open-air fires. About 20 of them had gathered in three small groups around each fire drinking tea with blueberry jam and eating smoked-salmon. Two of the groups were Chukchee and the other group was Koryak.

However, there was not much difference between the rituals performed by the two peoples. We had our meals with them as we waited for the herd of reindeer to arrive.

A little way away from us, a man was shouting out something in a loud voice as he pointed at the cloud over the mountain far away. People looked over at him, but didn't seem to care much. He looked at the top of the mountain and shouted looking excited, as if there was something impressive up there. Then he looked this way and called us in a loud voice as if to say "why don't you realize what is going on here!" But that was all he did, and his voice only flowed along with the wind that blew over the tundra and reached our ears. He probably saw in his eyes the country of the dead or something beautiful from eating *mukhomor*. Another old lady sat on the ground swaying her body back and forth, saying out loud "Yaaai, yaaai" as she kept the long and swaying rhythm. She was singing the "song of herself." Some were still enjoying the after-effects from the *mukhomor* taken the night before and others were in the midst of an extraordinary feeling from the *mukhomor* eaten that morning.

Some people stood up and pointed over the hill, so I looked in that direction to see white dots about a kilometre away, seeming to proceed slowly this way. I zoomed in with my video camera, that I had set up to record the proceedings. Looking into my lens, I could see small reindeer and a shadow of a herder running about left to right in an effort to lead the herd in the right direction. The reindeer herd was coming closer toward our hill. Then as soon as I heard an engine-noise coming over the hill, I saw a carrier cart pulled by a tractor coming towards us, and a trackless trolley with caterpillar tracks that looked like an armoured car. Many children, boys and girls were on the carrier cart and young men got out of the trolley as well. They had come across the tundra in the cars from the village to take part in this ritual.

Some people started to make a small pile of food including tea leaves, tobacco, dried fish, bread, doughnuts, butter, candies and sugar inside a circle made with a lasso on the ground. They inserted a branch of willow with leaves on it in the middle. The pile of food was called *inawet* and it was an offering to the deceased. Those who gathered here could take whatever they wanted or needed from the pile. For example, if you needed tea, you would take a package from the pile and keep a third of it for yourself and put the rest back into the pile again. But you could only take what you would completely use up at this site. The word *inawet* was used to refer to "a gift for something" or "an offering." For instance, when they made a fire, they would put a small amount of tobacco or food in the fire and then start cooking. If they killed an animal, they would take it home and put a little bit of its fat in the fire. Only then would they start to cut it up. These were both called *inawet* and were offerings to the fire. I later asked them about this word *inawet*, and was told that it was used either as a noun or as a root of a verb – e.g. "I have already made the offering" would be *Ti inawet uku*. Or "I have offered it" would be *inawetti*. I wanted to know if it had any relevance with the Ainu word *inau* (sacred wooden sticks with curled wood shavings

that are offered to deities), but was told that *inawet* was one word as a whole and could not be broken down any smaller.

The word *inawet* and its concept were very significant in order to understand their way of thinking. I have mentioned above about their offerings to the fire, but beside those, they also threw a gun cartridge into the river and offered it to a special spot in the river as they passed by when they went out on a hunting trip. What's more, from the next day I was about to see the ritual in which they offered the reindeer itself as an *inawet* to the spirit of the river and earth. That ritual and the reindeer ritual for the deceased that was about to take place had a common feature – they both killed reindeer. However, they didn't consider the reindeer itself as an *inawet* in the ritual for the deceased. The *inawet* here was strictly the food brought in by the villagers. In addition, the *inawet* made here was something a little different from other occasions. If it were an *inawet* for a particular spirit, people couldn't take or use them. It was typical of the *inawet* made here that everybody could eat or take the food that had been offered. The *inawet* here may be understood as food offered to the dead that is also shared among the living. After the reindeer ritual, they ate a lot of reindeer meat, and they could also take home any leftover meat that couldn't be finished. However, they didn't take home the leftovers from the *inawet*; usually, only the reindeer herders could take that. This could be understood as a special distribution for their work.

While some drank tea and ate their meals around the *inawet*, others started to dig a hole in the ground. This hole was for burying the organs and bones of the dissected reindeer. It was about a meter deep. Soon the figures of the reindeer in the distance gradually grew larger, and the head of the herd appeared on our hill. Children and men with lassoes stood up and went closer to the herd. Working as one, all the men led the reindeer to the top of the hill. Then they made the children and the elderly stand around them so that the reindeer wouldn't go anywhere else.

The herd of 1,600 reindeer stood still together and stared at us. When someone stepped closer, one of them started to run in the other direction, a few others dashed after it, and soon, as though it were being drawn towards them, the whole herd started to move like it was flowing. Head up and eyes wide open, looking startled, they ran across the tundra with their necks straight out. The innumerable reindeers stepped on the moss, and the clatter of hooves surged in and out like ripples. But they were blocked again at the other end of the hill, and they stood there reforming their herd. About ten of the men gathered and slowly approached the reindeer, bundling part of the lasso that they were going to throw and letting the rest of it dangle on the ground. They stepped into the middle of the herd, and the reindeer continuously moved around them moving from one side of the herd to the other, like water flowing through a narrow channel. It seemed like the reindeer were revolving around the men in a cycle. They said that the direction in which the reindeer revolved had to

be the same as the sun – i.e. clockwise starting from the right. Because the sun was the most important thing for human beings, the reindeer had to revolve in the same direction, in the same way that the sun rose from the east and set in the west.

When one of the men pointed at a reindeer, the herd followed the order and divided itself getting smaller and smaller, and finally the chosen reindeer was separated from the rest of the herd. Then the men held their lassoes above their heads and threw the bundle from their hands out in front toward the reindeer that came running past them. The next moment, after the numerous reindeer had run past, one reindeer was left behind kicking its hind legs in the air in effort to untangle the lasso hooked in its antlers. The man held the lasso firmly in his hands and stopped the reindeer from moving. Then another man rushed beside it and pushed it down as he held the lasso. He tied the lasso again securely at the stem of the antlers and let go of the reindeer as the rope pulled. The reindeer jumped and shook itself from side to side as it tried to get away. When the reindeer ran in the direction where the women had gathered and prepared for the ritual, the man ran together with it with the lasso in his hands. When the reindeer tried to run in another direction, he would hold the lasso firmly and pull against the reindeer to stop it. The reindeer gradually came closer to the ritual site as it ran a little and was stopped, then sprang along and was restrained. By the time it came closer, the reindeer looked tired and was gasping for breath, but it still braced its front legs with its head down and pulled so hard against the man with all its strength that the lasso around its antlers was stretched tight.

As soon as the reindeer came to where everybody had gathered, another man came running and together they tried to lay the reindeer down on the ground (Plate 7). They pushed the reindeer down with its left side up, felt for its heart, held the spot firmly over the ribs and then one man stabbed the heart with a small knife in his right hand. When they pulled the knife out, the reindeer, still held down, struggled in an effort to raise its head and moved its legs with its eyes wide open for a while, but it soon became still. At this point, the one thing they had to be careful of was not to let a single drop of blood fall on the ground. They had to avoid such a thing happening, because the reindeer was to go to the upper world, and dripping its blood on the ground would mean offering it to the spirit of earth.

Therefore, when the slaughterer pulls the knife out of the heart, he holds both sides of the knife with his fingers firmly so that the blood cannot spray out. After this, the wound is sewn together immediately to prevent the blood from spilling. Moreover, if he doesn't stab the heart properly, he would pierce the lungs, which would cause the blood to overflow from its mouth and onto the ground; so this should be avoided as well. With some of the sacrificed reindeer there were times when blood would overflow from the wound. When this happened, they would cut off some fur from its neck and stuff it inside the wound. In addition, they would bring a washbowl and place it under the reindeer's mouth when frothy blood came

out of it so the blood would not spill on the ground.

Ten reindeer were killed using this procedure. They had said they were going to kill two reindeer per death, thus six reindeer in total, but they actually ended up killing more. Here I saw an old man putting away, as though it was a most precious possession, a handful of chest fur cut off one reindeer, which he had received after the reindeer was killed. I asked about this to Alekseev and Natalia afterwards and they explained it to me.

He was a man who accompanied a particular reindeer in order to be sure to send it to the deceased; he had the role of an administrator in a way. He was entrusted by the relatives of the deceased, to separate the reindeer from the living world, and to pass it on to the upper world. Therefore, he worked as an intermediary – meaning he helped the reindeer’s spirit or soul transfer to the upper world. Reindeer have souls just like human beings, and when a reindeer is killed, the soul goes to the upper world. Actually, the soul is supposed to go there after the whole ritual is completed, because the ritual is a ceremony in which they convey the soul to where it should go. For instance, apart from the upper world, the spirit of the offered reindeer is sometimes sent to the ancestral land, the river or to the ravens. They never said out loud where the spirits should go, but they thought about it inside.

Alekseev went on to explain about the person who was entrusted by the relatives. For instance let’s say a person has died. His relatives would cremate him and of course the ritual would be held. One can suppose that he knew his reindeer well when he was alive and that those who worked closely with him would be equally as knowledgeable about them. The relatives of the deceased would know who was the closest person to him was. This person is called *Kaitubutum*. He could be a relative or not, as the case may be. The relatives would visit him and ask him to help them. So the person entrusted would go near the reindeer herd with the relatives – he definitely had to know the reindeer owned by the deceased – and point out the reindeer to be caught, and all of them would catch this reindeer.

Usually, the closest person would be a relative, but on some occasions it wasn’t. When there was no one close in the family, they sometimes asked a specialist to do it. The specialist was called *Gujuibalan*. The word “*Gujukau*” meant “sign,” so *Gujuibalan* was “a person who knows the sign.” The role of this person was to distinguish one reindeer from another, and remember them. Apparently they knew each one of the 14,000 reindeer. Other people took care of the daily lives of these *Gujuibalan* whose only role in their society therefore was to specialize in remembering the reindeer. Men of this kind were said to be very talented at memorizing. What’s more, people trained these men everyday and tested them. For example, they would make him remember a baby reindeer and then test him to see whether he recognized it correctly or not ten years later after the reindeer had grown up. Reindeer differ in their colour and form one from another. Even if their colours

or forms are similar, their voices or behaviour are different. And he memorized the owner of each reindeer. Of course, each reindeer had an original cut in its ear as the owner's marking, but these reindeer were handed over, distributed or passed on to other people as gifts. So the *Gujuibalan* apparently remembered, along with the ear marking, the history, such as whose reindeer it originally was, and how it had been passed on to others up to that day.

As a matter of fact, the reindeer offered to the deceased had to be specifically owned by him. If the reindeer was stolen from someone else, the reindeer's soul would go to the upper world, but the original owner would get it back there. After the reindeer was killed and cut up, the bones were buried in the ground. But if bears had dug up the ground and the bones had been taken before people gathered there the following year, it indicated that the reindeer had been a stolen one. The bears would let people know by digging up the bones. Therefore when they offered the reindeer to the deceased, they had to choose, without fail, the original reindeer with the owner's marking on its ear. If there were no reindeer with his marking on its ears, he received instead as an offering of a reindeer, with his marking on its ear, that he had given to someone in the past.

The fur from the reindeer's chest that I saw the entrusted man receive when the reindeer was being killed was a gift from the relatives. He would take this home and keep it carefully. Normally, they kept it with an idol, which was a guardian deity in the form of a human called *Gichigi* (Plate 8). This was the same as the wooden figure with the markings of fire sticks on it that I had seen in the museum in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii. By keeping the fur with the idol, the reindeer were thought to prosper more in this land. That is to say, the chest fur of the reindeer was the symbol of all the reindeer here. And I later learned on another occasion that the guardian deity *Gichigi* played an extremely significant role in their spiritual lives and many rituals.

After the reindeer had been killed, it was cut up and the bones and flesh were separated. The skull and the limb bones were crushed, and the brain and marrow was taken out. Those parts which made cutting the flesh from the bone difficult were cooked in a pot over a fire. Women carried out this procedure. Those women who sang their own song's after eating *mukhomor* continued to work joyfully. There was a man sitting in front of the fire singing along. When he occasionally collapsed, people around him would support his back. Then when he started to talk, those around him gathered closer to listen to what he was saying. All around the hill, children were playing around throwing lassoes at their friends who pretended to be reindeer. At this point, all the reindeer that were supposed to have been killed had been killed and the men who were inside the reindeer herd came back with the lassoes tightly wound diagonally around their shoulders. They gathered around the *inawet* and had their meals and tea. As soon as the reindeer meat was cooked, the women put it on the *inawet*. People rushed and scrambled over each other to eat the meat.

In principal, all the meat had to be eaten up by them during the ritual, but the leftover bones were to be gathered together and had to be put inside the hole dug in the ground. They put all the stomach contents and the intestines, the bones and the crushed pieces of bones into the three holes. Because they had sent the reindeer off, all the parts belonging to the reindeer except the flesh had to be left there where the ritual had taken place. Thus, not a single piece of bone was permitted to be taken home from there. In fact, the women were also in charge of keeping an eye out for such offences.

After they had finished eating, the men bundled together a few branches, fixed the reindeer's antlers on to it and pierced through the first and second bones of the vertebra with one of the branches. This branch was of alder, which has strong powers of influence and protects people from evil spirits. Moreover, the top part of the skull was left on the antlers, so the two antlers made a pair. The two bones from the spine had been tied together with a string and cooked thoroughly to remove the flesh completely off the bones. Then over the bundled branches they put a few stones, which are called *Niktengin*, meaning "to hold down." And the ceremony itself including the reindeer ritual is called *Tantegin*, which also means "to hold down."

The object made out of the branches and reindeer bones was a symbol of the reindeer itself. The head pointed eastward, which is the direction from which the sun rises; and also where the upper world of the dead is located, as I later came to learn. Consequently, this symbolic reindeer indicated that it was going to be sent from this world to the world of the dead.

There was a woman who was carefully tying something like a small lucky charm on a string to the antlers. It was a necklace for the female reindeer. What's more, I was told that a stone represented strength, so "to hold down," meant to commemorate eternally the fact that they had sent a reindeer to the world of the dead. In other words, these bones and antlers were evidence of the ritual and acted as a monument (Plate 9).

However, putting the internal organs and bones in the hole dug in the ground had another meaning. I assume this has something to do with the rebirth of reindeer. The habit of gathering all the pieces of crushed bones in one spot without missing a single one, and burying them in a dark and quiet hole, must be backed by the concept that a reindeer is born again from those bones. I later learned that they have a very strict rule about handling the reindeer's bones. For them, scattering the bones over the tundra ground was something that they should never do. When they failed to observe these rules, the reindeer were said to disappear.

The idea of sending a reindeer to the upper world of the dead, and the idea that reindeer came to life again seemed a contradiction at first, because a problem seemed to arise – did the offered reindeer go to the upper world, or did it come to life again among the herd of reindeers on earth? The Canadian Forest Indians believed in the

separation of the soul of a hunted reindeer, and handled the bones with special care based on the belief that reindeer are immortal. Hence the concept of the immortality of reindeer and the special handling of the bones seen among the reindeer-herding nomadic Koryaks are common points of culture amongst reindeer-hunting peoples. However, the characteristics of the reindeer rituals for the dead lie in the fact that they send the reindeer to the deceased for them to raise it in the upper world of the dead. As a matter of fact, the Koryaks believe that the dead live in the upper world with the herds of reindeer just as they did in the living world here. Therefore, sending the reindeer to the world of the dead, and the concept of the immortality of reindeer are not contradictory. They are based on the hunters' worldview that reindeer are immortal, and at the same time they have constructed a worldview unique to the herders – that reindeer and human beings are always thought to be one in their daily lives, in the living world or in the world of the dead.

In addition, I was interested in the small leafy willow branch that had been stuck in the middle of the *inawet*. Some time ago I had seen how they had put a bucket full of water, with a small willow branch stuck in the middle in the same way, next to the storage shed in the village, while their reindeer had migrated to the grazing land far away from the village during the summer. They said they did that so the reindeer wouldn't be short of water while they were at the grazing land in summer. This indicated that willows link water and reindeers together, and also link the *inawet* and the deceased together. Taking the interpretation further, wouldn't it mean that through this willow branch, the reindeer could drink the water in the bucket during the summer, and the deceased could eat the *inawet*? Therefore, this ceremony that offers reindeer to the dead could be interpreted as linking this world and the world of the dead together by means of the willow branch; the deceased can eat the offerings with his family and return to the upper world with the offered reindeer at the end of the ritual. This ceremony creates a special field that has no boundaries between this world and the world of the dead, or in other words a world that has transcended time and space.

By now, people were putting back the soil into the hole, burying the reindeer's bones and organs deep in the ground. In order to prevent the bears from digging up the reindeer's bones, they placed the logs that they had used as a framework for cooking over the hole: If the bones were dug up, the fact that the reindeer was not owned by the deceased would not only be revealed, but it would also be an extreme offence against the reindeer's immortality. People left the hill, and the children went home on the tractor and trackless trolley. The herd of reindeer went down the hill and was gathered at one place to rest since they had to cross the river the next day. And on the hill – so large we could all gather there – stood alone the symbolic reindeer made of antlers, bones and branches.

3.2 Reindeer Offering to the Spirit of the River

When I woke up the next day it was raining slightly outside. Mikhail had already got up and started a fire and was preparing our meal. The herd of reindeer would cross the river today, and they were to sacrifice one to offer to the spirit of the river. In order to watch this ceremony, we decided to go downstream in our boats again to the site where they had pitched the tents yesterday.

People were waiting inside the canvas tents; they had set up about ten of them. I adjusted the vinyl covering so that my video camera would not get wet in the rain. As I was drinking tea inside one of the tents, Natalia came and told me to come and see the old ladies eating *mukhomor* in another tent. There were four old ladies here. One of them was Alekseev's mother. She was a Chukchee with a tattoo on her face. She had tattooed two vertical lines from between her eyebrows to her nose, and three horizontal lines were drawn in between so they connected the two lines. Three short lines radiated from the corners of her eyes. She also had a short horizontal line across her eyebrows above both eyes, and had two or three short radial lines in the middle of those horizontal lines. On both sides of her lips she had drawn a cross, and from the bottom part of her lips or on her chin, three radial lines were drawn downwards. The colours of these tattoos ranged from blue to purple. The four old ladies in this tent all had tattoos like this.

One of the ladies was tearing the dried mushroom, she was holding in one hand, into small pieces with the fingers on her other hand. I was told they usually ate three mushrooms. Eating five of them would give them stomach-ache. She put the pieces of mushroom she had torn into her mouth little by little, drank some tea and washed them down. I asked her on what kind of occasions they ate *mukhomor*, and she told me they ate it when a special ritual was to be held. They also ate it in their daily lives when they worked. For example, they said they could progress quickly with their work if they ate it before or while they were tanning the reindeer hides. It had the same effect as liquor, but they said *mukhomor* was smarter than alcohol because they could work even after they had eaten it. And they could sing and dance when they ate it. They ate *mukhomor* and sang their songs.

After a while, the reindeer herders came to the campsite. They had gathered the reindeer that had scattered about during the night into one herd again, and had brought them nearby. They had a cup of tea at the campsite and took a break. We went downstream on a boat again, to the point where the reindeer would cross the river. The people at the campsite immediately followed us in 14 to 15 boats. After going downstream for about ten minutes, there was a point where the river curved widely to the left and then to the right. Sand had accumulated on the inside of the curve, forming a wide bank. They were going to gather the reindeer there and do the ritual, then make the reindeer swim diagonally across downstream and make them go ashore on the other sandbank on the other side of the river.

When we arrived, the reindeer driven by the herders were just coming out of the woods onto the bank at the riverside. It is said that if you make sudden moves in front of a reindeer, it will run off in the opposite direction surprised. Therefore, the people gathered at the sandbank stood still at the riverside and watched quietly as the reindeer moved. Some 1,600 reindeer moved slowly along the woods onto the sandbank. If a reindeer tried to walk back into the woods, the herder would send it back to the bank. After a while, the herd moved along to the end of the sandbank and the herder made them turn around and walk clockwise in a circle just like the sun, in the same manner they had done the day before.

Men with lassoes in their hands went together into the middle of the herd, splitting it to pick the reindeer to be sacrificed (Plate 10). They look for their own reindeer and can tell their sex, age and what condition they are in. Then when they catch one with their lassoes, they take it to where the women are waiting. The reindeer for sacrifice should be strong, beautiful adult males, in contrast to the reindeer killed for food, which are skinny and weak from sickness. Since weak reindeer can't survive the winter, they are killed for food in autumn.

The men led the reindeer with lassoes tangled in their antlers to the riverside. Then the reindeer and villagers stood there facing the river. They said in their minds - not out loud in words - "We offer you the reindeer so that you may help the reindeer cross the river." They call the reindeer offering to the spirit of the river *Guadjum-koyanna-matt-gi-ngun* (to kill the reindeer for the river). They don't have a concrete image with some personal features regarding the river spirit. They say it is the river itself, or the very natural image of the river water flowing. Yet they are sure the river has its spirit.

Then the man who was about to kill the reindeer circled around it clockwise, following the sun. Everything in this world follows the sun, so the man goes around the reindeer in the same direction as the sun and kills it. He approached the left side of the reindeer and with a knife in his right hand, ascertained where he should stab the heart. As soon as the reindeer stopped jumping about for a second, he quickly stabbed it and pulled the knife out right away. The man holding the antlers and the lasso and the man holding down the reindeer pulled away from it. With blood spraying out of its heart, the reindeer walked in circles and collapsed. Here the reindeer were killed standing, contrary to the reindeer ritual for the deceased held the day before, where the reindeer was killed after it was laid down on the ground to prevent the blood from spilling on the ground.

The reindeer was cut up after it was killed. They made an *inawet* out of the small pieces cut off from the organs of the left side of the reindeer body. The heart is on the left side, thus signifying life. They had to offer the spirit the left side - not the right side. In addition, the left side of the jawbone was offered to the river spirit as an *inawet*. The jawbone is very strong and therefore indicates safety. To offer

this meant that the way across the river was stout. This was put on the riverside. In the same place they put the antlers, pointing the way the reindeer would cross. The women collected the pieces of organs of the left side and put them together with the antlers as an *inawet*. The antlers stuck up as they were half-washed by the current, and the contents of the stomach and the intestines, the pieces of the kidney, heart and jawbone formed a small mound behind it (Plate 11).

Then the women started to talk to the river in front of the *inawet*. “The reindeer herd has come to the river. We have killed a reindeer as an offering. We will now make the male, female and infant reindeer cross the river safely,” the women chanted. They can kill the reindeer to eat once they have gone through this procedure. So that was how ten reindeer were killed there, before they were cooked in a pot hung over the bonfire by the women.

They started their meal when the men came back to where the women were. They ate the reindeer meat that hadn’t been boned with a knife. When finished, all the bones and any bone fragments were collected and put on the *inawet*. If they could not finish the meat and someone took it home, the remaining bones had to be burned early in the morning before sunrise or in the evening after sunset, after they have finished eating the meat at home. They did so because the lives of the reindeer herd are active during the daytime, and they become calm in the early mornings and evenings. Furthermore, they shouldn’t burn the bones if the wind was blowing in the direction where the herd was so that the other reindeer couldn’t smell the burning bones. The custom was also thought to prevent the spirit of the reindeer from detecting the smell of the burning bones.

The *inawet* set at the riverside was said to be a reindeer itself. They said that if the bones were put someplace else, then it wouldn’t be a reindeer. Therefore, all the bones had to be put together with the rest of the body parts. Everything, they said, had to be put in one place. That was why they had to burn the bones if any of them were taken home. It is natural to think that this conduct may be backed by the concept of the reindeer’s immortality, in the same way that they buried all the reindeer bones in the ground.

In addition, they say they can check if the river spirit has actually received the reindeer as a gift. If an accident occurs when the reindeer cross the river, it means that the spirit did not receive the reindeer. A few years ago, Alekseev had worked as a reindeer herder, and he made the reindeer cross the river. All the villagers gathered, and his brother picked a reindeer and insisted on sacrificing it. However, an old man pointed at another reindeer and told them to sacrifice that one, but his advice was rejected. After going through the procedures, the herd started to cross the river with the reindeer that the old man had chosen at the front. But before it got to the other side of the river, the reindeer suddenly turned around and started swimming towards the herd that had followed it from behind. As it bumped into the large herd

of reindeer in the middle of the river, the reindeer drowned. In the end, they say, that through this the river spirit claimed the reindeer that should have been offered to it in the first place.

When they finished the reindeer offering and the meal, the men started to lead the herd's way to make them cross the river. They worked as one to push them to one end of the sandbank. The reindeer that attempted to run into the woods were stopped and pushed back to the riverside by the children who waved leafy willow branches in their hands, as ordered by the men. A total of 1,600 reindeer were shoved to the riverside, and heavily packed in one spot, so that they wouldn't make a move. When the men went closer to the herd, a reindeer that had nowhere to go entered the river and started swimming. Then the rest of the herd followed this reindeer's lead, quietly forming a straight line into the river. One after another, each reindeer entered the river as it was drawn to the line, and the herd of reindeer spread out on the water surface in a widening column (Plate 12). The reindeer at the front had its antlers pulled up high with its head out of the water, and was almost halfway across the river that was about 100 meters wide.

Although the herd had started off straight towards the other side, their formation became bowed as they were pushed down stream by the current. The reindeer at the front swam upstream as they got closer to the other side, so they wouldn't be pushed downstream. The slight sounds of splashes made by each reindeer as their bodies cut through the water surface sounded altogether like a soft rippling echo coming from the bottom of nature; it felt like we were surrounded by it. The Koryak men, women, children and even we, the Russian researchers and I, watched this magnificent but fraught moment in silence. The entire herd had entered the river, and now it was one big creature whose centre part swelled downstream, crescent-shaped like an arc. The front part of it got closer to the other side as it was pushed downstream.

As soon as the first reindeer reached the sandbank that jutted out downstream, the herd started to climb up onto the sandbank as if they were drawn to it. After a while, all the reindeer had swum across to the other side, and I could see them going ashore one by one. The entire herd that had spread widely across the river was now spread across the opposite bank, and not a single one was drowned. They slowly started to move downstream along the riverside. The river was brimming with water again, and it just kept flowing swiftly. The men on this side of the river went back to where the women had been cooking. On the other side of the river, herders who had been hiding in the woods so as not to surprise the reindeer came out one by one, went around to the front of the herd and started to lead their way. Their wish for the reindeer to cross the river safely had come true.

The villagers got on the boat and went back to the campsite. They struck the tents, followed the reindeer to the opposite bank and prepared for the ritual of the new land that was to be held the next day. At the campsite, one of the old ladies I had

seen in the tent that morning was sitting on the grass and singing. She was smiling at me. Then she started to sing “her song.” Her voice echoed as she sang “say-aah, say-aah, say-aah.” It was a very vigorous song; different from the other old ladies’ voices I had heard before when they sang as they cut the reindeer apart. The way she sang was full of confidence absorbed in her own world while others were packing up, and she seemed to have become the very nature of Kamchatka; just as the reindeer crossing the river were the throbbing pulse of nature in itself.

3.3 Reindeer Offering in the Land of Autumn

The herd of reindeer crossed the river and moved on from the summer to the autumn grazing land. The villagers were going to pray for the reindeer herd’s prosperity and safety by sacrificing a reindeer to the spirit of the new land. In addition, Alekseev’s family was going to offer a reindeer to their ancestral land far away. At the same time, they were going to pray to the wooden *Gichigi*, which was the deity of the house that guarded the family, for the reindeer’s prosperity and the family’s security. The villagers took this opportunity to kill reindeer to obtain meat for food. They also killed the calves that were born that year to get high-quality fur needed for the winter.

As the wind swung around from south to north, the northern sky cleared up and the sun came out. We travelled downstream and got to the opposite bank where the reindeer had crossed the day before. Then we climbed up the steep hill through the shrubs and got to the grassy tableland. About five tents were pitched there. They had put the clothes and shoes made of reindeer fur outside the tent in the sun to dry; they had gotten wet from the rain from the day before. Natalia had brought with her the offerings necessary for that day. It was a mixture of cooked reindeer meat cut up in small pieces and white rabbit fur. This was going to be offered to the ancestral land of Alekseev’s family and to their family’s guardian deity. Alekseev was holding a long spear. A polished iron blade about 30 centimetres long shone at the end of the shaft. We waited near the tent for the reindeer herd to be gathered and brought closer. Each family came from the village in a boat and after they moored the boat to the riverside at the foot of the hill, they climbed up the hill with their luggage on their backs. Looking down from the hill, you could see across the river the endlessly spreading moss green tundra, and far away in the distance stood a sharply peaked mountain with the blue sky at its back.

Soon afterwards, the reindeer herd seemed to have arrived and the herders came around the tent and started to drink tea and eat. The villagers climbed uphill following the narrow footprints in the tundra that headed towards the tableland, which was a level higher than the campsite. When I got to the tableland, I saw the reindeer herd slowly coming closer towards us. Alekseev stabbed the shaft of the spear in the ground and headed toward the herd with only a lasso in his hand. One

after another, the men went closer to the herd and, gathering the reindeer just as they had done the day before, slowly made them circulate as they worked together as one. The reindeer rushed to the right and to the left, then stood in a cluster as though they were watching the herders' movements. The women started a fire for cooking. When they did so, Natalia threw in a little bit of the offerings she had brought from home and made an offering to the spirit of fire.

A while later, a struggling reindeer with a lasso around its antlers was brought in near us. One of the men pulled at the lasso and held its antlers. Another man held a knife in his right hand, stabbed it at the heart in a flash from the left, and pulled it out right away. The reindeer staggered as it bled from its wound and collapsed. They held the reindeer by its antlers and again turned it around clockwise. The women put branches of willow with leaves under the reindeer's neck as it lay there with its wound facing up. An old lady came along and scooped the frothy blood from the wound with both her hands, and poured it on the ground about three meters away from the reindeer's head. The reindeer had its head pointing eastward. In addition, she sprinkled the blood from the wound eastward, which was the direction its head was facing, then southward, westward and northward in that order. Then she poured water from a kettle over the wound and washed the blood away, and then also poured it over its entire body and rubbed the body with her hands.

From what I later heard from Alekseev and Natalia, pouring the blood from the wound onto the ground was an offering to this land where people lived. They called this land *Nuchet kang*. Then they would make an *inawet* with the reindeer's antlers and its stomach contents as an offering here on this land. What's more, splashing the blood east, south, west and northward meant offering it to the lands of each direction. And pouring water over the reindeer meant giving it drinking water, but they said they should never give it water during the winter.

Besides the antlers and the stomach contents, the *inawet* was made of parts of the liver, blood around the wound and pieces of fat. The parts of liver were called "the liver for the evil spirits" and were given to the evil spirits that gathered around them. They offered the blood around the wound to let the spirit of the land know that they killed a healthy reindeer. If the reindeer were ill, they wouldn't make an *inawet*. If they made an *inawet* out of a sick reindeer, the spirit of the land would get angry with them. The direction in which they offer the *inawet* is east – the same direction the reindeer's head was pointing. This was because the sun rises from the east, and that signified daytime.

Now, women gathered around the reindeer that lay there and began to cut it apart. The old ladies sat in front of the reindeer, and neatly cut it into pieces in a slow manner as they sang – from the effects of eating *mukhomor*. They cut open the skin along the hind legs and fore legs, and then skinned the whole body. One of the women skinned it from the head. When she did the soft skin that covered the antlers,

she made a cut with a knife, then pulled it with her mouth and skinned it to the end of the antlers. It was habitual to think that they must clean the antlers. Furthermore, because autumn was the breeding season, if they killed a female they left a little bit of skin on the top of the skull so it would be connected with the antlers to offer it as an *inawet*. These antlers were then put on top of a stand, made of a few branches, about a meter high (plate 13).

In order to skin the body, they push their fists through the knife cut, in between the skin and the subcutaneous fat. After skinning the left side of the body, they turn the reindeer over to skin the right side. Having skinned the entire body, they turn it over again so the left side is facing up. By following this procedure, they skin the whole body without cutting it into pieces. Incidentally, they cut up the reindeer on its right side so they can prevent the blood from pouring out unnecessarily from the wound on the left; they collect the blood to make a soup later on. They do so just for the sake of convenience, it has no special significance. The blood on the skin is washed off with water from a washbowl. Then the skin is spread over the dry moss on the tundra to dry.

The reindeer's carcass is carved above the hooves, then at the joints right above them; the hind legs are carved at the joints between the thighbone and the hipbone; and the front legs, including the scapula, are cut off from the body. The carcass is carved up in this way; they take the joints apart and put them aside together to separate the flesh from the bones. While they joint the legs, they also cut open the abdomen and take the stomach out. After pouring out the first blood, the contents of the stomach are squeezed out onto the same spot on the ground where the antlers would be set as an *inawet*. Then the intestines are pulled out and their contents are also squeezed out as an *inawet* like that of the stomach. Other organs such as the kidneys and the liver are taken out too. When they cut the abdomen open to take out the organs, they cut up the left flank. They don't cut it up by laying it on its back and slitting the abdomen vertically. They do it this way because by laying it on its side, the blood can collect inside the empty abdomen after the organs are taken out. At this point, the four legs were removed and the abdomen was cut open from its side. The intestines that had been taken out beforehand were washed in water, and were spread on the shrubs like a long rope to dry. The fat membrane was spread out to dry in the sun in the same way.

They cut the head apart at the same time by opening the mouth widely and taking off the lower jaw, separating the head from the neck. The chest was cut down the middle and was opened up, and the ribs were cut away from the back with an axe. After taking apart one side of the chest, they took out the heart, lungs and trachea. Then they took the hipbone apart from the loins. By that time all the parts had been removed from the left side and the blood had gathered in the hollow boat-shaped body. The contents of the stomach had been squeezed out as an *inawet*

already, so they washed the empty stomach with water and scooped the blood inside the body into this with a cup. The leftover blood – the blood that could not be scooped anymore – was soaked up with reindeer fur and was squeezed into the stomach. The blood would be cooked and made into a soup. Then they cut apart the ribs on the other side with an axe and broke the backbone into small pieces. Each part was cut into smaller bits by cutting the flesh away from the bones. Finally, the blood from the wound, the contents of the stomach and intestines and a part of the liver were put in a small cluster, above which they put, supported by the branches, the antlers with the skull and skin attached. This *inawet* was the offering to the spirit of the land of autumn. This was how each family surrounded the reindeer, sitting down, proceeding with their dissection, and making an *inawet* in front of them, all about the tundra hill. Within the calm scenery, only the short shouts made by men when they killed the reindeer and the soft singing voices from those eating *mukhomor* blew along with the wind.

Soon Alekseev caught another reindeer with his lasso and brought it in. He was with his son who was a herder. They called Natalia, Alekseev's wife, and Nina, his daughter. This time they were going to make an offering to their ancestral land. They stood on the western side of the hill. His family stood in a row facing southwest, in the direction of their ancestral land (Plate 14). The end of the spear which Alekseev, the husband, was holding upright in his right hand was shining brightly in the rays of the sun. Their ancestral land was where Alekseev's ancestors had been born and had died, and had been cremated at the funeral. Alekseev himself had also been born there. At that time he lived away from the ancestral land, but he never had and never would forget it. So that was why they sent a reindeer as an offering to it.

The ancestral land was actually located 50 kilometres to the southwest from the village, and was tundra that spread along the coastline. A mountain named "Groznyi" about 800 meters high stood there. They were going to offer a reindeer to this mountain. Actually, the tundra along the coastline was still used as their grazing land during the summer. I later heard from Alekseev's father about the life-style they had led there before they came to the village where they then lived; according to what he said, they had lived along the coastline and in the mountains behind it. Alekseev and his father were true Koryaks, and had not forgotten the ancestral land that they had lived in before they mixed with the Chukchees in the village. In fact, there were two ways of performing the reindeer offering to the ancestral land. The first way was to go to the ancestral land with their reindeer herds and kill the reindeer when they got there. The second way was to kill the reindeer at the place where they currently lived, and send its spirit to the ancestral lands. However, the first was too difficult to carry out in their present circumstances, so he said he chose the second way.

When they finished praying to the ancestral land, the family came back to where the reindeer – caught with a lasso – was waiting. Alekseev's son held the lasso

and Alekseev went around to the left side of the reindeer and quietly pointed the spear at its heart (Plate 15). The reindeer sometimes moved as it wanted to jump, but he aimed at it the moment it stopped and speared it; then pulled out the spear right away. After a moment's pause, the reindeer collapsed on the spot and didn't move anymore. The power of the 30 centimetres wide broad spear about was striking. Compared to the reindeer that was stabbed with a knife and stood there bleeding for a while, or the reindeer that kept kicking its feet after it fell to the ground, the way this reindeer died could be called "an instantaneous death." They turned the fallen reindeer clockwise; gave it water to drink (Plate 16) and started to cut it apart. Its head was facing westward, and the contents of the stomach and the intestines were also put on the ground facing the west, because these *inawet* were going to be sent to Mt. Groznyi, the ancestral land located in the west.

In fact, during the dissection the antlers were laid on the east side behind the reindeer. But Alekseev and Natalia were later going to carry the antlers and the other offerings in their hands to the bushes a little downhill. According to them, these offerings were for the guardian deity of the reindeer herd, "*Gichigi*", and the guardian deity of the house. Therefore, this *inawet* was a different offering entirely from the one they offered to the ancestral land. As they cut the reindeer apart, they put together with the antlers each part necessary for the second offering. These parts were: the eyes, the lower jaw, the lips, the hooves, the heart, the liver, the fat, the fur and a part of the brain – each of which came from the left side of the reindeer's body. They said that every part of the *inawet* had to come from the left side of the body. The left side was where the heart was, and therefore signified "life."

To this *inawet*, they added the mixture of cooked reindeer meat and rabbit's fur that Natalia had prepared before leaving that day. They also included tobacco, a piece of bread and tea leaves, and a few "Mild Seven" cigarettes I had given them as a gift from Japan were also added. A woman singing the song of *mukhomor* cut the reindeer apart carefully and laid the piece of meat for the *inawet* aside. Eventually, Natalia took her place and did the work. Young Nina took part in dissecting the reindeer too and her hands were bloodstained.

I had thought the lady who was singing was of quite old age, but I later came to find out that she was the same age as myself. She was a Chukchee, and had lived with her stepmother on the tundra from when she was little. They told me she was "the experienced one," who knew their traditional manners and customs. I later ended up learning a lot from this lady who had a tender sounding name, Maria. One of her eyes seemed handicapped; the eyeball was white without light, and was almost always shut. The wrinkles chiselled on her face described the harshness of the tundra life that went down to 50 degrees below freezing point in winter. But her chubby cheeks, the smile about her mouth and kindly smiling her eyes proved clearly that she was leading a glittering life without doubt in these severe conditions. Natalia

said she was her cousin, and she trusted her. Alekseev and Natalia had decided to follow Maria's experience on giving the offerings to the *Gichigi* (Plate 17).

So Alekseev carried the antlers and Natalia carried the *inawet* made of the prepared parts of reindeer meat and tobacco. The experienced Maria led the two from the end of the hill into the shrubs, and I followed them. They descended the hill a little, crossed a stream in the bog and got to the shrubs about 500 meters away from the point we had left. Maria stopped there and Alekseev put the antlers down on the grass. Following word by word what Maria said, Natalia put down one by one the offerings near the antlers. I later asked Alekseev and Natalia what Maria had said in her prayer, but we ended up having a slight problem there. I will tell you about that later on, but before that I should explain about the guardian deity *Gichigi*.

A *Gichigi* is a human-shaped wooden figure (Plate 8). They showed it to me when I visited the tundra beyond the village. The eyes and mouth were carved on the round face and there were numerous burnt dents in the body where they had turned the sticks to make fire. It gave off a black lustre from the smoke, soot and the grease smeared around the mouth as an offering. The *Gichigi* was said to be the master of the reindeer herd. Indeed, the figure had a small cane and lasso in its hands. Furthermore, there were many twigs tied to its neck. These twigs stood for the body and both legs, and they were the herders that were the *Gichigi's* assistants. Just like how men needed a master and herders to manage the reindeer herds, the *Gichigi* was accompanied by herders as well. It was a spiritual manager of the reindeer herds owned by each family. Some strings had talons or the head of a hawk or a crow tied to them. They looked eerie as it glittered with grease, but they said these were the friends and assistants of the master, or the *Gichigi*. In other words, they were the *Gichigi's* helpers.

If a reindeer becomes lost, they would give the *Gichigi* something to eat. They actually had a small wooden or a bone-spoon or container for giving food to this wooden figure. When human beings gave *Gichigi* power from food, the *Gichigi* gave the reindeer power. What's more, I wondered why an old man had many *Gichigis* to himself, so I asked why. They told me such things could happen, from time to time. For example, if he got one *Gichigi* from his father and another from his grandfather and so forth, then he would inherit many of them. This meant that he had many sources of power, and it was something good for them. The old man showed me his *Gichigi*, but said they usually didn't do such a thing. The more they showed it to someone, the more it lost its power.

However, I wondered if that was taboo among the Koryaks, or a way of protecting themselves against outsiders – the Russians in particular. For instance, it was strictly taboo among the Koryaks to be seen sewing the special outfit the deceased wore at a funeral. However, they made a new fire using the *Gichigi* in front of the others at the reindeer ritual, and it surely wasn't something they did secretly.

But at the same time, it is surely understandable that it could be taboo among the Koryaks to show others the *Gichigi*, which is the guardian deity on occasions other than the ritual. On the other hand, the Koryaks felt quite awkward to talk about the shaman with Russians. In former times under the former Soviet Union, their traditional religions were denied and there is a history of shaman-hunts that took place. Shamans were sent off to the woods where they were killed. Their shamans and many of the rituals have been passed on secretly in an underground-form. Therefore, the Russian researchers were in a situation where they even strictly refrained from using the word “shaman.” When they had to refer to such a person, the Russian researchers and the Koryaks both said “an experienced person” as if nothing was the problem.

The fact that the old man – probably an “experienced person” – whom I had met on the tundra had shown the Russian researchers and I the *Gichigi* – which was a religious artefact in itself, like the funeral outfit or the drum – must have been an extremely exceptional case. I say so because the Russian researchers said surprisingly that it had been the first time for them to see a *Gichigi* like that outside a museum. In any case, I learned that the *Gichigi* was the spiritual master and the spiritual manager of the reindeer herd. But that also meant it protected human life at the same time. Human beings and reindeer are strongly connected for the nomads. The lives of people rely heavily on the reindeer’s meat, fur and bones. The lives of human beings exist because of the reindeer and without reindeer people cannot lead their lives. In other words, the *Gichigi* is acknowledged as a spiritual being that corresponds to their actual nomadic life as it revolves around the reindeer, and is thought to have power that influences their real life.

So they had made an offering to the *Gichigi* who was the guardian deity of the reindeer as mentioned above. However, they hadn’t brought the *Gichigi* here, but were going to offer the food after they had gone home by smearing grease on the mouth of the *Gichigi* that was carefully kept in the corner of the house. In fact, originally the reindeer had been killed in front of their campsite. Ever since the village has grown, they have been doing the ritual on a hill far away from the village since there aren’t any good grazing lands near the village. Originally, the reindeer herd had come to the campsite where the traditional tents were pitched, halfway between the summer grazing land and the autumn grazing land. They would make a new fire with the *Gichigi*, then sacrifice reindeer and offer them to the *Gichigi*.

I was remembering the reindeer ritual in the land of autumn. When we finished the reindeer ritual, we ate the cooked meat, drank tea, took a picture with Alekseev’s family and were shooting with the video camera. Looking through the viewfinder, I saw an elderly person who had eaten *mukhomor*, singing as he tapped his cane. Not only women, but men were singing too. Alekseev’s son told me he would teach me how to throw a lasso, and threw it with me at a stick stabbed in the ground. Then

he said farewell as he left to drive the reindeer herd to the new autumn land; he went running toward the reindeer herd with his lasso over his shoulder. An old lady sat down facing the tundra that spread endlessly looking down from the hill, and sang away continuously in a high and low voice saying “Yaaai, yaaai.” When they had finished eating, people packed up the dissected meat and carried it over their shoulders with the new reindeer furs and went down the hill heading homeward one after another. More than ten *inawet* mounds that had been offered to the spirit of the land were left scattered on the hill. Propped on top of the stand made of branches, the widely spread reindeer’s antlers were hoisted on high, symbolizing safety and prosperity in this new land of autumn. I closed my viewfinder when I heard Alekseev’s family calling me as they descended the hill, and hurried after them.

Later on, I asked Alekseev and Natalia about the prayer she said to the *Gichigi*. As a matter of fact, the Russian researchers were worried about my query. The question itself about the *Gichigi* was something that concerned the deep mental world of the Koryaks, which was a territory guarded by strict secrets. Just speaking of it would lessen the *Gichigi*’s power, which meant it would bring about dangers to the reindeer herd. Nonetheless, after asking various long questions, I asked them about Maria’s words in her prayer. Alekseev kept silent, but Natalia explained that what Maria had said went like this:

“May the reindeer be healthy, may the weather be pleasant for them, may their herd grow large, may there not be ice and storms.” It was their prayer for the reindeer’ safety and prosperity. But the next moment Alekseev said to his wife,

“You have said more than enough. Let’s go home.” Then he stood up and left for his father’s house where he had been sleeping. The Russian researchers all drooped their heads. They had been very careful with their relationship with the Koryaks, which was a minority group, because of the political background. They had been taking a very cautious approach when asking something concerning their secrets. However, since those were the things that interested me the most, I had been asking them frankly and the Koryaks had been answering back straightforwardly. But it had reached their limits at this point. There were certainly two problems. Firstly, there was a possibility that these matters were being kept secret due to the political and historical relationship between the Russians and the Koryaks. The other problem was the possibility that they were kept secret even among the Koryaks. I think both cases are possible. In any case, I had to follow the Russian attitude toward them, but at the same time I wanted to learn what the Koryaks could teach me if they would.

Luckily, Alekseev and Natalia came back to us – we were all discouraged – after a while. They seemed to have felt a little guilty at having walked away suddenly. We tried to get rid of the bitter feelings by chatting away on harmless topics. We spent time together until late at night; even Alekseev laughed out in a loud voice.