

1. The Reality of Russia

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1. The Reality of Russia

1.1 Meeting the Russian researchers

After going through immigration control at Khabarovsk Airport and claiming my baggage, I looked outside as I was clearing customs to see a tall and bearded man waving at me. It must be Sergei, from the description I had been told over the phone. As I walked outside, I was greeted by two other Russians, who were with him. They were Mikhail and Vasha. We introduced ourselves to each other and shook hands. Secretly I was relieved that they were just ordinary, energetic young men. In spite of their formal status as researchers from the Russian Academy of Sciences, they weren't wearing ties, but were dressed in simple jackets and pants with work boots on. Moreover, they welcomed me with a friendly smile. I knew at first sight that these Russian researchers were "field workers" by nature. They reminded me of the field workers that were always around me when I was a college student. They were liberal and free of formalities, always enjoying working in the field. So I strongly felt I could work comfortably together with these Russian researchers.

Immediately, they divided my luggage among them, and carrying it, they started walking toward a hotel near the airport. The temperature on this last day of August was 25 degrees Celsius when I left Niigata, but was 18 degrees Celsius here at Khabarovsk. I could see signs of autumn already showing at the edges of the trees on the street. There was a two-hour time difference between Japan and Khabarovsk, and it was already a little past four o'clock in the afternoon. In the streets, freight trucks and military trucks passed by kicking up the dirt. Crossing the street at last, we walked across the mud and reached the steps made of planks that led to the hotel. It was a simple one-storied wooden hotel. Walking through the small entrance, the odour of the toilet stung my nose. The reception was to the right, where there was a small window like a ticket booth, and the face of the large housekeeper was looking out of it. The name of the hotel, "Transit," explained that this was a place of temporary accommodation for people in transit rather than a standard hotel.

There were three beds in the room, simple folding beds made of iron bars and springs, with thin mattresses spread over them. The Russian researchers had come all the way from Sankt-Peterburg (the former Leningrad which faces the Baltic Sea, located further west of Moscow) arriving here at Khabarovsk at three in the morning, and had already taken a nap here. They told me to choose a bed out of the three. However, since there were four of us, somebody would not get a bed. So I suggested in front of the three to ask the housekeeper to bring another bed into the room, but the bearded Sergei said to me looking rather troubled,

"That is almost impossible." I asked them why, and was told that when they came in this morning, a blanket that was supposed to be on the bed was missing, so they asked the housekeeper to bring another one. In return she answered,

“That is difficult. It is much easier to look for a woman to spend the night with than to look for a blanket for the bed.” We could only smile grimly at her words that reflected so well the current situation of the Russian economy and society. I was already in the midst of economic and social disarray that characterized the situation in Russia at this time.

Sergei was a man covered with a short black beard from his temple to the chin, and around his mouth. He was thin, and his slender body seemed to be two meters tall. He had a sharp and courageous middle-east look on his face, which gave people the impression that he was a devout clergyman or a warrior. In fact, he had lived in Central Asia for a few years, and said he knew a lot about Islam. He was born into a researcher’s family, and had been familiar with biology and archaeology from when he was a college student. However, he preferred doing ethnological research out in the field in direct contact with people. When he was a student, during the winter vacation, he would go trap hunting in the forest and camp there alone in order to earn his school expenses.

His hunting skills were quite something, and he was known as a “hunter” among his research colleagues. His research subject was originally the Evenk hunters living in the upstream region of Amur, on the east side of Lake Baikal, and he said he experienced living with them as they moved about the forest. Actually, he couldn’t ride the reindeer the Evenks bred, since he was too big, so he ran after them as they moved their campsites. During this expedition I came to find that he was an honest man with a strong will, who always tried to do things based on rational decisions. He was my partner all through the expedition, taking the difficult job of interpreting, carrying the luggage, guarding me not only from the various dangers in the northern forests, but also from the dangers of the Russian cities.

Mikhail was a middle-sized man with light brown hair. His hometown was in the Crimea Peninsula of Ukraine, but joked with a smile that although he was born and brought up in such a warm place with a pleasant climate, he liked Siberia so much he kept coming back here. Indeed, he was doing research on the Chukchee and Koryak, mainly of the Chukotskii Peninsula in North-eastern Siberia. He had lived in a Chukchee village for two years as a schoolteacher, living in a conical tent made of deer hides called *yaranga* in winter. We were to find out later in this expedition that he was a great negotiator. He got tickets for a flight that was supposed to be full, obtained permits for research studies and photography at the site, and arranged a meeting with an interviewee that I had to see in order to collect information I wanted. To tell you the truth, the wink he showed me when things went well, made me feel relieved, but then again made me worry at the same time that he might be doing something behind my back. Moreover, watching how he got information in the field and how he organized people gave me the opportunity to become familiar with the relationship between the state and the minorities in Russia, and the role of

researchers that take part in fieldwork.

Vasha was a short man with bright blond hair. He seldom talked and seemed timid from the way he always smiled with a lonesome look on his face. He said his mother was a Ukrainian. Apparently he had hurt his back serving in the military, so he couldn't push himself too far. I wasn't sure if this had something to do with it, but his hands trembled when he held the dishes or a camera in his hand. They trembled as if they were vibrating at first, then gradually swayed like big waves. For this reason, I have suddenly grabbed his hands when I was sitting next to him. He seemed not only physically unstable, but mentally so as well. His research subject was the Evenk living in the Lena River area in Central Siberia, but said he had recently done research on the Yukaghir hunters living in the Kolyma River area of Eastern Siberia. What's more, he said he had always been going on field trips and doing things together with Mikhail for the past ten years or so. Indeed, they were always together here at the Kamchatka expedition but it seemed to me as though Mikhail was speaking up for Vasha, and Vasha was depending on Mikhail. Vasha seemed to be literally standing at the lowest position among the three Russian researchers. Since I occupied a bed to myself, Sergei who was sleeping there pushed Mikhail out of his bed, and Mikhail had to push Vasha out of his bed as a result. So, Vasha ended up sleeping on the floor on a small mat.

Nevertheless, it was Vasha who would represent them outside. His position at the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences was as head researcher. It seemed like Mikhail, who was working in the same Siberian Branch, was virtually arranging things underground, pushing Vasha out in front for official matters. On the other hand, Sergei, who was the head of the Exhibition Branch, seemed a little distant from these two. His major interest was to hunt for himself, and he was basically indifferent to minor arrangements in human relationships. Mikhail and Vasha seemed to care about our relationships in the field. Actually, Mikhail would organize us and get things going, whereas Vasha was very considerate of our feelings. In that sense, Vasha was the most warm-hearted one of the three Russian researchers. I was worried about Vasha, but he was the one who cared most about me. As a result, I later came to learn about some aspects of Russia today through this cooperative research: Russian philosophy from Sergei, the reality of Russia from Mikhail, and from Vasha, the Russian heart.

So, this is how the expedition began. However, what awaited us before anything, before leaving Khabarovsk and entering the research site in the Koryak Autonomous Region located in Northern Kamchatka, was the reality of Russia. As soon as we had left our luggage at the hotel, we went to the airport again to make a reservation for the flight to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii, the state capitol of Kamchatka Oblast. The windows of the hotel room were covered with a thick-wired fence to prevent intruders from outside, but the Russians took my heavy backpack

that contained my valuables – my camera and a video-camera – with them when we went out.

When we got to the check-in counter at the airport, we were told to go to the office where they sell tickets. Mikhail talked to the lady in charge for a while about the reservation for the next day, but was told that she had no authority to register my ticket that I had bought in Japan. There was another attendant who did have authority, but apparently, she was not here at the moment. In the office they were writing down names of passengers who were to board on a piece of paper. In fact, this was not even a waiting list that had the names written down in order. They said it was still uncertain who were actually going to be admitted as passengers. When we went outside, Sergei said disgustedly,

“It’s a matter of money.” He told me that in order to get a ticket, you needed to talk to the attendant, give them some money in some cases, provide the attendant with a small gift if she was a woman, or sometimes it was just a matter of merely liking the customer. Mikhail tried again to talk the attendant into somehow promising us a seat, but in vain. We returned to the hotel.

In the evening, we went out for a meal carrying the heavy equipment with us again. The cafeteria in front of the airport was like a large round hall with high ceilings. People who looked like transit passengers were taking a seat looking around as if they were checking to see if it was all right. We drank a toast to the success of our expedition with vodka. We ordered dry bread, salad, soup and meat. Just like what I had in Moscow, the food seemed to me like something functional and dull. Everyday, wherever you ate, the cucumbers and tomatoes were cut in the same shape and placed in the same way, and the pile of bread cut in the same form and the stiff meat on the table made the dish look like a fixed wage given to men for the daily labour as a quota. The waiter put the dishes one after another mechanically on the table as if there were no one there, and took away the empty plates one after another from the tables that had finished. Nevertheless, I had no complaints against the food itself. The only thing that made me feel grey was the monotonous food and ways of eating. Moreover, I should have felt lucky that I could actually have a meal, considering the situation Russia was in, where you had to stand in line for a whole day to buy some loaves of bread. The meal cost 15 dollars (1,500 yen in Japan) for the four of us. The Russian researchers laughed bitterly that their monthly pay was 30 dollars (3,000 yen in Japan). They shook their heads saying that if they kept eating at places like this with their salary, it would only last them for two days.

That night, I lay down on my bed directly without taking out my sleeping bag. At four o’clock in the morning, Mikhail and Vasha got up and left to make reservations for the air tickets at the office in the airport. I was still feeling drowsy. At eleven, Vasha came back, so Sergei and I left him behind to take care of our things, and we went out for breakfast at the same cafeteria as the night before. There

was a group of Romas (Gypsies) there. They were all women wearing colourful fabrics wrapped around their heads, big earrings, and loose shiny clothes. It was as though a bunch of colourful southern flowers had been suddenly tossed up to this northern land. They reminded me of the people from the Kashmir region of Northern India, where I had stayed for some time for my previous research project. In fact, Romas are originally from Northern India from where they have continued their wandering trips to Europe. According to Sergei, they came to Russia in the 14th or 15th century. Now they also speak Russian, only marrying people from their own community and making a living out of trading. A large-sized woman who seemed to be the eldest was talking and laughing in a loud voice, while the others listened as they ate. They were highly conspicuous in this land of Far East Russia, acting in an indifferent and even dignified manner as if they had nothing to do with the present situation of economic failure in Russia. Although Sergei talked bitterly about them, he and the other Russians seemed to be overwhelmed by the group of Roma women.

When we got back from breakfast, Mikhail had already returned from the airport. The flight to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii had been cancelled for the past two days due to a typhoon, and since there were many people waiting he said it was hard for us to make a reservation. Anyhow, it was Mikhail and Vasha's turn to go out for breakfast. Vasha came back after an hour and said we were to pack our bags and go to the airport. He said Mikhail had managed to make arrangements for at least two seats. Vasha decided to stay behind and come on another flight, so Sergei and I started walking toward the airport. Vasha left the hotel with us to carry our luggage and Mikhail's, but as we met Mikhail, who was returning from the airport, on our way, Vasha handed over the bags to him and returned to the hotel alone. However, we arranged to meet him with his luggage at the airport later, in case he got a seat too.

At the airport, the boarding gate for foreigners was located far away from the boarding gate for Russians, but Sergei explained the situation to the airport staff and came with me. In the waiting salon in front of the gate for foreigners there were about 10 Koreans waiting, apparently going to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii on business.

After waiting for two hours, Sergei and I passed through the gate and managed to go up the ramp at three o'clock in the afternoon. Mikhail, who boarded from the Russian gate, was stopped for a second at the foot of the ramp to be checked, but somehow managed to get on the plane. Just before taking off, Vasha, who had been left alone, also succeeded in getting on board safely. This flight had been supposed to depart at eight in the morning, but was delayed for seven hours due to a fuel shortage. The way the body of the Ilyushin, Russia's best aircraft, stretched straight and slender was truly beautiful. However, it was narrow inside and the noise of the jet engine nearly blew my ears out. To make things worse, it was hot inside. I sat in

my uncomfortable seat crumpled up, without being able to move an inch, but fell asleep after a while.

When I woke up, the aircraft was flying over the sea. We had flown over Sakhalin, crossing the Sea of Okhotsk eastward, heading toward the state capitol, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii, located in the southern part of Kamchatka Peninsula. The numerous small waves of the Okhotsk spread below our eyes. Soon we passed the flat marshland along the shore of the Kamchatka peninsula and the range of mountains behind it. The aircraft made a big turn once it crossed the Kamchatka Peninsula and came over the Pacific Ocean. The sky to the west was stained crimson by the sunset, but as the plane went under the clouds dusk had already set below and the city sank in dark blue. Since there is a two-hour time difference from Khabarovsk, it was already eight o'clock here at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii. As we descended through the transparent blue sky, I felt as though I was going down toward the bottom of a deep sea. I had a feeling there would be a country I had never seen, and I might meet mysterious creatures and people.

It was raining slightly at the airport. As soon as the passengers walked down the ramp, they walked straight out of the airport. The airport was a two-storied building like a small train station. A picture of a volcano like Mt. Fuji and a jet plane was painted at the front. In front of the building, there was a small traffic island, where cars and buses pulled up. A crowd of people were pushing each other out of the way, almost hanging on to the bus, in effort to get on. Next to the traffic island, an old propeller-driven airplane was displayed on a platform, and across the street from that was a small cafeteria. Next to the cafeteria, there were a couple of box-shaped stores with packs of cigarettes and daily necessities displayed in their glass windows. The Russian researcher told me, with a note of disappointment, that a real mountain shaped like Mt. Fuji, just like the one drawn on the building, could be seen behind the building when the fog cleared. Now, however, this small town sank in the darkness of night among the low clouds and slight rain.

1.2 A Chukchee Joke

Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii, the state capital of Kamchatka Oblast in Russia, was a region hidden behind a veil of secrecy until a few years ago. Not only foreigners, but even Russians living within the country were restricted from entering the region. The headquarters of the Russian Pacific Fleet is located in Vladivostok of Primorskii krai, but Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii - directly facing the Pacific Ocean- acted as the forward base against the U.S. and was a military harbour where a nuclear-powered submarine was stationed.

The history of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii goes back as far as 1741, when the Danish explorer Vitus Bering, who had been appointed by Peter the Great, arrived in this town with his Kamchatka expedition. The town was named after the name of the

two ships in which the Kamchatka expedition sailed, the St. Peter and the St. Pavlov. Bering discovered the Bering Sea between the Eurasian Continent and the American Continent, but later died when he failed to survive the winter on Komandorskiye in the Aleutian Islands, where his grave is located. Since then, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii has developed because of its natural richness in fishing, shipping, and as a military base. Currently with a population of 270,000, the town is the administrative centre of Kamchatka Oblast. However, its role as a military centre has faded due to *perestroika* and the end of the Cold War, and thus it is now in search of an independent way in the regional economy. Unfortunately, the future that awaits them as far as this is concerned is not a very bright one.

The cars seen on the streets were mostly right-hand drive, used cars from Japan. These cars were shipped from the ports of Niigata, or Otaru in Hokkaido, by Russian fishing vessels after they had transported fish to Japan. Sometimes I saw cars that had a Japanese liquor store's name written on them. Before exchanges between people had started, exchanges of goods were already taking place between this once restricted area and Japan. Indeed, the Russians had positive feelings toward the Japanese, arising from Japanese products such as cars and electronic devices; and they were strongly interested in Japan, much more than the Japanese were of the Russians.

Anyway, we found a hostel near the airport as is often the case - the most convenient and cheapest way to travel - and settled down there for the time being. This time, the hotel was a ferroconcrete building like a public apartment. Entering the hotel, the reception was to the right, and just like the last hotel we stayed in, it had a small window that looked like a ticket-booth. We waited for nearly half an hour until the housekeeper who was cleaning up the rooms and the corridor appeared at the reception. We got rooms on the first and third floors, so we decided to divide into pairs to share the accommodation. I took the room on the third floor for security reasons and Sergei came with me.

Mikhail went out to the airport office to make reservations for the flight to Pakhachi in northern Kamchatka, but soon came back saying that the attendant was not there today. He told us we were to catch a freight plane if there was one departing tomorrow, but if not, there was supposed to be a regular flight in three days. He was laughing bitterly that this was always the case.

According to what we later found out, there were two regular flights a week, but the tickets were not sold here at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii. The aircraft for these flights were small-sized planes for 28 people, and since they flew on petrol, not on diesel fuel, the fuel cost was expensive. Due to inflation, the ticket price had already doubled and the passengers wouldn't be able to afford it if they raised the price higher. The business was barely paying and the airline company was about to cancel these regular flights.

The next day, Mikhail went to the airport again and tried to arrange for us to get on the freight plane, but couldn't make it. In fact, there were four large aircraft waiting in Moscow to bring fuel here, but the airport of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatski i was full of aircraft that had run out of fuel, and there was no room for other large airplanes to land. Consequently, they were thinking of transporting the fuel to Petro pavlovsk-Kamchatskii by sea on a tanker. Actually, such cases were not unusual in Russia. Vasha had once waited 14 days in Irkutsk because of a fuel shortage. There was also a German tourist who had returned to his country recently since his flight had been canceled, even though he had bought an air-ticket for a domestic flight in Russia. We decided to take our chances of getting a seat on the regular flight in two days, - that is, if it did fly - and Mikhail and Vasha went out to negotiate directly with the staff in effort to get tickets that were supposedly "not on sale".

Before going to bed, we talked about the current situation in Russia in one of the hotel rooms. In reality, the problem Russia was facing was money. It was difficult to make a living due to inflation. Especially for the elderly, this often meant death. Pensions were almost worthless, and their savings had evaporated due to the government's price control. The elderly could barely buy food at the stores, and were seen buying only bread. The Russian researchers themselves said they were at a loss as to how to support their families from now on.

The researchers' salaries at the Academy of Sciences had apparently been delayed for three months already. There were approximately 100 members working at the museum in Sankt-Peterburg, but there were no young researchers being hired. In addition, there was no such thing as retirement here, so the older researchers did not leave. What's more, the older researchers were eager to keep their positions for themselves, and did not allow young researchers to advance. At the same time, there was no way the young researchers would enter an institute where they wouldn't be paid, after getting an under-graduate degree and finishing a master's course of three to four years. To make things worse, the government did not finance the management of national property, such as the ethnological materials kept in the museums and as a result they say the management of institutes and museums was out of control. So the researchers are currently forced to make a difficult decision. This was whether they should keep working as an unpaid researcher, or to take up another job. In Sergei's case, he said he was thinking of earning his living as an interpreter.

I asked the Russian researchers why Russia was experiencing such conditions. They told me it was because the former Communist Party members wanted to keep their power and money. That is to say, they didn't want to change the system. If the government really wanted to, it was quite possible to promote economic development. Russia has its resources, and it is possible to industrialize the country. However, in order to do so, they needed to introduce foreign investment. Foreign countries will make investments if it looks profitable, and some countries were in

fact waiting invest in the country. The reason it hadn't taken place, was because the Russian government would not guarantee any foreign investments. Without any guarantee, even if foreign investments were made, they could lose everything depending on changes in national policy. As a result, foreign investments were limited.

"Then why didn't the government guarantee investments?" This was because if large amounts of foreign investments were introduced, they would exceed by far the amount of money and property owned by the former Communists, and they would lose political and economical power. They could only maintain their power by keeping their money and property, and leaving the others without wealth. Those who were wealthy at that moment, in Russia, were members of the Communist Party, which held 70% of the Parliament's seats, and they were the only ones capable of doing business under these conditions. As a result, they were the only ones that were making more and more money. Therefore, only those with funds were making money, and the others continued to have a hard time earning their daily bread.

That state of affairs was demonstrated when the American automaker General Motors held a trade fair at Sankt-Peterburg and exhibited a high-class car, a Lincoln, there. When a gentleman came along and said he wanted to buy it, the salesman for the company explained to him that he would need to open a bank account, so he could make a payment into it. However, the Russian said he would pay in cash, and bought two Lincolns worth 600,000 dollars on the spot. Furthermore, during the trade show in Russia, a total of 200 Lincolns were sold, which is more than what they usually sell at trade fairs in the States.

I told them that the confusion, which Russia was in, showed that it was going through a phase of transition, and would get better soon, but they replied that although they wanted to think so too, it unfortunately was not true. According to them, the current situation was not "confusion", but a result of the government's policy. They said it was meaningless to compare the situation with, for instance, that of Japan's post war confusion and recovery. In Japan's case, due to the lack of resources, the only way to survive was to rely on trading and mutual relations between other countries, which is still the case today. However, Russia has an enormous amount of resources, and has many choices to make in its future economic activities; Russia did not necessarily need to decide in which direction it would head right now. As I have mentioned before, if they wanted to promote economic development, the government could do so right away, but they are not doing so as part of governmental policy and it is the government's policy not to change the current establishment. As an outsider, I sympathized with the Russian people looking so troubled, and they certainly were in a heart-breaking situation, but the three Russians drooped their heads sadly, saying that this was the reality they faced.

I told them that it was hard to comprehend the fact that in a communist society,

which Russia achieved after the Revolution in 1917, where people are supposed to live under equality, they were again facing a problem that they had supposedly solved in the past. They replied with a smile that communism only illustrated the ideal society people should aim at. In reality, the starting point was something quite different. After the Revolution, the property possessed by the aristocrats that had dominated the society till then was put up at auction and was shipped to New York and London in many freighters. The profit made out of this was supposed to be the nation's profit, but the truth was it went to the Communist Party, actually lining the pockets of a limited number of Party members. The cultural property of Russia was not only drained into foreign countries, but the profit was monopolized by a limited group of people.

Many of the ethnic groups living in Russia - that is to say, the very group of people we were about to visit - were made propaganda of to the rest of the nation as if they danced joyfully and sang praises of their traditional culture and lived happily in order to meet their nation's ideal that people should live under equality. However, the Russian researchers smiled grimly that in reality their culture had been destroyed and the people had been assigned to fixed labour quotas, becoming alcoholics.

It seemed to me as if they couldn't care less about the Russian reality anymore. They certainly said they were sick and tired of the current political situation. They said they were grieved about the way the government was fighting over authority day and night, not caring about its people at all.

Listening to their story, I thought the problem was not something typical of Russia or of communism. It made me think about a more universal problem - i.e. the danger of making people believe in ideals, whether it may be political or religious. In that sense, it was something that could happen anywhere. When reality ends nowhere near the ideal people realize for the first time that reality has gone past mending, and that the ideal they believed in was in fact merely rhetoric to manipulate them. Consequently, as is the case in Russia now, not only those who believed in communist ideals, but all those who forced people to believe in it had to pay too high a price.

The bottom line of the reality these Russian researchers themselves were facing was how to support their families without being paid. This problem was something the majority of Russians were presently facing. That moment, Mikhail said looking serious, that he knew an interesting story told among the Chukchee living in North-eastern Siberia, and started telling me the story. It was a typical Chukchee ironic joke that went like this:

Once upon a time, a Russian researcher and a guide were walking downstream along a wide river in Siberia. After a while, a boat came floating slowly down from upstream. In that boat, a Chukchee man sat quietly smoking his pipe looking spiritless, and a Chukchee woman was rowing the boat desperately. As the flow of

the river was quite slow, the researcher and the boat went downstream side by side as if they were keeping pace with each other. So the man walking along the bank could talk to the person on the boat. The Russian asked the man on the boat where he was going. The man pointed at the woman rowing the boat and said his wife was pregnant, and was going to the hospital in town downstream since the baby was due soon. The Russian was surprised to hear that the woman was his wife, and asked him why he was making a pregnant woman do such hard work, and was sitting in the boat smoking his pipe, doing nothing himself. The Chukchee man answered. "My wife will finish her job when she gives birth to the child. But I am the one who has to bring the baby up after that. I'm racking my brains about how to bring him up."

Maybe it reminded Mikhail of this joke, because I was puffing away on my pipe, or because we started to talk about the gloomy future of Russia. Anyway, I thought the Chukchee man's story fitted the present Russian situation well, and represented the Russians' feelings well. The collapse of the former Soviet Union might have ended in a second, but in reality, the work to be done after that was the major problem, and that was precisely what the Russians were worried about.

1.3 Kamchatka's Problem

The next morning, we went out to the centre of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii and decided to visit the museum in town. We caught a bus in front of the building at the airport. In the distance, I could see a mountain covered with a touch of snow. A volcano that looked like Mt. Fuji rose high. The top of the mountain was partially covered with clouds, but the way the foot of the mountain spread itself elegantly was amazing. In town, second-hand Japanese cars ran about. The port that once was covered with a veil of secrecy was there before my eyes. Some 20 large-sized ocean fishing vessels anchored in the harbour, and there were other boats moored to the quay in repair. Only a part of the wide gulf could be seen, but the cape that stuck out as if to cut the ocean off separated the gulf from the open sea, making the waves weak and silent like a lake; it was truly a natural good port, a great fortress.

A large statue of Lenin stood in the city square. It was the same statue of Lenin that was pulled down with a rope around its neck in the central cities like Moscow as the former Soviet Union fell apart. However here in the Far East, no such radical acts accompanied by the political disturbance were seen, and Lenin raised his arm as usual, seeming to point the way people should proceed. When Mikhail saw me taking a photo of the statue, he said jokingly, "Shall I take a picture of you and that proletarian Father?" then winked at me. Sergei was laughing. I realized the statue of Lenin, which had been the symbol of idealism for 70 years in Russia, had already turned worthless in the hearts of people.

In town, it caught my eye how many high buildings under construction were left unfinished, laying bare their scaffoldings and concrete walls. The failure of the

Russian economy had quite seriously affected this regional town so far and distant from Moscow. The current economic tendency in the construction business had fallen to 4% of what it was two to three years before. This did not mean the growth rate had fallen by 4%, but meant it had dropped to 4% of what it was. Consequently, most of the construction works had been suspended as a matter of fact and the crowd of buildings under construction gave me the impression that the town was on the verge of going to ruin.

Kamchatka Oblast, located in the further end of the Far East, was troubled over the supply of petroleum and coal that the economic activities of Kamchatka depended on. The very reason why they couldn't fly the aircrafts heading northward from here owed to this same problem. Winter was around the corner, but neither food nor fuel was brought in here from the mainland of Russia. In small towns, electricity can't be generated without coal, and heating or lighting goes without saying, but it would be even more difficult to bake their daily loaves of bread.

Therefore in Kamchatka Oblast, people go to neighbouring Vladivostok in Primorskii to buy oil. However in Vladivostok, they were taking advantage of the fuel shortage and raising the prices. In addition, since they had to transport the purchased oil back to Kamchatka, the transportation costs raised the prices even higher. This influenced other economic activities as well. In short, as the fishing vessels ran on this high-priced fuel, the price of fish went up. As a result, when they export the processed salmon or fish roe called "Ikura" to Japan, the same product is cheaper in Sakhalin Oblast, which is closer to Vladivostok. So the fishery in Kamchatka Oblast loses the competition, and its export is subdued as a result. What's worse, it costs a fortune to transport the products to Japan, so here again, Sakhalin Oblast being closer to Japan, has an advantage over Kamchatka. After all, Kamchatka Oblast is made to lose the competition because it is distant from the oil supplier.

Besides this, aren't there any natural resources like oil or coal in Kamchatka Oblast? As far as this goes, they say it is still unknown. They know a small amount of coal and mineral resources does exist, but neither exploitation nor even a large-scale research has been done. That is due to the following reasons: Kamchatka Oblast and its centre Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii had been playing a role as a strategic point facing the Pacific Ocean against the U.S. It had been a confidential area here until a few years ago, and the entry of people had been restricted. The economy had been based on the military installations – which bear the military harbour as its centre – and its relating facilities, and thus the entire economic foundation had depended on the former Soviet Union's central control. The ex-Soviet Union had subsidized its region's economy with outside funds, and had never been concerned with the development of the regional economy nor the regions' economic independence.

The case of Kamchatka was no exception: all the regions of the former Soviet Union had executed only what the central orders had planned to do industrially, and no consideration had been taken in respect of the region's economic independence. On the contrary, the central government had prevented the region's separation and independence from the centre by suppressing the region's economic independence. One region had produced wheat, another had produced mineral resources, another had exploited oil fields, and another had a military installation: the central government had divided the industries among the whole Union, supervising them all according to the government's planned economy.

However, due to the economic failure of the former Soviet Union, the central government could not take care of the regions anymore. All the regions had been thrown into the middle of nowhere, without any economic independence, and told to get on with it by themselves. In addition to the fact that they were not economically independent, since they had never experienced management nor even an administrative way of thinking, all the regions were, and are at a loss what to do. Even if they had known what to do, they were in a situation where they couldn't do anything about it in reality.

Furthermore, the strong state control that still exists is making its future economic independence difficult to achieve. For example, what makes Japanese financial investment in Russia difficult is the central government's inconsistent law in respect of export – i.e. there is no guarantee for the investment. For instance, let's say we established a joint enterprise between Japan and Russia to export "Ikura" as a processed product to Japan, and build a factory. As soon as the business is well under way, the export regulations would change. The new product that would not meet the government's quota system, and would suddenly be given a nine-tenths levy, meaning we would have to give this in to the central government.

That is to say, by legally regulating export, the government is absorbing the most part of the sales profit. After all, the Russian economy is a mafia economy – i.e. the economy is based on concessions – and it is troublesome because it is completely different from free economy. To make things worse, the profit made out of this quota system is paid into a bank in Moscow, and there is no hope that it may be returned to the other regions. Under such conditions, it is impossible for the regions that were dumped by the central government to try to become independent economically through export.

Needless to say, a company can't make investments if no profits are expected. This is caused by the government's controlled economy and the policy of not guaranteeing any investments, and it was just what the Russian researchers referred to as "the government's policy," and to be precise, it was the conservative policy of the former Communist Party that held 70% of the Parliament's seats. The conflict between Russia's reformists and conservatives is the conflict between a market

economy and a planned economy, which results in a conflict between the outer regions and the government. In fact, other types of conservatives and reformists are clashing in another direction within the regions, making the problem terribly complicated. After the collapse of the former Soviet Union, some republics that had achieved independence left the Union, and the Russian Federation that took over the Union now consists of many republics, Oblasts and regions (Krai). Each region is presently in a conflict with the central government about whether to become independent or to stay within the Federation, resulting not only in political, but also severe military instability; that is the true present state Russia is in.

Anyhow, after taking various bus routes, we finally got to the museum on top of a small hill facing the sea. The State Museum was a two-storied wooden building that had an old cannon pointed toward the sea exhibited at the front. Foreigners were not allowed to enter, but the Russian researchers somehow persuaded the museum staff and we went inside. Descending the steps to the basement, we opened the lock on the door to the exhibition room. There were some materials exhibited on the ethnic minorities such as the Koryak, Chukchee, Evenk and Aleut, and an exhibit about the history of the Kamchatka Oblast expedition, and a natural science exhibition that displayed stuffed animals, specimens of minerals and fossils.

I was especially interested in the materials concerning the Koryak. There were clothes made of reindeer fur, a model of their residence, sleighs, skis and snowshoes, a wooden figure and ritual objects such as a wooden carving that was thought to be a bear. The snowshoes in particular, were made of two wooden pieces put together that made a frame and had a net across it, and shape-wise it was classified as an Athapaskan type, typical of the Forest Indians of North America. The wooden figure was made out of a flat piece of wood with a distinct head and body, the eyes and mouth were carved out simply and there were two vertical rows of holes that were used to spin the fire-sticks on to make fire. The wooden carving of a bear had a hunched back expressing thoroughly, though simply, the features of a bear, and the size of it was approximately 20 centimetres. What surprised me most about the exhibit of Kamchatka's nature was that its animal range was almost the same as that of the Northern American forestland. Brown bears and reindeers, goes without saying, but moose that have big antlers shaped like spatulas, ibexes (goats) with beautifully round-curved horns, wildcats – fur animals – with long hair that sticks up at the tip of their ears, stoats, ermines, otters, muskrats; these were all familiar animals to me.

Going up to the first floor and entering another room, there were materials from the modern Koryak. These were clothes and ornaments made today, pieces of modern art inheriting the traditions of the past. Bright colours such as red, green and white were used and they featured linear geometrical patterns, quite different from the characteristics of the Nanai of Primorskii, the Nivkhi, or the Japanese Ainu that

tend to use a rather darker blue and arabesque patterns formed by a combination of curved lines.

Other than that, there was a large painting drawn by a modern Koryak on the wall. When I stood in front of the painting, it made me feel a little sad. Pictures of people dressed in their native costumes, dancing and playing the drums made of reindeer-hide in front of their semi-subterranean houses, – like a photo you would see in an ethnographical report many years ago – or pictures of a Koryak woman with braided hair gazing this way in front of a house with the ocean in the background: these things seemed to indicate a yearning for bygone days and the absence of reality.

Later however, I came to realize that my interpretation of these paintings was utterly one-sided. On the way home after finishing the fieldwork of the Koryaks in Northern Kamchatka, I ended up coming back to this museum and looking at the same painting again. This time, I realized the artist did not paint it merely from a yearning for the past, denying reality. I came to understand the picture was painted more from their life-affirming worldview, transcending the past and reality. What's more, I also came to know the traditional materials exhibited in the basement of the museum were not relics from the past as I had thought. They were daily necessities for the modern Koryaks, and the worldview beyond it was still alive to this day as a part of reality.

Up till this moment, I had seen the reality of Russia from the viewpoint of the government, and the region of Kamchatka Oblast. From here on, what was about to unfold in front of my eyes was the concern of a small ethnic group that formed part of this region. It was a problem the Koryaks who lived in the Koryak Autonomous Region, were facing. Here, to the governmental and regional aspects, a new element in the name of "ethnicity" was to be added. Surely problems had arisen about how the traditional culture dealt with change, preservation, and revival in a new form. At last, the voyage to meet the Koryaks had really begun.