

Beluga Hunting Practices of the Indigenous People in Kamchatka : Characterization of Sea Mammal Hunting in Northeastern Asia

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1. Introduction
2. Sea Mammals and Their Hunters of Northeastern Asia
3. Indigenous People of Kamchatka and the Soviet Regime
4. Beluga Hunting and Ethnic Groups
5. Whaling and Ceremonies in Kamchatka
6. Beluga Hunting and Other Sea Mammal Hunting
 - 6.1 Traditional Ways of Beluga Hunting by the Itelmen
 - 6.2 Information from the Village of Lesnaya
 - 6.3 Information in the Former Village of Kinkil
 - 6.4 Information in the Former Village of Lekinniki
 - 6.5 Information on the Village of Tigil
7. Beluga Hunting in the Nivkh
 - 7.1 Information in the Village of Puir
 - 7.2 Each Stage of Beluga Hunting
 - 7.3 Towing a Beluga and Welcoming Rituals, Landing
 - 7.4 Flensing and Sharing
8. Conclusion

Abstract

This paper reports on the multiple forms of beluga hunting practiced by the Itelmen and Koryak indigenous peoples, and discusses the characterization of beluga hunting and whaling among the sea mammal hunting cultures of Northeastern Asia along with the beluga hunting of the Nivkh (Gilyak) in the Lower Amur region. I argue that importance of blubber as food, and rituals of sending off and thanks offering festivals concerning the heads of sea mammals are commonly observed in the regions.

1. Introduction

In cold northern regions the productivity of biological resources of the sea is greater than that of the land. Especially in summer, the rapid increase of plankton in shallow coastal sea areas, such as the continental shelf, enhances the growth of various marine resources, including benthic animals, fish, and sea mammals. Among these marine resources, salmonid fish (hereinafter referred to as “salmon”) that ascend rivers after reaching sexual maturity in the sea and sea mammals that are rich in blubber have been the most important food resources for indigenous people of the North Pacific coast. Salmon were easily caught in rivers, and sun-dried salmon was used as a staple food for both humans and dogs. Sea mammals, including whales, were hunted, and their blubber constituted an important high-calorie food.

However, the use of these biological resources varies with location and environment. Generally, in high-latitude regions, the amount of fishing is small, whereas the amount of sea mammal hunting is large. Maritime Chukchi and Asiatic Eskimo living in the northernmost area of Northeastern Asia were highly dependent on the year-round hunting of various sea mammals, from seals to large cetaceans. In the past, hunting of large cetaceans in northeastern Asia was practiced among the Maritime Chukchi and Asiatic Eskimo of the Chukchi Peninsula, and also by Maritime Koryak of the Kamchatka Peninsula. This indigenous whaling was heavily affected by the overhunting of American whalers in the Northern Pacific and Arctic Sea, which began in the late 19th century.

After whaling by North Americans began, indigenous whaling for large cetaceans on the western coast of the Kamchatka Peninsula declined, and only beluga hunting was maintained. In this paper, I report on the multiple forms of beluga hunting practiced by the Itelmen and Koryak indigenous peoples. I then discuss the characterization of beluga hunting and whaling among the sea mammal hunting cultures of Northeastern Asia along with the beluga hunting of the Nivkh (Gilyak) in the Lower Amur region.

Various hunting methods have been used for each species of sea mammal. However, for all of these groups the traditional equipment for sea mammal hunting was a toggle harpoon. Later, rifles were used for small and medium sized sea mammals, and harpoons were used only for retrieving the kill (Photo 1).

2. Sea Mammals and Their Hunters of Northeastern Asia

Table 1 indicates sea mammals hunted by the indigenous people in northeastern Asia. Although, as noted above, the primary purpose for hunting them in the northern region was to obtain their blubber, meat and intestines were also used as food, and fur had various uses.

Five species of seals — Harbor, Spotted, Ringed, Ribbon, and Bearded — inhabit the seas of northeastern Asia. Whereas females of all but Harbor seals give birth on the sea ice, Harbor seals give birth onshore. Harbor seals inhabit the Kurile Islands, southeastern coast of Kamchatka, Aleutian Islands, and the Pacific coast of North America. The Ringed seal, the smallest of the five species, inhabits the Arctic Sea where

Table 1 Sea mammals hunted by the indigenous people of northeastern Asia

Ethnic Group	Sea Mammals Hunted
Ainu	Seals, Steller Sea Lion, Northern Fur Seal, Nihon Sea Lion?, Delphinoid, Minke Whale
Uilta	Seals
Nivkh	Seals, Steller Sea Lion, Beluga, Delphinoid
Negidal	Seals
Ulich	Seals, Steller Sea Lion
Orochi	Seals, Steller Sea Lion, Beluga
Even (coastal group)	Seals
Itelmen	Seals, Northern Fur Seal, Sea Otter, Beluga
Koryak	Seals, Steller Sea Lion, Walrus, Beluga, Large Cetaceans
Chukchi	Seals, Walrus, Beluga, Large Cetaceans
Asiatic Eskimo	Seals, Steller Sea Lion, Walrus, Beluga, Narwhal, Large Cetaceans

(Watanabe 1994: 66)

**Photo 1** A harpoon for retrieving seals, Karaga village, Eastern coast, August 2009

thick sea ice develops. These seals are among the most commonly hunted animals on the coast of the North Pacific, owing to their wide distribution and because they are easily killed with either clubs or harpoons.

Inland groups, who also needed blubber and seal fur, obtained them through trade with coastal groups. For instance, Reindeer Koryak of northern Kamchatka traded their reindeer meat and fur for seals with Maritime Koryak. While seafood products provided a change to the monotonous taste of reindeer meat, the fur of seals provided stout thongs of lassos and hide rope for reindeer sleds. On the other hand, Maritime Koryak needed reindeer meat and thermal reindeer fur for their clothing.

There are other instances where inland groups went on expeditions to the seacoast to hunt seals. Negidal and Ulich, forest-hunter and river-fishermen of the Amur land undertook expeditions as far as Mamiya Strait (Tatar Strait) and the Okhotsk Sea to hunt for seals and Steller sea lions (Watanabe 1994: 64–65).

Among the otarioids, Steller sea lions, the Northern fur seal, and the Japanese sea lion (a subspecies of the California sea lion, which is thought to be extinct) are also likely to have been hunted. Records clearly indicate that the Japanese sea lion lived on Takeshima, a small rocky island in the southern Sea of Japan, off the coast of Shimane Prefecture (Abe *et al.* 1994: 141), it is likely that its distribution area even reached the northern end of the Sea of Japan, and that the Ainu of Hokkaido and Sakhalin hunted them (Watanabe 1994: 67). Steller sea lions have also been hunted widely from Hokkaido to the Arctic region.

For the Chukchi, Asiatic Eskimo, Kerek¹⁾ and Koryak in the Arctic and Subarctic area, sea mammal hunting was the most important subsistence activity, and they hunted sea mammals, including large cetaceans, from skin boats. The walrus is the largest pinniped in the Arctic, and it migrates from the Arctic Sea to the Chukchi Peninsula and Karaginsky Island of northeastern Kamchatka. On the coast of the Chukchi Peninsula, bowhead whales and gray whales are thought to have been the main whale species hunted, and also in the Penzhina Bay and the northwestern Okhotsk Sea, Koryak hunted bowhead and other large whales (Watanabe 1994: 76).

These sea mammal hunting cultures suffered significant damage from the first half of 19th century, when whalers based on the east coast of the USA started extensive whaling in the northern Pacific. At the time of W. Bogoras's and W. Jochelson's explorations, whaling for large cetaceans by the Chukchi and Koryak had already declined (Bogoras 1975; Jochelson 1975). Moreover, many Kerek had died from starvation as a consequence of US whalers' overhunting of walrus as a substitute for large cetaceans (Bogoras 1975: 122).

Narwhal and beluga inhabit the Arctic coast, and in addition beluga inhabit the Okhotsk Sea coast from the northwestern coast of Kamchatka and the continental coast to the sea area of Shantar Islands. After the decline of populations of large cetaceans from to overhunting, the Chukchi and Koryak switched to beluga as their main target species.

3. Indigenous People of Kamchatka and the Soviet Regime

The Itelmen (formerly known as Kamchadal), who lived in the southern part of Kamchatka, were primarily hunter-gather peoples, whereas the Koryak, who lived in the northern part of the region, were divided into the coastal hunter-gather Maritime Koryak and the inland herder Reindeer Koryak. Although they were different both linguistically and culturally, Olutor and Kerek were included in the Maritime Koryak category during the Soviet era.

After the founding of the Soviet Union, the construction of socialistic productive sectors began in Kamchatka in 1930s. The Soviets constructed *kolkhoz* (collective farms in the USSR) where the key economic activity was reindeer herding, and leaders of the *kolkhoz* forced indigenous people to join (Sergeev 1937: 475–518). Indigenous people worked in various sectors of the *kolkhoz*, including reindeer herding, fishery, farming, hunting, and energy production. During this period, the economic framework of indigenous society changed drastically.

Based on the collectivization policy, indigenous people were forced to relocate to new settlements. Moreover, new systems, such as school education, military conscription, and regular work routines represented a considerable change for the indigenous people. Subsequent major influxes of settlers from the continent turned indigenous people into a minority. Relocation and reorganization of settlements dissected their traditional linkages among extended family and hindered their access to traditional hunting and fishing areas, undermining indigenous social bonds based on reciprocity.

The *kolkhozes* had hunting sectors that harvested fur-bearing animals, such as sable, for both commerce and consumption. Hunting of seals and beluga was also carried out. For securing food, hunting and fishing for personal use was also allowed under certain regulations. The management of most of the *kolkhozes* of Kamchatka became worse in the early 1970s, and they were converted to *sokhozes* (state farms in the USSR) and their hunting divisions were incorporated into *gospromkhozes* (a special sector for hunting, gathering, energy supply, and so on adjunct to each *sokhoze*).

4. Beluga Hunting and Ethnic Groups

The main range of beluga includes the Arctic Sea from Greenland, Canada to Alaska, and North Eurasia from the Chukchi Peninsula to the White Sea. In the Russian Far East, belugas inhabit the western Chukchi Sea, the East Siberian Sea, Anadyr Bay (Anadyr Delta), and Sherikhov Bay (Okhotsk Sea of Northwestern Kamchatka), around the Sea of Sakhalin, Amur, and Shantar Islands. The population of belugas in the Russian Far East is estimated to be as follows: East Siberian stock (West Chukchi Sea – eastern Siberian Sea): 2,000–3,000, Anadyr Delta stock: 200–3,000, and Sea of Okhotsk stock: 18,000–20,000 (Culik 2004).

Indigenous peoples, especially the Inuit/Eskimo, have hunted beluga in coastal waters from Greenland and Hudson's Bay to the Bering Sea. The Chukchi of Chukotka also hunted beluga as an important sea mammal resource (Kishigami 2001; 2005). In the

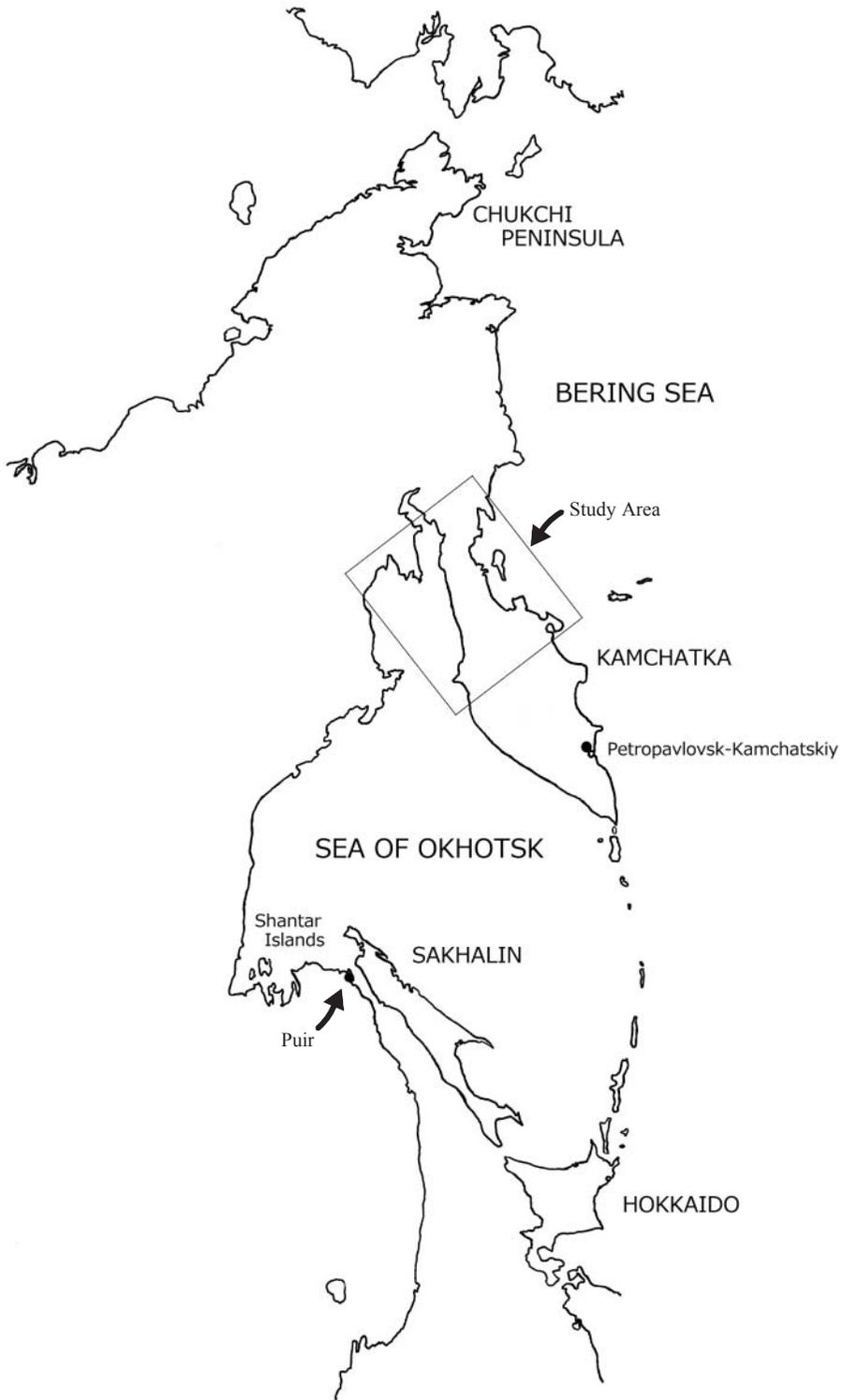
early 20th century, the Asiatic Eskimo of the Chukchi Peninsula hunted large cetaceans, beluga, walrus, and seals. Excavations of ancient settlements and burial sites along the coast of the Chukchi Peninsula indicate that, for more than two thousand years, the ancestors of contemporary Asiatic Eskimo and maritime Chukchi based their subsistence on the hunting of the same species of sea mammals as their descendants (Kurpnik 1993: 186). W. Bogoras, who conducted fieldwork on the Chukchi of Chukotka from the end of 19th to the early 20th centuries, reported that whereas Maritime Chukchi and Asiatic Eskimo captured large cetaceans with harpoons, primarily they used rifles for walrus hunting and both rifles and harpoons for beluga hunting (Bogoras 1975: 122–124).

In addition, it is thought that the beluga populations of the Chukchi Sea, Beaufort Sea, and Bering Sea do not migrate to the eastern shore of Kamchatka (Артюхин и Бурканов 1999: 178; Сметанин 2002: 188, See Maps 1 and 2).

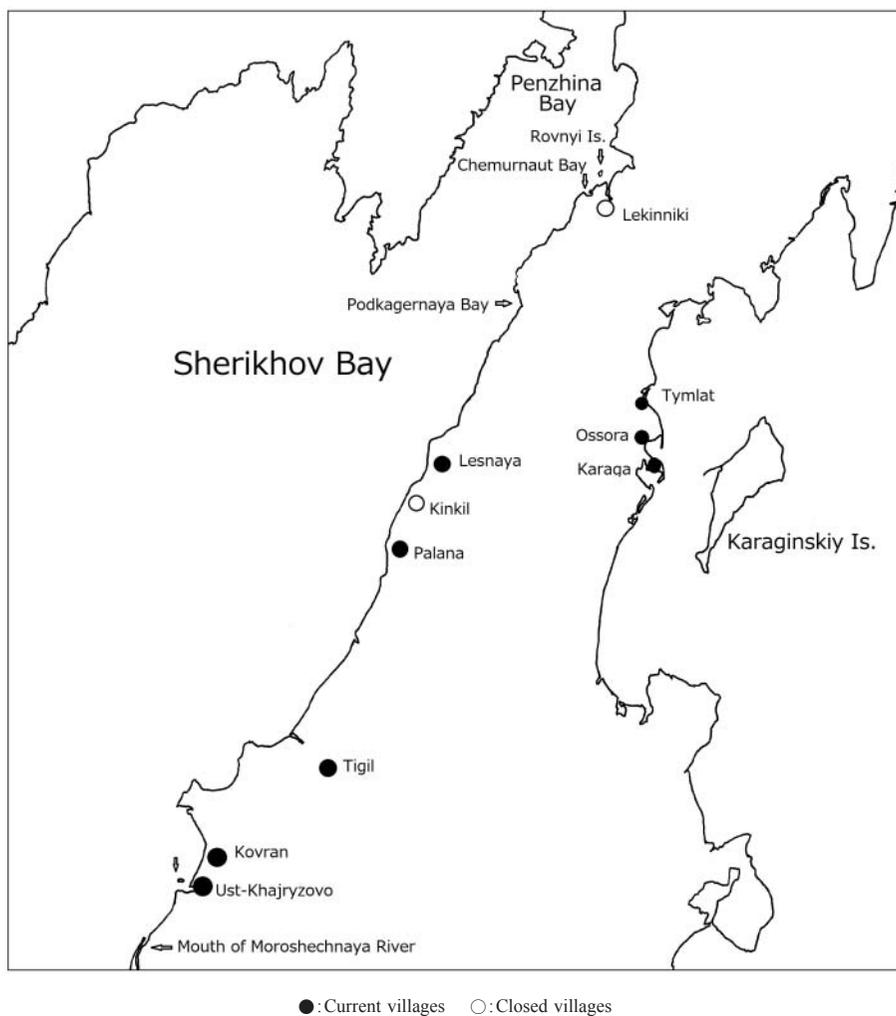
5. Whaling and Ceremonies in Kamchatka

W. Jochelson documented in detail the Whale Festival of the Penzina Bay Koryak on October 11, 1900 (Jochelson 1975: 65–77). A beluga was caught in a net and brought to the village of Kuel on a sled. This ‘guest’ was welcomed respectfully in front of the village by singing and dancing women, and then ‘fed’ branches of alder. After that, the beluga was flensed along with seals that had been caught by the residents. Subsequently, a dog was slaughtered as a sacrifice to the Master of the Sea. Then inhabitants of this village and guests from neighboring villages came together in the underground house of the host of the festival. Boiled meat of beluga and seals cooked by women was served to the participants. Then, dishes prepared specially from berries, blubber, roots, and stems of plants were offered to the beluga and seals. Their wish is that their guest, the beluga, would return safely to the sea during the five day festival and repeat its visit the following year, encouraging its relatives to come along, by telling them of the hospitable reception.

Further, Steller documented the whale ceremonies of the Olyutors on the northeastern coast of Kamchatka (Steller 2003: 76–77). He wrote that they caught large whale species that came into their bay, using a large net made from thick thongs of walrus hide. While the Olyutor hunters were paddling toward shore towing the whale, all the women and children of the village stood on the shore, singing and screaming, dancing and jumping around, and congratulating the success of their whale-hunting. When the whale was beached, they all got dressed up in their best clothes, took out a carved wooden whale two feet long, set up a new *balagan* (storage hut on stilts) and put the wooden whale in it. They then lit a lamp and put a guard by it to make sure that the lamp did not go out during the entire whaling season. Also, when they brought out their whale-nets anew, they had the greatest celebration in a large underground dwelling, preparing a large vessel of *tolkusha* (special dish for various festivals made of salmon roe, pith of fireweed, seal oil and berries) offering a dish cooked specifically for the event, along with dogs killed as sacrifices. They carried the wooden whale from the *balagan* into the underground dwelling and placed the dish of *tolkusha* in front of the



Map 1 Location of settlement Puir and study area



Map 2 Study area of northern Kamchatka

smoke-hole. After that, during a period of darkness, the whale returned to the sea.

Another festival, the November ceremony of the southern Itelmen documented by Krasheninnikov who regarded it as a feast of thanksgiving to hunted animals and to the “master” who gave them to the Itelmen. It is also regarded as the ceremonial sending-off after their hunting season. Whales are among these ceremonial animals. However, Krasheninnikov thought that these ceremonies were for stranded whales (Krasheninnikov 1972: 246–258).

6. Beluga Hunting and Other Sea Mammal Hunting

In Kamchatka, beluga sightings are confined to the western coast from the mouth of Moroshechnaya River, located at approximately 57°N, to Penzhina Bay. Belugas are not uncommon in this area. In August, 2000, I saw a school of 6–7 belugas off the village of Ust-Khajryzovo and running up the mouth of the Khajryzovo River following a school of salmon. The whiteness of the belugas contrasted very brilliantly against the brown surface of the river. Some belugas came so close to the riverside in front of several people that I could hear their blowing sound. W. Jochelson recorded that Maritime Koryak of Penzhina Bay, on the northern end of the western coast, hunted belugas entering the river mouth using nets and harpoons (Jochelson 1975: 552–553).

Since 1997, I have studied indigenous cultures in Kamchatka, and report on my ethnographic research on sea mammal hunting (including beluga hunting) below.

6.1 Traditional Ways of Beluga Hunting by the Itelmen

The following is based on interviews of August, 2008 and August, 2009 in the city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatky. The informant, Mr. O. G., was born in Kovran, northwestern Kamchatka on July 9, 1950. His father was Russian (born in 1913) and his mother was an Itelmen. Mr. O. G.'s information about beluga hunting includes the traditional Itelmen methods as well as information about group net-hunting during World War II and the postwar period. I present Mr. O.G.'s narrative:

My father was a fisherman in Ust-Khairyzovo, so he had a close view of beluga hunting by Itelmen in Sopachinoya and Moroshechnaya. Hunters threw harpoons from a sealskin boat manned by two persons. Their harpoons had toggle-heads. They did not use rifles for beluga hunting at that time.

I saw a mother beluga give birth to a calf. I was frightened at the sight of a large beluga that swam under my boat.

The basic way of beluga hunting by Itelmen that my father told me about makes use of the tidal zone.²⁾ When a school of beluga comes close to the mouth of the river following salmon from the south, a hunter who is monitoring the movement of belugas moves his boat to the position that blocks their escape route, and then remains there using a sinker. Later when these belugas are stuck in shallow water at low tide, a hunter can get close to the belugas on foot and kill them with a spear.

Belugas will go up the Khiryzovo River as far as 20 km from Ust-Khairyzovo. In summer in Kovran, a school of belugas were enclosed with nets and killed with harpoons and spears. In winter, seals, and sea lions were caught in a similar manner. These hunted belugas were canned in a Ptichj Island cannery.³⁾ These cans of beluga were sent to soldiers during World War II. Steller's sea lion meat was canned similarly. Because the beluga population fell dramatically owing to overhunting during wartime, beluga-hunting was

banned in 1960.

6.2 Information from the Village of Lesnaya

The following is an interview held in Palana, Tygil District to obtain information about sea mammal hunting in Lesnaya, the northernmost village of the District. Informant, Miss B. V., was born in Lesnaya in 1930, and is a Koryak.

People of Maritime Koryak in Lesnaya fish salmon in the rivers far from the village in spring, and then return to the village. They hunt seals, such as spotted seal and bearded seal, and they also belugas. Seal meat is boiled, and its blubber is used as cooking oil. Some homes dry seal meat. It is very tasty to eat sea mammal meat as *shashilyk* (roasted spitted meat).

Next is information from an interview in Anavgai, Bystor District, in August 2001, with Miss N. S., a Koryak woman and resident of Lesnaya, who was born in Kinkil (a former village located about midway between Palana and Lesnaya) in 1958.

All people hunt sea mammals. They shoot sea mammals with rifles and retrieve them with harpoons. Surplus meat and blubber are salted. Usually, blubber is eaten with dried salmon. May is the best hunting season for sea mammals such as spotted seal, bearded seal and beluga.

6.3 Information in the Former Village of Kinkil

The following information is from an interview in Palana in August, 2006. Mr. S. P., a Koryak man who now lives in Palana, was born in Kinkil, in 1957. Kinkil was closed by the Russians in 1967, and after that officially there were no residents in this village. However, some former residents stayed in Kinkil temporarily, and some of them return seasonally for fishing and hunting. Most residents of Kinkil were Koryak.

Even now I sometimes go to Kinkil for fishing salmon or capelin. I hunted sea mammals when I lived in Kinkil. I hunted spotted seals and bearded seals in June and July when seals appear close to the coast following the migrating capelin. Seal fur is good for making antiskid skis by putting the fur on the undersides. Meat and blubber are eaten, but some blubber is also frozen or salted. In addition, sometimes oil is extracted from melted blubber and then refrigerated. In 2006, I heard that one beluga was hunted in Kinkil. Rifles are used for beluga hunting.

6.4 Information in the Former Village of Lekinniki

The following information is from an interview with Mr. A. A., a Koryak man in Ossora, Karagin District, August, 2004.

Lekinniki, which is located close to the Lekinniki Bay, the northernmost part of the western coast of the Karaga District, was closed in 1980, and its residents were moved to

the villages of Timrat and Ossora, on the east coast. Before the closing of this Lekinniki, there existed another Lekinniki in another location. In 1960, the old Lekinniki was closed and inhabitants moved to the new Lekinniki.

My family (extended family) owned a small herd of reindeer, but their main subsistence activity was sea mammal hunting. In winter, our family hunted sable, fox, wolverine, and bear. My family's hunting ground of was rich in sable.

A new *sokhoz*, Sokhoz Karaginsk, was established by combining reindeer *kolkhozes*. The head office was in Tymlat and the branch office was in Rekinniki.

Previously, reindeer herding *kolkhozes* also placed importance on fisheries, and the fishery in Rekinniki was not for the market but for the food needs of *kolkhoz* members. Each brigade (a herding group for a reindeer herd) owned each fishing site, and salmon was salted or dried. In Rekinniki, we obtained food by hunting sea mammals, like seals, and also made clothing and thongs for sleds from seal fur.

When we travelled on shore, we used a *vezdkhod* (rough terrain vehicle). Also we went to Rivnyj Island on Rekinniki Bay by a *bajdara* (*umiak*) to hunt bearded seals and spotted seals using clubs. At 4 a.m., under the direction of an elder, we approached by a *bajdara* from behind the island with a west wind (when the wind is blowing from west side, a *bajdara* can approach from the leeward, without being noticed by the seals because of the higher waves caused by the wind). After going ashore, we would approach as close as we could to the seals on land. Then we rushed at the seals and clubbed them to death. At times, we could get one hundred seals this way. Since we could get 15 seals per person, the number of seals captured at time will total this figure. Then these one hundred seals were tied to the *bajdara* or to a *kater* (motorized boat) for the return. *Bajdaras* were covered with the skins of bearded seals. *Bajdaras* were used until 1960. However, after we moved to the new Rekinniki, we used a *kater* to go to the island, because the distance from new Rekinniki to the island is as much as 120 km. August is the main season of hunting spotted seals and bearded seals, and hunting of them lasts to the end of September.

In Chemurnaut Bay, just south of Rekinniki Bay, sea mammals were captured using nets. In this bay, the shoreline retreats 3 km at low tide. The size of each net is as follows: line thickness is 6 mm, mesh size is 20 cm, height is 9 m, and the total length is 120–170 m. One end is tied to stakes on land and the other to anchors made of sand bags. This net will rise at high tide, and seals and belugas will be caught in the meshes. The animals are retrieved at low tide. The skin of beluga (*muktuk*) is very tasty. Seals are dragged with thongs to the beach. While seals captured in autumn are frozen, the meat of seals captured in September is dried on nets made of seal thong. Long thongs are made by cutting the whole sealskin body spirally. Usually, skinned hides of seals are spread out to be dried using stakes.

In September, when the reindeer herd reached Podkagernaya Bay — the southern part of their nomadic route — herdsman hunted bearded seals with nets like these in Chemurnaut Bay.

It was well-known that the hunters of Rekinniki had a major role in seal-hunting in various *kolkhozes* in 1960s. Then, hunters belonging to *gospromkhoz* largely hunted seals. Rifles were also used for seal-hunting, along with clubs and nets. In the case of rifle-hunting, a harpoon was used only for retrieving killed animals. This is the same as the present hunting method in Karaga Bay. But nowadays, people do not eat much seal.

6.5 Information on the Village of Tigil

The following information is from an interview with Mr. P. A., held in Tigil, Tigil District, to obtain information about beluga hunting in which the informant participated. Mr. P. A., an Itelmen, was born in 1935. He participated in large-scale hunting where a large net was used with a boat. Many people were needed to drag a net. This large-scale hunting was not a traditional method, but was used to obtain food supplies or raw products during wartime and the 1950s post-war era.

Tigil is located on the bank of the Tigil River, 40 km upstream from the mouth. At present, people use tractors and other vehicles to cover the distance, but, there were no vehicles at that time, so hunters had to walk to the river mouth. On the beach near the river mouth, about 30 persons would hold one end of a large gill-net while the other end was tied to a boat. When a school of belugas entered the river mouth, the boat would enclose the school and both ends of nets were hauled to the shore. These belugas were killed with spears.

Blubber of the belugas hunted in this way was sold to a factory that produced salted products. Under the hunting license system at that time, the hunting season was from July to August, and the quota was whales. When hunting for large number of belugas, as many as 50 people were needed to hold the net. Sometimes, 40–100 belugas were captured in a day.

Around the district, the best places for beluga hunting were those similar to the mouth of Tigil River, such as Ust-Khairiuzovo (at the mouth of Khairiuzovo River) and Ust-Utkholok (at the mouth of Utkholok River).

7. Beluga Hunting in the Nivkh

The southernmost populations of belugas in East Asia are located in the waters around the Sakhalin/Amur and the Shantar Islands. In these areas, belugas have been included in sea mammal hunting activities (Крейнович 1935; Black 1973: 19–21).

In 1931, E. A. Krejnovich was sent to the Lower Amur region to study the Nivkh language (Masumoto 1993: 403). It is thought that Krejnovich conducted his study of the

seal hunting and beluga hunting of continental-side Nivkh (Gilyak) on this occasion.

He conducted his study of beluga hunting in the village of Puir⁴) through interviews, and wrote a report with an illustration of each stage of beluga hunting drawn and explained by a Nivkh man. Also, in the latter part of his report Kreinovich described beluga hunting in the village of Chomi, based on an interview with a native of Chomi (Крейнович 1935). Although Kreinovich agreed with L. Shurenk's remark that beluga hunting was not as important as seal hunting to the economy of the Nivkh, he argued that their beluga hunting had some noteworthy characteristics that could be seen through a comparison of practices in Puir and Chomi. The following are the characteristics that Kreinovich described.

7.1 Information in the Village of Puir

Kreinovich conducted his study of beluga hunting by interviewing a Nivkh man aged about 35 in Puir, on June 29, 1931. On this occasion, Kreinovich requested his informant to draw pictures of beluga hunting (Figures 1). Also, together with another illustration drawn by the informant, Kreinovich described in detail the rituals of sending off the spirit of a slaughtered beluga.

7.2 Each Stage of Beluga Hunting

When a beluga is seen from the village beach, Nivkh men head to sea in pursuit (Figure 1–①). They force the beluga to swim toward shallow water (Figure 1–②). When in the shallow water, a harpooner standing at the bow (Figure 1–③) throws a harpoon into a beluga when it surfaces (Figure 1–④), and then attaches a float (Figure 1–⑤). When the beluga surfaces again exhausted by pulling a float, they retrieve the float and pull back on the harpoon line to draw the beluga toward the boat (Figure 1–⑥). Then, a harpooner gives a finishing stab into the blow hole of the beluga. The dead beluga is then tied alongside the boat and is taken to the village (Figure 1–⑦).

7.3 Towing a Beluga and Welcoming Rituals, Landing

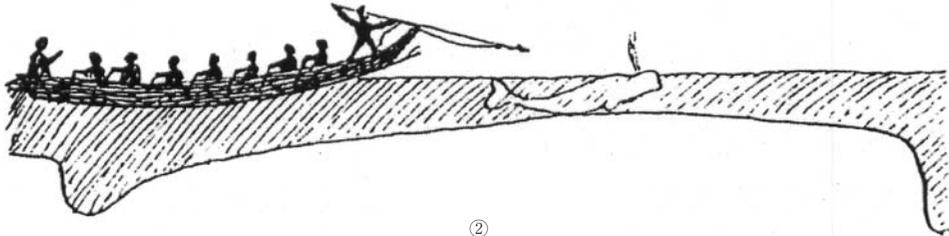
When a boat with a beluga tied to it returns to the village, an old woman sitting on the beach beats a board with two sticks to welcome the whale. The villagers run out to tow the beluga onto the beach. (Kreinovich noted that he had never seen such a case of a welcome like this with music.) (Figure 1–⑧). When towing the beluga to the shore, the boat approaches the beach head-on (usually a boat is beached stem first). The rope tied to the beluga is loosened (Figure 1–⑨). Many inhabitants haul up the beluga with a rope (Figure 1–⑩).

7.4 Flensing and Sharing

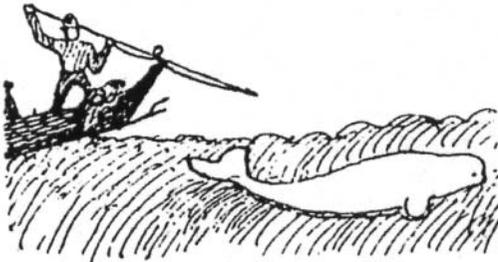
The board that the old woman was beating is carried to the beluga and set under its head. Old men order young men to collect *qongon* (dune grass) and *pikser* (cow parsnip)⁵). They then “feed” these plants to the beluga (original footnote: Gilyak in the Amur ‘feed’ all the sea mammals pikser if they caught seals, sea lions, and belugas. Indeed, this plant is pushed into the mouth of the beluga.) Next, the old men come to the shore and flense



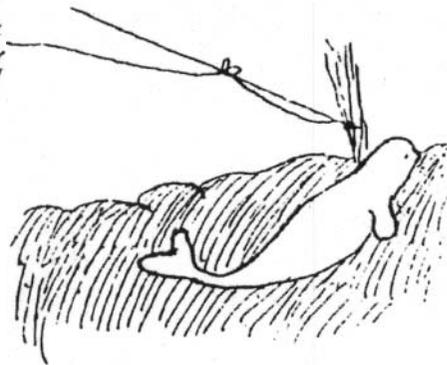
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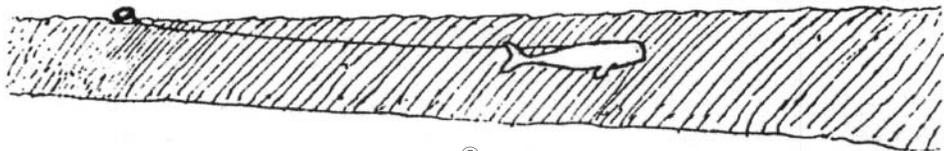
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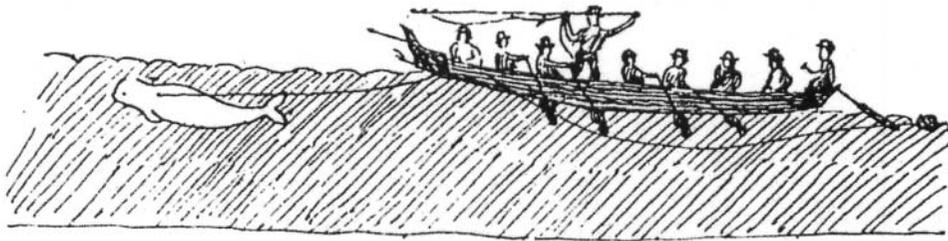
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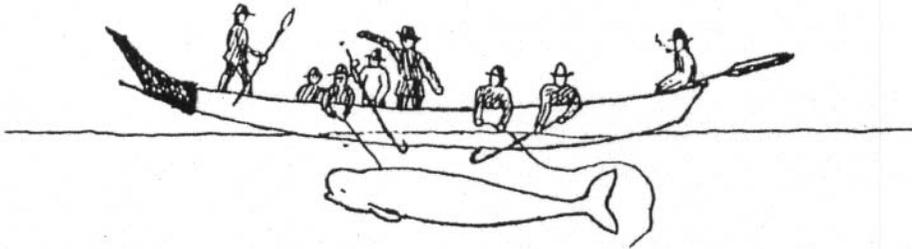
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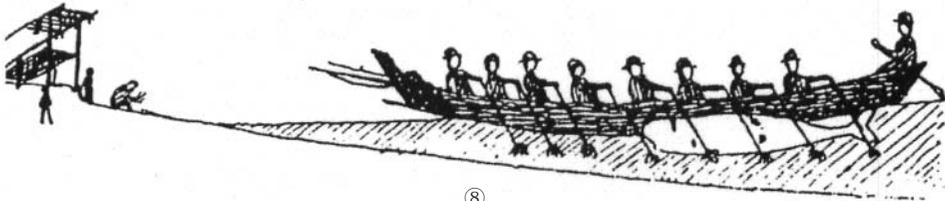
⑤



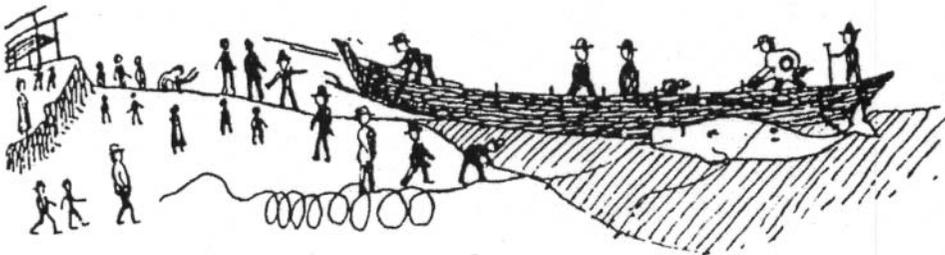
⑥



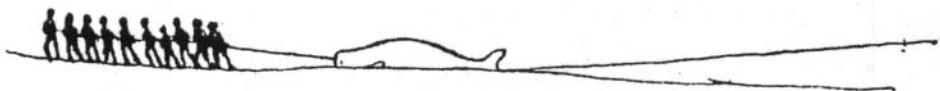
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⑧



⑨



⑩

Figure 1 Beluga Hunt

(Source: Крейнович 1935: 110–111)

the whale. After the flensing is finished, inhabitants are asked to come back for their share of the beluga. The share for “sitting” inhabitants (those who did not participate in this hunting trip) is less than that of the members who went to sea (original footnote: A Giliak man named Shuryai from the village Lyangr⁶) said to me that they share beluga equally in their village. Also he said that only in when they caught 2–3 belugas, somewhat more was delivered to the crew members.) The members of boat crews receive larger shares. After the villagers take away their shares, they cut the head of beluga (the literal term is to, “break” the head).

8. Conclusion

Blubber of sea mammals has been an important food for humans in Northeastern Asia as well as in the Arctic and Subarctic. Although seal hunting is common to all these northern areas, whaling has been observed only in limited places dependent on whale migration routes and geographical environments.

In Penzina Bay, the hunting of large whale species was practiced by the Maritime Koryak. Further, considering the details of the rituals for the whaling reported by G. Steller, it is highly likely that the hunting of large whale species by the Olutor was also conducted long ago.

The traditional Itelmen way of beluga-hunting, which exploits tidal fluctuations and terrain characteristics, is similar to the hunting techniques of the Nivkh, where the hunters chase the beluga toward shallow water. The Nivkh hunting rituals for belugas share elements with those of the Koryak, such as a welcoming procedure for the whale. The reports by Krasheninnikov and Steller lead to the further suggestion that these whaling rituals were very common at that time. From the whaling rituals of the Maritime Koryak, including the Olutor, it can be inferred also that the whale is a special animal. Finally, that elaborate rituals for beluga hunting of the Nivkh and the rituals for the same by the Koryak on Penzina Bay, may indicate rituals that for sending off and thanks offering festivals involving the heads of sea mammals were the ideological core.

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Notes

- 1) The Kerek is one of the Koryak groups. They are sea mammal hunters living along the Bering

- Sea coast from southern Anadyr Bay to Olutor Bay. The Kerek language is closely related to the Koryak language, and was regarded as Koryak.
- 2) The beach of western Kamchatka is a shoaling beach, and its great tidal amplitude creates mudflats 3 km wide in some locations.
 - 3) In 1930 the Ptichj Island cannery was built by the State Company of the Soviet on the small island Ptichj, off the coast of Ust-Khajryzovo, for king crab.
 - 4) The village of Puir had 26 households and a population of 107, according to the 1928 census (Kuroda 2001: 20).
 - 5) The names of these plants are referred to by Kreinovich 1998, Glossary of “Nivkhgu” (translated and annotated by Takeshi Hattori and Shinko Ogihara, Itsuji Tangiku ed.).
 - 6) Lyangr village had 46 households and a population of 189, according to the 1928 census (Kuroda 2001: 20).

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