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#### Chapter 7

# A Mythological Mountain Giant Bringing Hunter's Luck: Reconstruction of the Ethno-cultural Ties of the Indigenous Peoples of the Lower Amur Basin and Sakhalin

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The image of a mythological giant, an anthropoid being connected with hunting, plays a peculiar role in the belief complex of the indigenous peoples of the Lower Amur basin and Sakhalin. According to their imagination, many such male and female beings inhabit the taiga. The image of this being is very complex. It cannot be allocated unconditionally to the traditional pantheon of good and evil spirits. It is more real than a spirit. Though endowed with a number of supernatural abilities, it is not considered to be a spirit and is perceived rather like an inhabitant of the taiga. Different peoples hold highly similar conceptions of the giant's looks, character, and functions. These similarities enable us to draw certain conclusions, which may serve as a basis for the reconstruction of some ethno-cultural ties of the indigenous peoples of the Lower Amur basin and Sakhalin.

As reported by previous investigators, the name of the giant is very similar among the various peoples. The Oroch and Udehe call it *Kadzamu* (from *kada*, i.e., a rock); the Nanai, Ulchi, and Negidal call it *Kalgama*, *Kadzama*, *Koldam* respectively; the Uilta living in northern Sakhalin call it *Ongena*, and the Nivkh, *Kolodam* or *Pal Nivkh*. (Bereznitsky 2003: 249).

According to the Oroch of the Khungari River (N. D. Akunka, 1989) and the Negidal of Kalmin (S. A. Gokhta, 1996), people are allowed to speak of the giant only in the daytime. Otherwise, some misfortune may occur; for example, the weather may abruptly change for the worse or hunting and fishing may be unsuccessful. All my informants insisted that *Kadzama*, *Kalgama*, or *Pal Nivkh* was a huge being, around three to five meters in height. It has a pointed, wedge-shaped head. The Nanai of the village of Naikhin said that the giant had a hole on the crown of its head, something like an ever-open wound (N. P. Bel'dy, 1995; M. Ch. Geiker, 1995). The face is black. The body is covered with red, brown, grey, or black hair, or the giant wears clothes made of the pelt of animals living in the taiga (mainly elk's pelt) and sharp-topped headgear. The Oroch of the Khungari River believes that its body hair is smeared with the pine-tar.

One of the Amur Nanai, T. N. Samar, has told me one of their legends about a mythological taiga giant, *Kalgama*, entitled "*Kalgama* covered with white hair" (Bereznitsky 2003: 250). The plot of the legend consists of the abduction of a small girl by the giant and her subsequent rescue, and is popular in the folklore of all the Amur ethnos. In this case, however, some features of the giant are unique in comparison with other similar



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

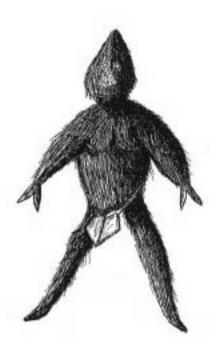


Figure 4

types of legends. The white hair that covers the entire body of the giant is one of them.

Usually the giant has two or three fingers on each hand. Some informants insist that the giant's legs are slightly crooked at the knees and it has hooves instead of feet (Figure 1). Others state that *Kadzamu* has legs like those of a human being but much bigger (Figure 2). According to a third version, the giant's legs are like huge logs. They enable it to ford the Amur River at the deepest point. When crossing the river, only its head is visible above the water (N. S. Geiker, 1991; V. S. Udy, 1996), though it is able to swim under the water. Some other sources insist that the giant can cross a river or a stream by walking on the surface of the water (N. D Akunka, 1989; O. N. Semyonova, 1990). The male giant in particular must do so for fear of wetting his gigantic scrotum, which dangles almost to the ground (Figure 3). This part of his body is significant in understanding the essence of his character.

The indigenous peoples of the Amur region share a common story about a hunter who met the giant and learnt the secret of his hunting luck. The hunter beheld the giant walking over a stream in the taiga. Passing over the shallow point, it murmured "deep," and at the deep point "shallow." Its murmuring was not a human voice, but nor was it a beast's bellow. The giant noticed the hunter, assailed him, and tried to tear off his scrotum; but the hunter turned out to be stronger and managed to tear off the giant's enormous scrotum instead. He hurried home and slit open his trophy. Inside the scrotum he found claws, teeth, and hair of all the taiga animals. The hunter threw away the claws and hair of the tiger because they were taboo. He buried all the others (fragments of teeth, claws, and hair) in the earth, after which he became a lucky hunter. This action is explained by the fact that, according to the notions of virtually all the peoples in hunting societies, animals keep their souls in their hair, teeth, claws, and the tips of their noses. To keep those parts means to possess the souls of the animals, and that brings the hunter luck. While the hunter's luck talisman is with him, the luck will not forsake the possessor. The giant, as we know, has a talisman in its scrotum. For this reason, it is a very lucky hunter. Many informants say it can capture animals and wildfowl with its bare hands.

A Nanai, V. I. Geiker, considers that formerly the taiga giants were stronger and that they often ran after people to "hunt" them. The tale titled "Kalgama has stolen a girl" he told me during my field research in Nizhnie Khalby well represents some features of the giant, and tells us why the people frequently do not understand what the giant says and how it makes the captured accept its speech.

Before, the Kalgama often hunted for people near villages. Once, girls from a village went to the forest to gather berries. When they finished gathering to go back home and looked around, they noticed that one of them was not there. They hurried to the village and told the old men. The old men concluded that the girl had been stolen by the Kalgama and dragged off to its cave. It was necessary to go to search for her. The villagers searched for a long time. Two days later, she was found. She sat on a tree and looked wild; she was muttering something but it was not human speech. Moreover, she scratched the people who came to rescue her. The people somehow twisted a rope around her and took to the village. They called a shaman to ask him to help. The shaman came, looked at her, and said, "For a while

she can tell us nothing. It is necessary to wait for three days. Meanwhile, you should pull off all the resin from her mouth that the *Kalgama* crammed in." In three days the girl calmed down and began to speak, "I gathered berries, and then went for a scrub. Suddenly I was seized by two huge fingers of a tall hairy man under my throat. He was not very similar to a human being, because he had an acute head. He carried me on his shoulders to his cave. On the way he caught an elk and tore it with his bare hand. Arriving at the cave, I saw his grandmother sitting there. The *Kalgama* began to try to feed me with the raw meat of the elk, but I refused. Then he began to cram resin into my mouth. My mouth was full of the resin. But I did not begin to swallow it. The grandmother *Kalgama* told her grandson that if he cannot force me to eat resin, then he should let me go back." The *Kalgama* took the girl back. However, if she once had swallowed the resin, she could have never returned home, because she would have ceased to be a human being and turned into a *Kalgama*. (V. I. Geiker, Nizhnie Khalby 1998)

It is possible that earlier in the belief complex of the indigenous peoples in the Lower Amur basin and Sakhalin there were representations of patrimonial taiga giants, which are partially mentioned in this legend.

As can be seen in the legend, the giant is strong enough to tear up even an elk. It can throw an *omorochka* (a birch boat) containing a hunter over the tops of the cedars. Some Negidal, Nivkh, and Ulchi said that the giant might carry luck talismans (fragments of teeth, claws, hair, bird feather and others) in a special pelt bag and hang it between its legs (Figure 4).

Such tales of a male giant assailing human beings in order to tear out their scrotums were discovered by many researchers who engaged in field research among the people of this region. They also gave examples of how to secure themselves against the taiga beings. A few cases have been documented from the words of the Negidal from the Amgun River. One day, an unmarried hunter went to an island to catch wildfowl. Before the trip he had tied a rope around his haunches and groin. During the night there came a being with a wedge-shaped head. Later it turned out that it was a giant called a Kalgama. The giant and the hunter began to struggle. When the hunter was exhausted and nearly falling down, he managed to tear out the Kalgama's bag. The giant disappeared immediately. In the bag, however, he found the hair of various animals, i.e. the hunter's luck talismans. Suddenly, he heard the Kalgama's voice in his ear begging that the bag should be given back to him. This plea sounded in his ears for seven years. But he hid the talisman well and did not give it back to the giant. During all that period he lived alone in his hut and was very lucky in hunting. One day, the hunter noticed that, at night, someone had cooked his food and repaired his worn-out mittens and long pelt boots. The next night, feigning to be asleep, he saw a beautiful woman drying and repairing his clothes. Subsequently, when he happened to wake up in the night, he felt the beautiful one lying beside him in his bed. He had scarcely made even slight movement, however, when she disappeared. If he had not moved, she would still have disappeared at dawn. The situation repeated itself night after night (Tsintsius 1982: 127-128). In this story, we can observe an interesting detail: although at first the giant was a male, it later came to the hunter as a beautiful woman to obtain his bag.

It is quite probable that the *Kalgama* can appear both like a man and a woman. However, we have insufficient data to draw such a conclusion.

There is another variant of this kind of legend. It is a story about a female Kalgama capable of turning into a duck and having a similar hunter's luck talisman. In this variant, there is an interesting detail we do not find in the legends and stories told by other informants. The Kalgama appears among the people as a duck together with a flock of ducks. A hunter dreamed that a female Kalgama came to him and ordered that he should wait for her on an island when he went out to hunt ducks. The hunter tied a rope, 200 meters long, around his legs. When he was fighting with the Kalgama, he tore out something like a tinder hanging between her legs (perhaps, the same bag for the tinder as that of the story above). The man who had managed to take possession of the female Kalagama's talisman had to keep it secret for seven years, and only after that could he become rich and make the Kalgama, who had turned into a beautiful woman, his wife. So for seven years the hunter heard her voice begging to give her back the tinder. Also for seven years she cooked, repaired his clothes and footwear, shared his bed with him, and finally bore him a son. Two years later, he became a very lucky hunter. With a single arrow he could shoot six sables. But in fact his taiga mistress stole sables from other hunters' traps and brought them to him (Myl'nikova and Tsintsius 1931: 198-201).

In this legend, one may trace an important detail of the traditional religious notions of the indigenous peoples: one should not tell anybody about one's contacts with the supernatural beings. One of the elements of the tradition, namely that of the hunter's being rewarded for his patience with the beautiful woman who transformed herself from a forest being, reminds us very much of the well-known Frog Princess of Russian fairy tales. In passing, it seems very strange that the supernatural being broke the ancient custom respected and strictly observed by the people of this region, i.e. never taking the catch from others' traps.

A similar story may be found in Chinese mythology. One of its personages is a very popular hero, a great hunter Yi or Houi. His name means "a skilful hunter" or "a master of hunting." The secret of his luck is determined by a love affair. One of the deities, "the mistress of beasts," is passionately in love with the hunter (Yanshina 1984: 162-185). She makes him a precious gift of the hunter's luck talisman.

In traditional Chinese demonology the images of a sharp headed, black, humanoid entities covered with hair (more often red in color) are widely represented. Quite often these giants have feet pointing backward and an imperfect face. These mountain entities frequently adopted the appearance of a man, tempted young men and girls, and carried out sexual acts with them (Kryukov, Malyavin, and Sofronov 1987: 160-161). A figure of a "wild man" with a sharp head can be seen at an exhibition in the Chinese city of Zhenzhou (Komissarov 1990: 99; translation of an inscription from the Chinese language by G. P. Beloglazov).

Taking into account the antiquity of the Chinese myth, one may suppose that the hunting peoples of the Amur region borrowed this motif from the Chinese. However, a more valid supposition is that the image of a giant has a general-purpose character intrinsic to many of the hunting ethnos of the world. In the beliefs of the peoples of Amur basin there are also specific features that may permit their identification as an indigenous layer of culture.

Parallel aspects may be traced in other Chinese legends connected with the relation between a hero or a hunter and a supernatural woman. In one of the legends, the fairy virgin asks the hero not to illuminate her with fire at night (Golygina 1977: 91). A similar motif is found in the oral traditions of the Nanai, Negidal, and Oroch. A taiga woman who had fallen in love with a hunter presented him with a hunter's luck talisman: a hair from her private parts (Tsintsius 1971: 177). It is believed that animals themselves come to be shot or trapped by the hunter possessing such a talisman.

According to some informants, such beings live both alone and with their families, which include little *Kalgamas* in caves, among the rocks in the upper reaches of rivers, in gorges, and other similar places. In these caves there are many provisions, hunting instruments, clothes, and other items. Sometimes, at night, one may hear the *Kalgama* performing the shaman's rite. The Oroch from Khungari River believe that the giant may not go far from its cave. It is subject to the chief spirit of good, *Enduri*.

In the upper reaches of the river Nilan, one of the tributaries of Amgun' River, there is a cave where, in the opinion of the Negidals, once lived some people or, perhaps the *Kalgama* itself. Inside, the walls of the cave are processed like porcelain cups. There are seats along the walls (Semyonov 1991).

An Ulchi woman, Z. I. Pudan, told us a story about the *Mariinsky Koldami* in 1996. "The *Koldami* lives by the Mariinsky Lake. There is a rock with a door made in it. Some hunters and fishermen, who came here to make oars for their boats, saw the *Koldami*. It is dark and damp inside the cave. Along its walls, there are plank-beds and many little shelves. An old woman sitting there rocks a cradle containing a child and says, 'Don't cry, don't cry!' The *Koldami* has a pointed head and three fingers. Its legs are like those of human beings, but much bigger."

We have no exact information about the family and children of the giant. According to some informants, an ordinary woman can bear a child of the being. Others say that the *Kadzamu* can sleep with a woman, but that she will never bear him a child. Still others say that a child born to such a woman will never be a human being, but a giant's child.

The *Kalgama* is on the watch for solitary hunters, fishers, wayfarers, and woman and young girls gathering berries. It grabs them by the throat and drags them off to its cave. In the opinion of some informants, the giant eats people there. Many legends tell us that the taiga giant steals children and transforms them into beings like itself. To accomplish this task it smears their mouth with resin to eat. It does not do any harm to babies, however, and nurses them in its cave (Bereznitsky 1992: 225). If a child does not accept its food, the giant may let them go home without harming them. The giant keeps young girls in its cave until they grow old and after that lets them go home. It baits children with pine-tar (Bobik 1996).

One may escape from the giant's attacks by shooting off its hat with an arrow (Bereznitsky 1997: 152-153). A Khungari Oroch woman, M. P. Akunka, who had lived with her parents on one of the tributaries of the river Khungari (Gur) in her childhood, said that there had been a cave of the *Kodzamu* not far from her house. Every time they passed near the cave, her parents covered her with a pelt or cloth so that the giant would not see and

kidnap her. In addition, the forest beings are afraid of human blood. A person can therefore escape them if he hurts himself by chance or on purpose.

The Nanai and Ulchi share similar stories. "One day, a hunter happened to steal a bag with a hunter's luck talisman from a giant. After that he became very lucky. The *Koladami* came to him every night to beg him to give back the bag. The hunter, who was sick to death of its visits, stuck a burning brand into its hand. After that the *Koldami* no longer came to him."

The same informant told two other stories about the sharp-headed giant and how to escape it. "Formerly the Ulchi used to travel in *omorochkas* (birch boats). The *Koldami* would grab them together with the boats, put them on its shoulders, and take them to its cave. But there is one way to escape. When the *Koldami* passes a tree, you should seize a branch and hang on it. The *Koldami* usually says in surprise, 'Well, it was so light, so how did it become so heavy?' Then, you should say to the contrary."

"One day, my brother went fishing together with his daughter and saw the *Koldami*. Long ago the *Koldami* dragged off an old woman living in the village of Ukhta to its cave. There it started treating her with resin. After having lived in its cave for a long time, the old woman managed to run away. But no one knows how she escaped from the *Koldami*."

An Ulchi woman from the village of Tyr, N. I. Dyaksul, told us a story of how her father had met the Kadzama. Her story also contained advice on how to escape from the giant. "I don't know where it lives around here. Perhaps, in the rocks. I don't know. It is in Mariinsky where the Kadzama lives for certain. Once my father saw it. When my father was fishing, his fishing rod suddenly broke. He went to the forest to make a new one. He cut down a tree and began to chop and hew it. He grew hot and entered a cave to have a rest. But suddenly the Kadzama seized him. The giant had two fingers on each hand. It grabbed my father by his throat and dragged him off to the depths of the cave. There the giant put a cup with food before him: berries, fish, and meat. But my father refused to eat. He ate nothing, nor did he drink anything for a week. The *Kadzama* was angry, but it did not touch my father. After that, our kinsfolk brought much food and put it on the large stump before the cave. That was refreshment for the giant. The next day they came again but neither the food nor my father was there. They waited for some time and went home. When they came home, they saw my father had already come back home. The Kadzama let him go. There was another case, when a *Kadzama* woman kidnapped a boy. She kept him in her cave, too, making him eat something. She wanted him to live with her. But he refused. At last she gave up and let him go."

We heard two stories about children meeting a forest being, *Pal Nivkh*, from a Nivkh woman living in the village of Tyr, A. V. Vaguna. It is remarkable that, in one of the stories, a girl escaped from the supernatural being by means of her own blood. "My cousin's wife, Lida, was once kidnapped by the *Pal Nivkh*. When she was three years old, she got lost in the forest. People from three villages had searched her for five days. On the sixth day one man found her on the other bank of the river, in the opposite direction. No one knew how she had managed to cross the river. She had a little bleeding wound on her hand, which was why the giant let her go back. It is very afraid of human blood."

"There was another case in the village of Takhta. One day my cousin's wife's son went

to join his father who was repairing a boat on the bank of the river. On the way, a sharp-headed woman treated him to a piece of sugar. The boy got lost. Villagers searched for four days. He was found at a place four kilometers down the river. The sugar in his hand was melting and he had an oak branch in the other hand. They tried to take the branch away from him. But he began to cry and said that the branch had been given to him by a huge woman who had let him go to the bank."

Some people were very afraid of the forest giant. To win it over and to coax it in order to obtain luck for hunting, fishing, and their own lives, they used to make a little figure of the *Kalgama* out of birch. The nose and the pointed head were formed with a hatchet, and the eyes were branded with a red-hot iron rod. They used to hang the figure over the child's cradle to protect him or her from evil spirits. Generally, it was believed that such a figure assured a happy and lucky life (N. S. Geiker, 1991). Hunters often used to leave some food for it when they went to the taiga.

For the Amur Nanai, unlike other peoples of the locality, the giant is also the bearer of luck of successful fishing. Formerly they would make the figure of a giant, quite often together with its assistant in an image of fish, and anoint it with the blood of the first-caught fish (Crossroads of Continents 1996: 71-72). Similar rituals were carried out by the Hezhe (Nanai on the Chinese side) of the Sungari River, who used a similar term, *Kalegama*, as the giant's name (Chen Bolin 1993: 171).

Sometimes contact with such a being could not only cause harm but also bring about some benefits. One day the Oroch of the Eminka clan living along the river Khutu found a child who had escaped from the *Kadzamu* and lost his way in the woods. Since then the hunters of this clan had luck in hunting and happiness in life (A. F. Mulinka and G.E. Akunka, 1991)

The image of the sharp-headed giant has played an important role in the traditional culture and beliefs of Amur indigenous peoples, especially of older people. Quite often people connect real historical events with the taiga being. For example, an Ulchi woman, V. S. Udy, believes that the Koldami lived on the rock of Tyr until it was driven off by the servicemen of Admiral G. I. Nevelskov, Legends or stories telling about this forest being, whose image is enriched with various motives alien to it, are still being created by the indigenous peoples of the Lower Amur region. Here is a story told by an Amur Negidal, E. M. Bobik (1996). "The Kalgama is enormously tall. His head is pointed. One day some researchers worked near his cave. They were geologists. In this group there was a young girl who cooked meals for the researchers. The Kalgama happened to see her and immediately loved her very much. He had a wife, who loved him. But she was old and no longer beautiful. He had not loved her for a long time. So he killed his Kalgama wife and kidnapped the cooking girl to his cave. She began to live with the Kalgama. But she was always hungry, because the Kalgama ate only sulfur and raw meat. One day she went to fetch some water and saw a helicopter. The members of the expedition came to look for her. They found her. The Kalgama noticed the noise, came out, and saw her getting into the helicopter. It grabbed the helicopter by the tail, because it was gigantic and very strong. It held it for some time and then let it fly away. The helicopter flew around there to see the Kalgama, but no one could find him" (E. M. Bobik, 1996). The taiga inhabitant, the sharpheaded giant no longer arouses any significant emotion among the younger generations. However, children are aware of the existence of this mysterious being.

We can thus set out the unique belief complex of the peoples of the Lower Amur basin and Sakhalin of a mythological giant, who both brought trouble and good luck. For all the peoples of this region the visual image is similar in its main details: body height (very tall), head form (sharp and pointed), number of fingers on hands (two or three fingers), speech (nonhuman language), and hypersexual quality. The giant often kidnapped small children for the purpose of transforming them into similar entities to itself by feeding them resin. It loved to kidnap small girls, as well, to convert them to taiga entities. It especially loved to steal beautiful young girls and women, with which it lived as wives until their old age. Less often it kidnapped adult men such as fishermen and hunters. This latter case involved contact with a female entity. It is possible that further research on these representations will allow us to hypothesize the origin of the beliefs in a giant and giant-woman

As described above, we have ascertained that the representation of this taiga inhabitant is characteristic of all the indigenous peoples of the Amur River basin and Sakhalin. Similar ancient beliefs about a giant with a pointed head can be confirmed also by the Heje, from Sungari River (Nanais on the Chinese side), who call it in the same name and recognize as the same entity, despite of the strong influence of the Chinese culture. Some separate units seen in these beliefs have parallels in the culture of some other Chinese peoples.

The most likely explanation for these parallels lies in functional convergence, not in cultural diffusion. The sharp, pointed head represents the ancient character of the image of this taiga entity in the beliefs of the peoples of these regions. This external appearance is considered to be one of the important general indications of the participation of an entity in the supernatural world, the world of impure forces, or the world of the "forest-man" (*leshii*), the discovery of which has been confirmed in the cultures of many peoples of the world (Dmitrieva, 1994: 102, 103). The erotic aspect (a big scrotum and big testicles) of the image of the giant testifies to the deep antiquity of these beliefs. It is quite possible that exactly the belief complex of the forest-man/woman was preserved by the natives of the Amur-Sakhalin region in the complete form. We can conclude that the materials about this humanoid giant can be utilized for one of the ethnographic materials for the reconstruction of different aspects of the cultural history of the peoples of this region as well as their neighbors.

Finally, I want to point out with pleasure that issues on a taiga humanoid giant are still being researched not only by scientists, but also by a young Nanai schoolgirl, Raisa Akeksandrovna Bel'dy, in her first ethnological study (Mel'nikova 2002: 95-110; Bel'dy 2002: 79-84).

#### **List of Informants**

- 1. Akunka, Grigorii Egorovich (b. 1921), Oroch, Us'ka-orochskaya, Vanino District, Khabarovsk Province
- 2. Akunka, Mariya Pavlovna (b. 1926), Oroch, Snezhnii, Komsomolskii District, Khabarovsk Province
- 3. Akunka, Nikita Dmitrievich (b. 1914), Oroch, Snezhnii, Komsomolskii District, Khabarovsk Province

- 4. Bel'dy, Nikolay Petrovich (b. 1927 d. 1997), Nanai, Naikhin, Nanai District, Khabarovsk Province
- 5. Bobik, Evdokiya Mironovna (b. 1912), Negidal, Beloglinka, Ulchi District, Khabarovsk Province
- 6. Vaguna, Antonina Vassil'ena (b. 1934), Nivkh, Tyr, Ulchi District, Khabarovsk Province
- 7. Geiker, Mineko Chusambovna (b. 1917 d. 1997), Nanai, Naikhin, Nanai District, Khabarovsk Province
- 8. Geiker, Nikolay Stepanovich (b. 1906), Nanai, Novoe Ommi, Amur District, Khabarovsk Province
- 9. Geiker, Valentin Il'ich (b. 1938), Nanai, Nizhnie Khalby, Komsomol'sk district, Khabarovsk Province
- 10. Gokhta, Semyon Andereevich (b. 1916), Negidal, Kal'ma, Ulchi District, Khabarovsk Province
- 11. Dyaksul, Nayaka Ivanovna (b. 1914), Ulchi, Tyr, Ulchi District, Khabarovsk Province
- 12. Mikheeva, Mariya Stepanovna (b.1909), Val, Nogliki District, Sakhalin Province
- 13. Mulinka, Aleksandor Fyodorovich (b.1920), Oroch, Uska-orochskaya, anino District, Khabarovsk Province
- 14. Pudan, Zinaida Ivanovna (b. 1925), Ulchi, Kal'ma, Ulchi District, Khabarovsk Province
- Semyonov, Vladimir Semyonovich (b. 1924), Vladimirovka, Polina Osipenko District, Khabarovsk Province
- 16. Semyonova, Ol'ga Nikolaevna (b. 1910), Uilta, Val, Nogliki District, Sakhalin Province
- 17. Udy, Vera Sergeevna (b. 1923), Ulchi, Kal'ma, Ulchi District, Khabarovsk Province

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