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Prologue

The jet plane took off from Niigata Airport, flying smoothly northward across the sky, heading toward Far East Russia. Beneath the clouds, the Sea of Japan spreads out wide, a glittering pale blue. Gazing at the ocean, I tried to remember the Russian folk story I had read in Moscow, as if I were putting together fragments of a half-forgotten dream.

The story goes like this: “In ancient times, the king of Novgorod set out on an expedition to look for treasure. When he reached the kingdom at the bottom of the sea, he met the princess of the sea there, and married her. After spending many happy years together, he suddenly remembered the wife he had left behind in his hometown, and he left the underwater kingdom. The princess of the sea came after him to Novgorod, but, struck with grief at the sight of the king living happily with his wife, drowned herself in the river. She became the Volkhov River, and still irrigates the land of Russia to this day.”

In the 13th Century Moscow was the capital of a small nation, which gradually grew and united the whole of Russia, eventually leading to the formation of the Soviet Union. However, this major power is currently undergoing rapid changes. The Soviet political system, wherein a single party held power for 70 years since the Russian Revolution in 1917, has fallen apart, pulling down the former Soviet Union as a result. At that time, while the economic reformation movement called *perestroika* and the policy of more open information in public affairs called “*glasnosti* (openness)” were underway, the three Baltic Nations that formed part of the ex-Soviet Union left the Union. Furthermore, out of the 12 republics left within the Union, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan of Central Asia became independent. The republics that remained formed the new Russian Federation of which the Republic of Russia became the core.

However, there is no guarantee that the Russian Federation is the final state of transformation out of the collapse of the Soviet Union. For instance, the Yakutskaya ASSR in Central Siberia announced its independence as “Sakha Republic,” named after the word “Sakha” which is what the Yakuts call themselves, in an effort to withdraw from the Russian Federation. Moreover, many other autonomous areas, which consist of ethnic minorities, are similarly trying to become independent republics. What’s more, it is still uncertain how far east oblasts (administrative divisions within Russia, similar to provinces) such as Amur, Sakhalin, Magadan and Kamchatka, or Far East regions such as Khabarovsk Krai, Primorsky Kray will build their relationships with the Russian Federation. In addition, the Chukotka Autonomous Region (Okrug) is seeking a chance to become ethnically independent from the Magadan Oblast, as is the Koryak Autonomous Region (Okrug) from the Kamchatka Oblast. The very framework of the Russian Federation is still in the

midst of transformation.

In fact, this expedition to Kamchatka – Russian researchers probably refer to field trips as “expeditions” because the vastness of the land and harshness of the fieldwork has never improved – was to be carried out under such political disturbance, and we suspected that we would encounter various difficulties. On the other hand, when you think about it, you could also say that this kind of investigation was possible due to the unstable political situation in Russia. The failure of the nation’s economy has forced people to earn their own livings, and this is not just a problem in individual oblasts or krajs (regions). The national central research institution, called the former-Soviet Union Academy of Sciences, was no exception. Researchers working for this institution had not been paid for 3 months. To make things worse, it had become difficult to live on 25 dollars a month (2,500 yen in Japan, 25,000 rubles in Russia), in a situation where the currency has lost its value up to 2,000 times over a few years. So, following the example of private enterprise, they started the international cooperative expeditions as a business, in search of a way out of the problems. In such cases, they would do joint research, depending on foreign research organizations financially and offering their accumulated experience and information in return. Many regions in Siberia were not only impossible for foreigners to investigate, but were even impossible to set foot on. Although the minorities living in these areas have deep cultural and historical ties with the Japanese, this fact is only mentioned fragmentarily in old documents, and was locked away in the far distance of forgotten history. Suddenly, however, due to Russia’s political reformation and economical needs, the doors had been unlocked.

My heart was pounding in excitement over the expedition that was about to begin. But at the same time it was filled with a sense of depression, close to resignation. I was excited because I had the opportunity to step into the land of Far East Siberia where no other researchers had ever been in 70 years. On the other hand, I felt depressed because I found myself resigning to the thought that the Northern natives whom I would meet there would already have lost their traditional life-style and culture, merely living as labourers on a state-owned farm called *sovkhoz* (*sovetskoe khozyastvo*). Actually, concerning this expedition, the Russian researchers had said that the Koryak and the Chukchee living in the Northern tip of Kamchatka Peninsula migrate within the tundra or the forest, leading a traditional life-style breeding reindeer and hunting animals. If what they had said was true, I was about to get crucial information that would solve a number of important anthropological problems for me. However up to that time, I hadn’t trusted their words. It was hard to believe that in this day and age there are people who still lead their lives by their traditional nomadic culture.

Nevertheless by letting things take their own course, I ended up deciding to take part in the Kamchatka expedition. I had been involved in cultural anthropology

research in Western Tibet for more than 10 years. Prior to that, I had also been engaged in researching Canadian hunters of the Northern Forest for almost 10 years; I lived with the Chipewyan, caribou-hunting American Natives of the Athapascan family, for 15 months in 1973 and between 1975 and 1976 to conduct an ecological anthropological field survey on them. While I was a graduate student in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Tokyo, I was also enrolled at the Graduate School of the University of Manitoba and later at the Graduate School of the Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Canada. I submitted a doctoral dissertation entitled “Ecological Anthropology of the Caribou-eater Chipewyan of the Wollaston Lake Region of Northern Saskatchewan” and received my Ph. D. from Simon Fraser University. The dissertation was published in 1981 by the National Museum of Ethnology, where I was working at that time, under the title “Chipewyan Ecology – Group Structure and Caribou Hunting System”. In 1989, it was also chosen to be included in the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) of Yale University. In addition, in 1983 I published “From the World of Canadian Indians” (Irimoto 1983) to present a comprehensive view of the relationship between the ecology and worldview of caribou-hunting people. I also wrote “An Anthropology of Nature and Culture” (Irimoto 1996) which discussed the theory and methodology for the anthropological study of ecology and worldview. I had already gained an understanding of the ecology and worldview of the caribou-hunting people of the North, based on my experience of living with them and studying them.

For 10 years, since 1984, after being transferred to Hokkaido University from the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, I had also studied the Ainu culture as well as doing research on Western Tibet. My mind was filled with the thought that I ought to organize the research materials I had collected up till then, and do theoretical research based on their comparison, rather than going on a new field trip. In fact, since we needed to do this research, we held an international symposium at Hokkaido University in 1991. Entitled “Religion and Ecology in Northern Eurasia and North America,” the symposium was attended by researchers from Sweden, Finland, France, the former Soviet Union, Canada, the U.S and Japan, who held discussions for three days. From the comparative research done on the various northern cultures of the vast land of Northern Eurasia and North America – this area is called the circumpolar region, as it is the area surrounding the north pole, they concluded that many common points could be seen in the life styles and worldviews of these regions, including Japan. However, in the process of this research, a new theoretical problem arose that I had to solve, namely the relation between hunting and herding among the northern cultures.

The activity of earning a livelihood by hunting, which is practiced among the northern natives, is strongly related to the characteristics of northern cultures. For example, the worldview behind the Bear Ceremony of the Ainu consists of the

continuity of reciprocity between deities and human beings – i.e. a bear is a deity covered with fur and flesh: so when the deities offer this as a gift to human beings they are worshipped and received cordially by human beings and also receive return-gifts, such as home brewed alcohol, cakes and inau (sacred offering of a wooden stick with curled wood shavings). They then return to the world of the deities as they are invited to make a return visit to the human world. This worldview is a widely observed notion throughout Northern Eurasian and North American native cultures.

Meanwhile, in Northern Eurasia, animal herding is practiced along with hunting. In contrast to the position a caribou (American wild reindeer) holds in Northern America as a traditional animal to be hunted, the reindeer, which belongs to the same biological species, keeps its status as an animal to be bred in Northern Eurasia. This indicates that the means of living changed from hunting to herding in Eurasia. Especially on the tundra (Permafrost Area) of Siberia, herders are seen moving about seasonally along with semi-wild herds of reindeers. The question was, how did this kind of change in livelihood take place? Moreover, another question came to my mind; was it possible or not for their social system and worldview, so strongly connected to the hunting life, to be modified into something that corresponds to herding life? Needless to say, this question is important to understand when considering the origin of herding in human history.

In fact, I realized that this question was tightly linked to the question of animal sacrifice. Animal hunting among the Northern hunters was practiced under a spiritual agreement between the animal to be hunted and the hunter. This agreement was often made in the hunter's dream and was later revealed in a myth, which would then even be performed in public in the society in a ritual such as the Bear Ceremony. Such societies revolve around the reciprocity between human beings and animals, supported by animism wherein animals are considered as deities. However the relation between human beings and animals among the herders is different. They slaughter animals as a sacrifice, praying for prosperous breeding, and offer this to the high god of heaven.

At the international symposium on "Religion and Ecology in Northern Eurasia and North America," that I mentioned above, I made a comparison between hunters and herders. By putting the northern hunters of Canada as an example at one end, and putting the Khanty that live near the Ob River in Siberia, the Sami (Lapp) of North Scandinavia and the livestock farmers of Western Tibet that I researched on a field trip myself on the other end, and comparing them, I introduced my hypothesis that people's way of thinking alters as the ecology changes from hunting to herding. When men herd animals that used to be the target of hunting, the animals lose their spiritual characteristics. In its place stands the concept that men own animals – a concept which previous hunters only slightly had in mind – or the existence of the

gods of land and heaven that dominate the weather or rich harvest. Their worldview changes; in the same way that men control the animals as a mode of life, these gods spiritually dominate the animals. Consequently, men develop a measure of giving spiritual power to their domestic animals through these gods. I assumed that this was why they killed the domestic animals as an offering to the gods.

Before, when animals were thought to have visited the human world willingly under a spiritual negotiation and agreement between the hunter and the animal, it was as though the animals offered themselves to the hunters. The direction of the offering was from animal to man. Whereas the herders made sacrifice to the higher gods that gained power using domestic animals, thus changing the direction and target of offerings. This was something that not only caused a radical change in the relation between animals and men, but also linked to the creation of a new god. That is to say, the relationship between animals and men changed from a horizontal relationship to a vertical relationship – men below gods, and animals below men – where animals are distinctly distinguished from men.

In addition, I came to think that this change was not something that would happen in a flash one day. Since hunting activities still coexist among the various types of nomadic culture in Siberia, I felt there would be a form of transition between hunting and herding, not just ecologically, but in their way of thinking too. I was mainly interested in what kind of relationship there was between human beings and animals in this form of transition.

Actually, in order to look into this hypothesis, the materials I had at hand were not sufficient. Of course, I had data on the Western Tibetan livestock farmers who are closely related to Central Asia culturally. Furthermore, I had visited the Sami (Lapp) in Lapland myself. Even with all this material, there was still something missing in order to investigate and prove my hypothesis. I wanted to compare the reindeer sacrifice done by the Siberian herders with the detailed materials of northern hunters of Canada that I observed 20 years ago, by directly observing the sacrifice of the reindeer in Siberia.

The second area I was interested in on this expedition to Kamchatka was cultural change. The society and culture of the northern regions have gone through drastic changes in recent years. In order to meet the demands of these fast changing international relations that go beyond the traditional framework of Northern Studies, researchers are searching for new objectives and methods of study in this field. To understand the society and culture of the northern regions where transformation is taking place currently, and to cope with rapidly changing international relations, it is necessary to expand Northern Studies within a new framework under transformation, rather than just continuing the comparative studies of traditional cultures. From now on, in addition to analyzing the relationship between an individual and the traditional culture, or the altering relations between the ethnic group and the nation, it will

be important to analyze the international relations that are closely related to these factors. How the nomadic society of Kamchatka altered under the former Soviet Union's *kolkhoz* (collective farm), and *sovkhoz* (state-owned farm), and how it adapted to reformations like *perestroika* and *glasnosti*, and where it is heading in the future, are interesting topics academically and at the same time are essential themes regarding the future international relations between Japan and Russia.

Incidentally, we had established the Northern Studies Society as an international learned society in 1991. The objective of the society is to do diverse research on Northern cultures and to contribute to the understanding of mankind through international cooperation. To this end, its activities include; holding an international symposium, collecting and sending out information concerning Northern Studies, exchanging information with other related societies and institutes and mutual cooperation with those organizations. Academic exchanges from an international viewpoint are required here. It is essential to build an international information network by being alert to the current status of Northern Studies in the societies and institutes of each country, including recent information on educational programs or cultural exchange programs as a part of practical activities. In addition, if we keep in mind the drift of research in other countries, and build up a new framework for the Northern Studies over the traditional Northern Studies in Japan through international collaboration, we can achieve advances in this field. The international joint research with the Russian Academy of Sciences is thought to be the first step in accomplishing this.

The international joint project in the Kamchatka region was proposed by the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1991. In 1992, an agreement was reached to select a site for research and for further studies. Based on this agreement, the plan started to take shape in 1993, but both Russia and Japan suffered communication difficulties due to the poor telecommunications links between the two countries. Letters took three months to get to the other side, if at all. Correspondence via fax was the only means that allowed us to continue with our plan. In August of 1993, I flew to Moscow for another international conference on a different subject, and while there I talked to a researcher at the Russian Academy of Sciences at Sankt-Peterburg over the phone. I managed to make final arrangements about the supplies, equipment and staff that were needed. Then I returned to Japan once more, and received my expedition visa from the Russian Consulate. After packing my gear, I flew out of Japan heading for the far-east Khabarovsk where we were going to meet.

According to our plan, I was the only one from Japan, three researchers from Russia were to come, and two guides were to meet us at Kamchatka. In fact, we had to give up the original plan of flying directly into the area of the herders, for our budget was short, so we were to get there on foot, camping along the way. I was quite concerned about this, and explained to them that I was rather too old to carry

the heavy equipment on foot. The Russian researchers replied that there would be no problems since the equipment would be carried by reindeer-back. What's more, I was told that bears and wolves might appear on the way, but there was no need to worry about this either because an armed hunter would come with us. The guide was not the only hunter; it was said that one of the Russian researchers was a hunter with good shooting skills. Actually, the thought bears and wolves did not worry me because I had experience of living among the northern hunters of Canada. Rather, when I heard all this I was quite excited, as if I were going on a school excursion, but at the same time, no matter what the Russian researchers said to me, I wasn't expecting much because I thought that the traditional nomadic culture, which was our research target, would have changed by now. That was what I was thinking as I boarded the plane.

The aircraft flew across the Sea of Japan, over the coastline of the inshore area of Russia, going inland past a range of small mountains. Soon, as the plane circled widely, a forest, marsh and a river meandering through it spread below my eyes. It was the Amur River, which flows along the border of Russia and China, into the Sea of Okhotsk. Khabarovsk where the Russian researchers would be waiting should be located at the riverside. In spite of all the troubles there might be, I was about to mark my first step on the land of Siberia feeling tranquil. My trip to Kamchatka was about to begin at last.

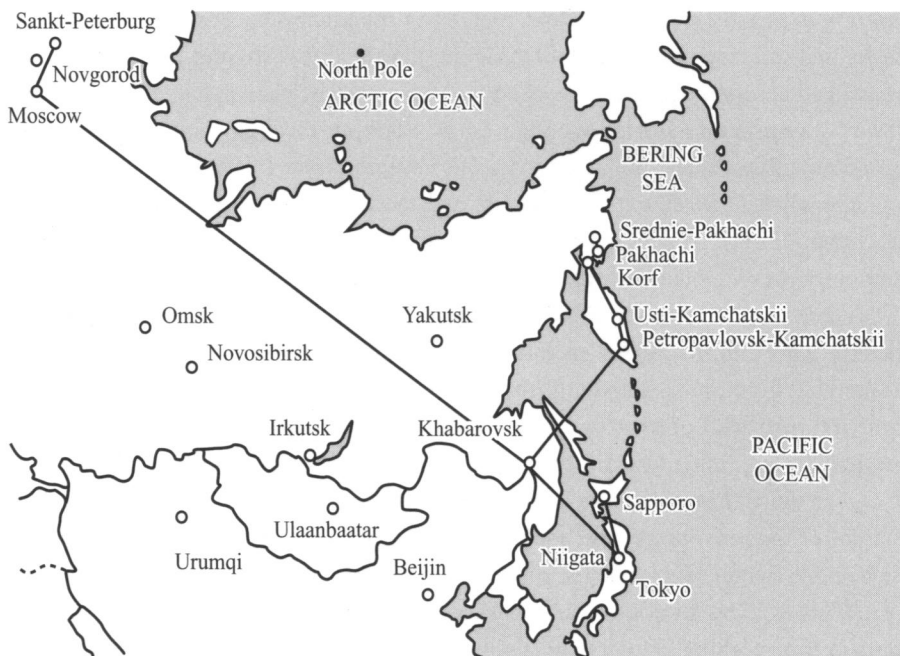


fig.1 Map showing Japan and the Kamchatka region of Russian Eastern Siberia