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## **CULTURAL IDENTITY OF ARCTIC PEOPLES**

### **ARCTIC STUDIES 5**



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*THE NORTHERN REVIEW.*  
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## Editorial

The present issue *Arctic Studies* 5 (which is also *Pro Ethnologia* 11) contains a digest of reports which were outlined within the annual conference of the Estonian National Museum called “Identity of Arctic Cultures”, held between the 13–15 April 2000. This issue is a sequel to the publication of the conference materials started in *Pro Ethnologia* 10.

The conference involved participants, from five countries (namely – Finland, Hungary, Norway, Russia and Estonia), all being outstanding researchers. The conference dealt with miscellaneous subject areas, considering both geographical aspects (e.g. Ainus, North-Siberian peoples, Sámis, as well as some peoples inhabiting the areas near the Northern Pole), and also cultural aspects. The main elements of the Arctic peoples’ identity were seen as language, sources of livelihood, material cultural heritage, environmental conditions, overall socio-economic situation, contemporary literature tradition, as well as world view and folk art. The topics also involved descriptions of Arctic cultures on the basis of museum exhibits and other data available in museums, and also the opinions of different researchers about essential aspects of Arctic cultures. Relevant discussions were also provided in the workshop *Changing Ethnic Identities* held within the conference.

Tatyana Bulgakova (Sankt-Petersburg) analyses in her article the experiences of Nanai shamans on a stage before an audience. During the Soviet period, they started to perform in folklore festivals and concerts. Bulgakova discusses how this fits into Nanais’ traditional world view.

Tatyana Sem (Sankt-Petersburg) examines the connections between the traditional world view and mythology of Nanais. The author creates fascinating links between different aspects of Nanais’ world view and puts up intriguing interpretations of the underlying aspects of Nanais’ identity.

Irina Karapetova and Karina Solovyova, researchers of the Russian Ethnography Museum (Sankt-Petersburg), in their research, analyse Khanty oral tradition recounting *Yavun-iki*, a guardian spirit of the river Yugan. They also examine Yugan Khanities' mythology in a wider context.

Yelena Pivneva (Moscow) deals her article "The Re-establishment of Ob-Ugrian "Traditional Family Lands" – Back to the Past or a Step Towards the Future?" with the current issues of the use of land and water resources in Khanty and Mansi communities.

Yelena Martynova's (Tobolsk) article "Reindeer Herding as a Possibility for Maintaining Ethnic Traditions in the Modern Environment. (The Ob-Ugrian Experience)" is also dedicated to the present day survival possibilities of Ob-Ugrians.

Anzori Barkalaja, rector of the Viljandi College of Culture (Estonia), examines identity changes of the Pim River Khanities in a context of environmental changes. He claims that until the 1980s, the Pim Khanities lived in a relative isolation, with Christianisation, civilisation and Sovietisation campaigns having little impact on their attitudes. Within the last two decades, however, expansion of oil industry, road-building and town-planning has changed considerably the environment in the area around the river Pim. In a situation of radical change, Khanities have chosen diverse survival strategies.

Tatyana Minniyakhmetova (Tartu) touches on connections between Udmurt traditional world view and Udmurt identity. She considers the peripheral Udmurt group living on the other side of the Kama River as an example. According to her, the Udmurts living over the Kama River have maintained a number of archaic attitudes in their everyday life, which can be regarded as the underlying aspects of Udmurt tradition.

Gábor Wilhelm (Budapest) looks at the development of the current identity of Ainu people. The present day cultural identity of Ainus has been established through protest movements for their surroundings. Wilhelm claims that although that protests may not have a considerable impact on the life of small ethnic groups, they increase cultural activity.

Finally, a short surveys of the multidisciplinary journal *The Northern Review*, published by the Yukon College, Canada, is included in this issue.

The board wants to thank the Finnish Institute in Estonia, Tartu Branch Office, as well as the Tartu NEFA group and the Estonian Cultural Endowment, being the groups which supported the conference. Also, the conference was part of the grant No 3134, noted as “Identity of Arctic Cultures” of the Estonian Science Foundation. The organising committee and editorial board are grateful to everybody who assisted the organisation of the conference and the publication of the present issue.

January 2001

Art Leete

## **Shaman on the Stage (Shamanism and Northern Identity)**

**Tatyana Bulgakova**

Now, when the traditions in the North are rapidly being destroyed and the ethnic identity is being lost, bringing shaman practice back is perceived as the integral part of ethnic revival (Pentikäinen 1995). Meanwhile, in many places in the North, traditional shamanism is lost in so much with regard to some Northern peoples we have to discuss the problems of not how to preserve the existing tradition, but how to reconstruct it or even to create a new one. That shamanism, which has been reconstructed now, does not usually assume the traditional appearance, but it takes the forms, which contemporary reality can offer. As the specialists, native people whose job is to show the native folklore on the stage, explain it, the cultural establishments, the system of boarding schools and the administration, which helps them to organise the Soviet festivals, or just national festivals (as it is now called), put them before the necessity to step onto the stage (Olzina 1997: 10). The new contemporary forms of cultural life bring forth the request for performing folklore on the stage. But there was not (with some exceptions) a good professional base to satisfy these requirements and to arrange the folklore. As a result, such pseudo-folk compositions appeared on the stage, which has almost nothing in common with authentic folklore. In another extreme, authentic folklore, not arranged at all and not adapted to conditions of the stage, was brought to the stage. It happened when not the actors and singers, but the bearers of the tradition themselves went onto the stage. "In contrast to the European peoples, who bring to the stage arranged folklore," writes Olzina, "we have brought to it the part of our own life, which is authentic folklore" (1997: 10).

This was the real shaman, who practices in traditional surroundings, could appear on the stage as the performer of folklore and sometimes (in other auditorium) even as a lecturer, who popularise his shamanic activity. This phenomenon (the appearance of a shaman on the stage) has become widespread nowadays. Shamanic actions have begun to be performed at folklore festivals. In Yakutsk, the shamanic theater has been opened. The organisers of the national festivals have started to include, in their programs, shamanic sacrifices. What is more widespread nowadays, mass healing has also led the shaman onto the stage. The essential peculiarity of all these new forms of shamanic practice is that they are not naturally developing from tradition, but being introduced from outside, borrowing from the other cultures or artificially created by the local workers in the field of culture. One of the main arguments of those, who support the spreading of these new forms of shamanism (neo-shamanism) created the statement that distinctiveness of the Northern peoples is shown, first of all, simply in shamanism and these ones can indicate the originality of the folk culture and preserve it only by maintaining shamanism. The idea of neo-shamanism, as a means of preserving ethnic identity in the North, became very popular. Thus, Mihály Hoppál writes: "They select from the past a segment which is suitable – or at least, seems to be suitable – for expressing and maintaining, with vital intensity of feeling, the emotional ties of attachment to the ethnic group. In other words, this neo-shamanism could be an excellent symbol – and, at the same time, technique – of the reproduction of ethnic identity in a postmodern milieu" (1992: 201).

At the same time, everyone can see clearly how the new phenomenon differs from the tradition shamanism. Just the fact that the shaman does not perform a ritual (or does not perform just a ritual) on the stage, but demonstrates in public<sup>1</sup> his art of singing and dancing has change the habitual stress. The stage or just the presence of on-lookers can correct the content of the ritual performance. This only fact makes us ask the question, to what extent the shamanism is identical to the traditional one. Thus, M. Hoppál, who speaks about sha-

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<sup>1</sup> Public is not just a group of passive onlookers. They do not only watch the ritual. The presence of everybody supports the shaman and is believed to have some mystical meaning.

manism as a means of keeping ethnic identity, contradicting himself, doubts at the same time if this new shamanism is identical to the traditional one. "It is open to debate," he says, "how far shamanism, when uprooted from its original cultural context, remains identical with itself" (Hoppál 1992: 199).

Using the concrete material collected in the expeditions among the Nanais, let us examine, to what extent, stage shamanism promotes the preservation of the identity of the culture and how the bearers of the tradition and the shamans, who practice in their habitual surroundings, treat these new forms of shamanism.

### **Shaman on stage**

Bringing "a piece of real life" to stage guarantees the essential attribute of a performance, its authenticity. But at the same time it leads to some special problems. As the practice has shown, the authentic performance is alien to the stage laws that are to hold the audience's interest. Authentic folklore, which existed well in its natural surroundings, was badly perceived by uninitiated onlookers. It has turned itself (how they begin to tell about it) as not to be real entertainment, not good amusement (Olzina 1997: 10). What is more, they have not succeeded in turning shamanic ritual into a variety show, because their spirits-helpers, as the shamans affirm, come to them even on the stage, so they have to communicate with them right before the onlookers' eyes, who did not even suspect it. That's why most of the shamans badly treat this contemporary experiment. The untimely communication with their spirits is objectionable for the shamans. Not on the stage only, but also in their everyday lives, the shamans are scared of their spirit helpers. They are frightened to take a false step to irritate them and so be punished. "If you laugh at the *endur* ('the spirit')," the shaman-woman Nyura Sergeyevna said, "you will straightaway die!" – "If a shaman is silly," said she the next time, "and gives away too much, he won't live long. He must not say too much!" The ritual for show could make the shaman forget about caution and to cause the unpredictable reaction of his spirits disturbed. The same Nyura Sergeyevna said: "Once some people from



replies, they all the time realised of being before the video camera (they worried, for example, if ringing of the small bells on shaman's hat are being recorded well). They did not also forget that they are acting against the tradition and exposing themselves to danger. That's why, when Lindza began the ritual, she sang appealing to her spirits:

Let nothing bad happen to the people who have come to shoot a film.  
Let nothing bad happen either to grandfather or to me,  
No matter what we are saying...

And she explained why she worried:

What we are going to do now is against our rules.

Several days after they performed this ritual, Lindza said: "It was ridiculous what we were doing! Vexing and ridiculous! We were performing, but I turned aside and asked (the spirits): "We are making such noise, such hubbub! But spare us!" And she concluded: "Maybe some of us will fall ill now!" Later she actually affirmed that just because of that ritual performed before the video camera, one of its participants died, the son of another one also died and her own pig with all its piglets died too.

Nowadays, in the program of different festivals held in Nanai district, like everywhere in the North of Russia, they have begun to include the "local ethnographical material". The old people who know the traditions well are invited to perform traditional rituals before the onlookers. But the old people themselves usually treat this innovation with suspicion. Maria Vasilyevna Beldy has been a worker in the field of culture for all her life.

That's why, on the one hand, she is in sympathy with those who try to organise such arrangements. On the other hand, she has lived a long life and knows the traditions well. That's why she as the other aged people, fear the contacts with the spirits not planned by the organizers. "At the festival," she said, "they made us bow to Temu (the spirit of water). They made us feed the water. They took me with them in order I would bow too. But two women (who were invited with the same purpose) refused to bow. Well, will I bow alone? And



we told the head of the cultural department: "We won't go to the beach<sup>4</sup>!"

Today the request for those shamans, who agreed to show their art before an audience, has become nevertheless so big, and the opportunities opened before them has become so tempting, that some ones could not stand their ground. Thus in 1994, shaman woman Mingo Geiker agreed to go the United States, where she showed her art in Seattle Unity Church and on Bainbridge Island (Washington State), where a special seminar was conducted (Beldy 1999: 15, 17). Great success and the presents turned her head. She told me after she had returned: "I have conquered America!" and recollected with exaltation how one of the Americans even kneeled before her. But she was already sick by that time. She fell ill immediately after she returned home. Then she had an operation and died soon afterwards.

"Mingo died right after she returned home," Chapaka said. "Having come back, she fell badly ill. Her eyes hurt, she even lost consciousness. That's how (her spirits) punished her! (Her spirits meant: "She was traveling all around chattering and did not give any attention to us!") Her own *sewens* ('spirits') have tortured her to death. Her own *sewens*! As some of the shamans has gone somewhere, as he died. They travel and die. I pity them!" The reason for Mingo's death was explained by her trip to the States. "She danced and sang in the shaman way on the sea shore in America," Nesulta said. "And the people filmed her. She fell ill right after she came back. Such grief! Before the operation she called me from the hospital every day and asked me to bow (to the spirits) for her. Sometimes she herself, sometimes Tonya, her daughter, called me. I bowed. That time I had a little of my own medicine (vodka) for *sugdy* ('sacrifice'). Then Tonya came to my place and we bowed together. She (Mingo) was not already able to bow herself. We sacrificed a pig." What was the reason for her decease? I try to specify it, and Nesulta answers me once more: "Because of the fact she was singing in the shaman way in America."

The tours of the other Nanai shamans also ended tragically. As far back as in 1983, a shaman woman Gara went to Moscow to the Fes-

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<sup>4</sup> Later Maria Vasilyevna agreed to perform this ritual.

tival of the Art of the USSR's Peoples. After she returned home, her husband Ecto died. She lived a little more than a year after this trip and also died. Lindza explained both these deaths with Gara's appearing on Moscow stage. "Gara came to Moscow," said Lindza, "and something bad has struck her. She shamanised just like that, playing with it. She was travelling and shamanising. Do they like it? Do the *ambans* ('the spirits') like it? The word sung in the shaman way is not a joke! Wherever they have taken her! Wherever they have carried her! Everywhere she danced in a shaman way. (Having returned,) she told me: "There was nothing bad in it!" But the *amban* does not like when they shamanise in vain!"

Shamaness Maria Petrovna's death is also considered to be the sequel of her tour to France and Italy and of her performance there<sup>5</sup>. Mentioned here, Maria Vasilyevna went there with her. She remembers that dancing with a drum on the stage, Maria Petrovna herself feared that something bad it could happen. "She was just dancing on the stage," recalls Maria Vasilyevna, "but she was afraid to sing in a shaman way. She was chanting just two words: "*Mimbie ajasigoando!*" ('Don't do me any harm!') She repeated only these two words. She did not tell much (did not sing). One must not (shamanise) just being in jest! But she is playing on the stage! If she does it playing, she'll fall ill. Her *sewens* ('spirits') will punish her. In general, shamanic matter is a fearful one!" – in this way Maria Vasilyevna concludes her reasoning. But just the same as Mingo and Gara, having come home, Maria Petrovna, was overwhelmed with

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<sup>5</sup> Another explanation of why the shamans die after they have come back is that the spirits from the other lands follow them, but the shamans do not know how to cope with such spirits. According to Chapaka's words, once Maria Petrovna, who had returned from the trip, was shamanising at her place. Suddenly she said that she sees a person, who is standing behind the door. For the other participants of her ritual this person was invisible. Chapaka was also there and she speaks about it this way: "Maria Petrovna asked Nyura, what she would advise her to do. "What must I do?" she said. "He wants to come in. He is standing behind the door." I did not like it," said Chapaka. "Why would she bring this spirit in?" But Nyura told her: "Well, bring it in!" And she had brought it in. It came to her place because it caught the smell of the sacrifice animal she fed her *sewens*. This food had drawn its attention. And it began to Maria Petrovna. It had not gone anywhere. That's why she had problems with her head. That's why those shamans, who have visited other countries, do not live long. They die."

impressions, recollected her trip with delight and even thought to change her life in order to continue singing and travelling round the world. "When she was back from the trip," Nesulta said, "Maria Petrovna told me that she is stopping to shamanise and is becoming a singer. After that she did not live long. She fell ill and died and did not become a singer." When I brought to Lindza the news about Maria Petrovna, who has just died in the nearby village and has not been buried, yet, Lindza took her drum and began to cry about her and to sing recalling also Gara, who died before.

They were crying and when I stop crying I don't know...

Poor thing! Why were not you ashamed? ...

You lived that way to be like you are now, with no breathing...

You went to the city and sang there and made such noise

That the ground cleft, and your cry (went in) there.

What have they covered it with? What have people let you go with?

You should not have permitted them to torment you like this!

What did you want to become living this way? ...

What did Gara and you find there (in the city),

if you agreed to give away your own breath (for this)?

(Gara also) went to make noise (to shamanise for filming) to an island.

What was good in it?

"People took her all over the taiga and the meadows," Lindza recalls Gara, "they tormented her in such a way that her old disease recommenced. She would have to say a million times a thousand times: "I don't want! I don't want!" – "I feel sorry for her! She went so far," next time Lindza says. "The people asked her to say different things. It was as if they hurt her making her say different words. It was as if is they tore her body asking her to tell. And she told. She applied to the sky, to something else and asked for mercy. They took Gara to different places. They took her to the taiga and made her dance in a shamanic way. It would have been better if she shamanised on the floor (in rooms), but they took her everywhere. And she could not bear it any longer. If she had lived quietly, she would be still alive. They had just taken her to the hospital and she died at night. She did not know what else she could do for herself (how to help to herself), so she went to the hospital. When she came to my place before it and

I m...e *pergechy* ('foreseeing') for her, her *panyan* ('soul') was already dead. How could I tell her: "You have already died!" It is impossible to tell people such things. Despite this it was not possible to shamanise then, I tried to do everything according to her wishes. I felt sorry for her! I feel sorry for everybody! People cry before their death. Although he cries, how you can save him! Your time has come and you die!"

If you have shamanised in the right way, you would be still alive...

Being occupied with such a matter,  
permitting people to take you everywhere,

Have you earned much money?

Were you so merry because of a rouble or two?

You had enjoyed yourselves so much that (let them) took your breath away!  
You bring so much junk, that you are not able to carry it in your rucksack.

But I ask people nothing!

After Gara returned from Moscow, Lindza dreamt of her coming to her place and saying:

My sister, no one (of my spirits-helpers) has stayed with me...

All my *sewens* ('spirits') have been left in Moscow,  
Because I shamanised in the wrong place, played the fool and made noise.

Lindza dreamt the same about Maria Petrovna, who has just returned from her trip:

Maruska went to the city,

When returning, she sat behind my (closed) door and  
peeped through the chink.

Seeing her while she was peeping, I asked her:

"My sister, why don't you come in?

You were able to travel all over different countries.

Why cannot you also come to my place?

But she never came and went away.

She thought I would tell her something.

Oh, my friends, I feel sorry for them!

According to traditional ideas, when a shaman performs on the stage and unwillingly calls his spirits-helpers, these spirits don't wish to

appear to give the shaman an opportunity to demonstrate to the audience (who don't really perceive the essence of what is going on) just the character of traditional ways of singing. If they have come, they want to do something habitual and to get for that a reward for this. These presentations follow the common idea that shamanic spirits cannot work without profit, that is, without sacrifice not on the stage only but in any other place.

"The *sewens* ('spirits') force their master to work all the time," says shamaness Olga Yegorovna. "Come on, work! Heal people! Do something don't sit like this! Come on, work! If a shaman does not want to work, his *sewens* would punish him. His company doesn't wish to sit inactively. They are sitting but they must work! Because they want to eat! If one does not feed his *sewen*, it will kill his own master. It will start to crunch him: "It is you who forces us to crunch you! You don't want to feed us!" We," Olga Yegorovna continues, "work in the *kolkhoz* in the same way. If the *kolkhoz* pays us nothing, we abuse our *predsedatel* ('chief') as well!"

The unlucky shamans-artists also perceived all this. As far as both Gara, who had just returned from Moscow, and Maria Petrovna, who had not yet travelled anywhere, were alive, the latest one discussed Gara's trip in this way: "Gara took her drum to Moscow with no certain purpose. The master of the drum (spirit) wants to heal in order that people would then feed it. The master of the drum thought to profit by this. But they gave him neither work nor sacrifice!" So Maria Petrovna decided that a disappointed spirit choose a victim on his own. He chose a chief of the Communist Party Leonid Brezhnev, who died exactly during those days when Gara was in Moscow. "On the way back," continues Maria Petrovna, "it was the same. It was travel in vain with no work and no gain. So in Daerge (where Gara lived) he chose the old man Innokenty as a victim. After Gara came, Innokenty died." According to Chapaka's opinion, shamanic spirits could leave their masters alone only if they would be successful in turning their trips into big rituals and in involving in it all the on-lookers.

In Nanai tradition, there is actually a ritual-trip *undy*, during which a shaman visits the houses of his patients. He goes not only round his own village, but also round some neighboring ones (if his

patients live there). The people, who meet the shaman, sacrifice pigs, cloths, money to his spirits and this way join themselves to those who depend now on this shaman. Thus, the shamans-artists should have finished their trip as if it were an *undy* ritual. "Coming back, they should have entered their houses dancing and singing in a shamanic way as if they were doing *undy*." But their tours have not become the rituals, and Lindza, who mourned their death, had to sing about it like this:

You went to the different cities,  
And you really don't know what you have left there, what you have lost.  
Were you able to cope with that (spirit)  
You should have given a *sugdy* ('a sacrifice')?  
(Did you overpower) that *nye* ('spirits'), which needed a sacrifice,  
When you enjoyed yourself travelling round the cities?

Continuing to shamanise, Lindza sees invisible to us Gara's spirits helpers, which she had not been able to overpower.

Gara, the *dyaka* ('your spirits')  
Are behind you bristled up and spread wide!

Those, who organise shamanic performances, consider them to be just a cultural measure, a chance to demonstrate the ethnic identity of traditional art. But this thought is in sharp contradiction to the traditional ideas, according to which any word, sung by a shaman, causes the contact with spirits, sometimes really unsafe ones. And if in some cases it was possible to change the mind of some shamans for a while and to induce them to go on a tour, the other shamans, who stayed at home, held to their opinion that desacralisation of the ritual, bringing it down to the variety show, impossible because nobody else but *sewens* oppose it. Appearing of shamans on the stage and before the video cameras, for sure, can promote preserving the memory of the traditional art and fixing it documentarily. But the question is still opened up if they actually help to preserve this art by bringing to the stage the "piece of real traditional life".

## An actor performed a role of shaman

Another phenomenon widespread recently is performing as a shaman by an actor, an uninitiated person, who does not believe in any spirits and is not afraid of anything. But even in this case, as the bearers of tradition affirm, if an actor sings in shamanic way quite accurately, he inevitably brings the spirits to the stage and it happens irrespective of his, the actor's convictions. As the contact with spirits is believed to be unsafe even for the shaman, especially it is considered to be fraught with danger for the uninitiated one, who does not know how to cope with them. There are many stories about such staged performances. "One person performed a shaman," Nikolay Petrovich said, "and that moment got very ill, he fell down right on the stage." His wife, a shaman Mingo listening to him clarified: "One must not sing in the shaman way without a reason. Otherwise he will fall ill and die. The *sewen* ('shamanic spirit') comes to you, but you have no special *yay sewen* ('which permits you to sing like this'). What will you do, when it jumps upon you? Of course, you will die! If you are not a shaman, you must not sing (in a shamanic way)! You can go out of your mind or fall ill and then die!"

Meanwhile some resourceful Nanais have however found a means to earn money using the request for shamanic singing. They go for tours, even abroad and don't expose themselves to danger of contact with shamanic spirits. The bearers of tradition explain that it happened because such actors listened to the shamans and learn what means they can bring into play and what way they must not perform as a shaman. The most effective means to draw spirits is shamanic singing (*jaji*) that is special incantation of special words. The certain elements of shamanic dress are also important because spirits can be embodied there. On the other hand, dance (*meury*) is a quite neutral element of the ritual. During the traditional rituals, most of their participants (not shamans) take in turns the drum; tie the shamanic belt with metal pedants and dance. But they dance in silence and they don't wear any shamanic cloth. While dancing they don't draw spirits, but just confirm their devotion to the shaman, the main performer of the ritual. Following this example, the actors, who have to perform a shaman on the stage, intentionally distort the most effec-

tive, as they believe, elements of shamanic behavior and to relieve in this way the ritual from its dangerous strength. Wearing the dress, which we would not call ethnographically authentic, they dance, beat the drum and clang the metal pendants, but either do not sing at all or sing some lyric words with some lyric tune. So they are not afraid of performing a shaman because they use purposely-wrong words and wrong intonation.

In this way, the traditional form is intentionally changed. Maria Vasilyevna remembers that in 1950 they put on the stage a drama and offered her the role of playing a part of the shaman there. Dancing with a drum Maria Vasilyevna repeated only the words: "*Piktesy ajagando!*" ('Let we, your children are healthy!') "I could say just these words," she explains, "I must not say anything else during all the play. Otherwise I could fall ill. If I had repeated what the shaman actually sings, the *ambans* would have heard me! They are always nearby, as Lindza says! They would have heard me and I would have fallen ill. It would have been bad for me! Why would I repeat it? I would not have been well. For those, who are not able to repeat the shamanic words...? No, of course, I fear!"

According to the traditional presentations, the most effective in the shamanic ritual is a special word chanted in a special way. Just words, intoned in certain rhythm, draw the spirits. Putting on the real shamanic suit is also considered to be dangerous. But anyone can dance with a drum. That is why those, who have to perform a shaman, are not afraid to beat a drum and to dance. But they intentionally pronounce "wrong" words, which are chanted in a "not right" way, that is not like a shaman would intone them, but like they sing their everyday lyric songs. When some reporters came from Khabarovsk to film a shaman, Maria Vasilyevna, who wanted to earn some money, agreed to dance like a shaman round the fire. Before going to the beach where the fire had been made, she asked Lindza what is she to change, to distort in her performance, to guard herself against the contact with the spirits. This fact is quite significant for our topic. How can such a performance be a means of maintaining the ethnic uniqueness, if (according to the traditional ideas) actors can secure themselves against the spirits only having refused to adopt the authenticity of what they are performing? Artificial growth of "sec-



ondary” staged shamanic folklore hardly can be considered to be the reliable means of keeping ethnic identity.

### **Ethnic mixing in the image of a staged shaman**

Probably just that causes such typical mixing of different ethnic features in the image of a staged shaman<sup>6</sup>. This image is quite common for different Northern peoples of Russia. Now such an “international, average” shaman appears not only before those, who would like to see a show, but also for those, who wants to be healed. Following the numerous healers and extra sensors, some “shamans” come to the stage to heal the audience. But we should find out at first if they are really shamans, to what extent they are bound to the tradition, and if their action is effective for keeping ethnic identity. We have never heard about a traditional shaman, who made up his mind to change the methods of his activity and to go to the stage. In our view, it is impossible because all this activity is really connected with all traditional surroundings. Only some shamans-innovators and autodidacts can do that. They often have shamanic inheritance and that’s why can demonstrate some unusual abilities. But they use new forms borrowed from the contemporary reality, not traditional ones.

Young representatives of Northern peoples identify the shamanic activity with the work of a contemporary healer, because they consider shamanic spirits to be such a kind of energy, which the healers use as well. Quite significant is recently the appearance of a dissertation, in which the author for the first time, as she writes, has formulated a concept that Nanai shamans use “extra sensory abilities”. As this author considers her the bearer of Nanai language and culture, we can look to her point to be typical for today’s generation of the

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<sup>6</sup> In amateur talent activity, which was organised in the North by Soviet Power elaborated some common, average etalon of how to sing and dance. This etalon was common for all Northern peoples of Russia. J. Sheikin, who investigated this amateur talent activity in the North, noticed how similar and ethnically neutral are the songs of different Northern peoples, which they perform on the stage. This fact will impress us even more if we know to what extent their traditional songs differ (Sheikin 1996).

Nanai (Beldy 1999). As young successors of the shamans don't care now, which cultural form should they choose to demonstrate their shamanic abilities, we have to raise serious doubts that new revised shamanism is the most important means of preserving ethnic identity of Northern peoples. "Last summer," Olga Yegorovna relates, "here came a man. Nanai. His wife is a Tatar. He said: 'I have grown up in a children's home in Komsomolsk. I have no parents.' He does not understand a word in Nanai. The newspaper *"Tikhookeanskaya Zvezda"* published an article about him. (In the photo there) he is with a shamanic drum wearing not Nanai dress, some another nationality dress, but a shamanic one and the shamanic hat with fringe. And the title: 'I am studying to become a shaman!' How can one become a shaman if the spirits won't punish you? (She laughs.) 'I am studying to become a shaman!' He will surely be a shaman! Some bad *ambashky* ('spirits') will come to him and he will shamanise with them. They (the spirits) need to eat!"

Contemporary artificial revival of shamanism is being realised, as a rule, not in traditional surroundings. Adapting to these new surroundings, a shaman on the stage either avoids a contact with spirits (shaman-actor) or, on the contrary, uses this contact for his purposes (shaman-healer). But in both cases he is not able to use the traditional forms of shamanizing. The reason is these forms are closely connected with the traditional way of shamaniing.

Traditional shamanism, if one can find it now, are inseparably linked with other elements of traditional culture, which all makes a one and indivisible system. Only this makes us doubt that one can use some isolated elements of this system as a means of preserving the identity. It is well known that the phenomenon of national self-consciousness hardly can be connected just with one isolated element of the culture (for example with a language or with a religion). Not only shamanism, but also language, folklore, ritual system, norms of behavior and some other forms to express ethnic, national self-consciousness fulfill the functions, which help us to differentiate one *ethnos* from another (Malygina 1993: 11). It goes in accordance with the traditional ideas, which are still kept in the North of Russia, and which say, that it is impossible to isolate an element of shamanic ritual and to show it on the stage as exclusively an art value. The

neophytes, who want to practice shamanism like a kind of healing, are not able to return to the traditional shamanism any more. (Sharp changes in the way of life made it impossible.) They prefer to adapt to the new conditions and to borrow some contemporary forms of analogous activity. Both for the shamans-actors and for the shamans-healers, the new variant of shamanism has some distinctive traditional features, but is completely untraditional in general. Such shamanism, all the more, cannot be the effective means of preserving identity. It is rather its generalised symbol, which is not culturally authentic and which can at least contrast all the Northern cultures together with unified contemporary mass culture.

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# **The Nanai National Mentality and World Model**

**Tatyana Sem**

The contemporary peoples of Siberia preserve, in a certain form, the archaic form of the Northern culture of the adaptive type, which is characterised by the elements of a religious-mythical world view and the cult practice of shamanism, as well as rituals related to hunting, family-tribal, seasonal-calendar and life cycle. The strategy of cultural adaptation, which serves as a basis for the culture of physical life, has been elaborated by researchers in the sphere of cultural and social anthropology, ethnology, and ethno-psychology, and is based on the theory of adaptation to four environments: natural-geographical, cultural-economical, socio-regulative and ethnical, as well as the prevalence of socio-cultural and ethnical basis over the natural (above all, the normative-evaluative and ideological, ethno-psychological ones) (Shirokogoroff 1923; Krupnik 1989; Lurye 1998; Lebedeva 1999). At present the development of the native peoples of the North is closely connected to the international policy of the preservation of ethnic and cultural peculiarities, and it is taken into account in adopting legislation. When drafting and discussing federal laws and regional concepts for the developing of the regions inhabited by the peoples of the North, particularly the Khanty-Mansi, Novosibirsk, Taimyr, Far East, Yakutia, and Evenk regions, a special attitude was fixed towards land as something alive, the sacred territory of the ancestors, the preservation of holy places, places of sacrifice, burial grounds, the right to observe national holidays, rituals, and also the peculiarities of the artistic-mythical world view and the necessity to consider the aforementioned in the educational process were mentioned. As a special task in the preservation and interpretation of the traditional culture of the North the necessity for pre-

serving the language, the spiritual culture, folklore, and the customs and traditions characterising the national mentality of the people was emphasised (Sokolova 1988; *Kontseptsiya...* 1996).

The meeting of the Tungus Association of the Republic of Sakha, participated also by the representatives of other regions inhabited by the Evenkis (Evenkia, the Amur Oblast, the Okhotsk coast), which took place simultaneously with the international conference of musical culture of the Tungus-Manchus in Yakutsk in August 2000, acutely pointed out the problems and tasks in extending language teaching, collecting national folklore (songs, dances, music), and propagating the traditional customs and traditions, including shamanism.

The Tungus traditional life concept is based on the understanding of the archaic mutual influence between the Universe and Man (Sem 1997a). S. Shirokogoroff, the renowned researcher of the Tungus people, has treated the peculiarities of the Tungus psycho-mental complex as psychical and mental (language, self-confidence, thinking) reactions to their different living environments. As the basis for the Tungus psycho-mental complex he regarded shamanism, which was closely connected to the family-tribal psychology in an individual, the ethnic entirety, even a regional group, and determined to regulate the mental life of society. S. Shirokogoroff held that the ethnocultural specifics of the Tungus shamanism were conditioned by the historical-cultural contacts and were formed as a result of a long-term assimilation and adaptation of the psycho-mental complex of the Tungus' forefathers to the new Buddhism culture of the Jurchen epoch of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and was similar to the Daur-Solon-Kidan shamanistic complex. In the treating of the different aspects of the world view, the pantheon, the ritual practice of the Southern Evenkis and Manchus, the scientist revealed the basis of the national mentality of the Tungus peoples in Siberia and the Far East, also giving a comparison between them (Shirokogoroff 1923; 1935).

Mentality serves as a foundation for the ethnic identity and hereditability of traditions, the formation of the model of futurity on the basis of priority and prevailing values in society. It forms the basic needs, values and notions of national culture and the ethno-social integrity. Mentality as an undivided entirety of ideas, beliefs, and perceptive skills of the spirit, creates the world view and

strengthens the integrity of the people's cultural tradition (Gurevich 1999). The world view as a form of world perception influences the behavioural activities in social culture. The world view models the individual's psyche. The brightest symbol of the world view is the traditional world model with either a graphical or figurative expression. In mythical-poetical and mythical-ritual tradition the world model encoded the basic information of the Universe, Nature and Man, revealed the structure of the space and the integration of the human psyche (Meletinsky 1976; Toporov 1982).

The world view that the Nanai, one of the Tungus-speaking peoples of the Amur Basin, had developed by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, can be restored on the basis of folklore, including the cosmogonic myth and ritual practice (calendar, hunting, burial, wedding, shamanic rituals), shamanic iconography and chanting as well as cult attributes, and represents a uniform, although syncretic phenomenon.

The problem of the Nanai traditional world view has been treated by many researchers of ethnology and culture of the peoples of the Far East. The collection and initial systematization of the material can be found in the works of the researchers of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> century (P. Shimkevich, I. Lopatin, A. Zolotaryov, S. Ivanov, I. Kozminsky). New materials on the Nanai beliefs and rituals were collected and systematic and more detailed analysis of the mythology, ritual lexis, ritual sculpture, partial study of folklore personalities, and the pantheon of beliefs was made in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Y. Sem, A. Smolyak, N. Kile, E. A. Gayer, A. Chadayeva, T. Bulgakova, T. Kubanova, T. Sem, E. Shanshina). The semantic analysis of the Nanai world model as the basis of the mythological-ritual world view had not been made before.

The Nanai shamanic iconography preserved the early mythological images of the world in the object-perceptive artistic form, and they are duplicated due to mythological thinking in the folklore and rituals. We possess a drawing of a shaman flying in the Universe, a depiction of a fragment of the creation of the world on shamanic and curative robes, on shamanic icons – curative and hunting drawings of the recreation of the structure of the Universe, the analysis of which, together with folklore and rituals, gives us an opportunity to recreate

the world model and world view of the Nanai as one of the Tungus-language-speaking peoples.

### **World model – the World Egg, the World River, the World Tree**

The Nanai world view perceives the world in its entirety as a flat spherical object connecting the vertical and horizontal world model in the form of a World Egg-Circle.

In the upper course Nanai group, A. Lipsky has recorded a drawing of the universe at the shaman's flight to the upper world to fetch a child's spirit, and to the underworld when leading the deceased's spirit, the original of which came from shaman Bogdano Onenko in the village of Dzhar in 1932 (ИЭ МАЭ РАН, 1932). The drawing of the universe at the flight to the upper world has been depicted as a circle symbolizing the World Egg, which is oriented along the vertical line pointing from the south to the north by two trees (weather and life), which determine the opposition between the sky and the earth, the top and bottom. The upper part denotes the seven layers of clouds of different colours in the sky where the shaman is going through during his ascent. The upper world has been represented by the personified image of the Master of the Weather – *Ka mur*, the underworld – by the Master of the Earth – *Duente*. Along the horizontal line the World Egg – the Universe – has been marked by two lakes from the east and the west (Figure 1).

This kind of horizontal-vertical world model connects the eastern part with the world of the people, and the western part with the one of the forefathers and reincarnation. Death and reincarnation on the horizontal structure have been marked by the element of water, and on the vertical one by the element of the tree, air, earth, and this way have been divided by the opposites of dry-wet. The drawing in A. Lipsky's materials shows the west above, the east below, south on the left and north on the right. According to S. Neklyudov (1992: 172), this kind of orientation corresponds to the Mongol model; in the Tungus one the solar orientation prevails with the east above. Here we should pay attention to the fact that the Onenko and Zaksor families have been referred to as the first shamanic families in the

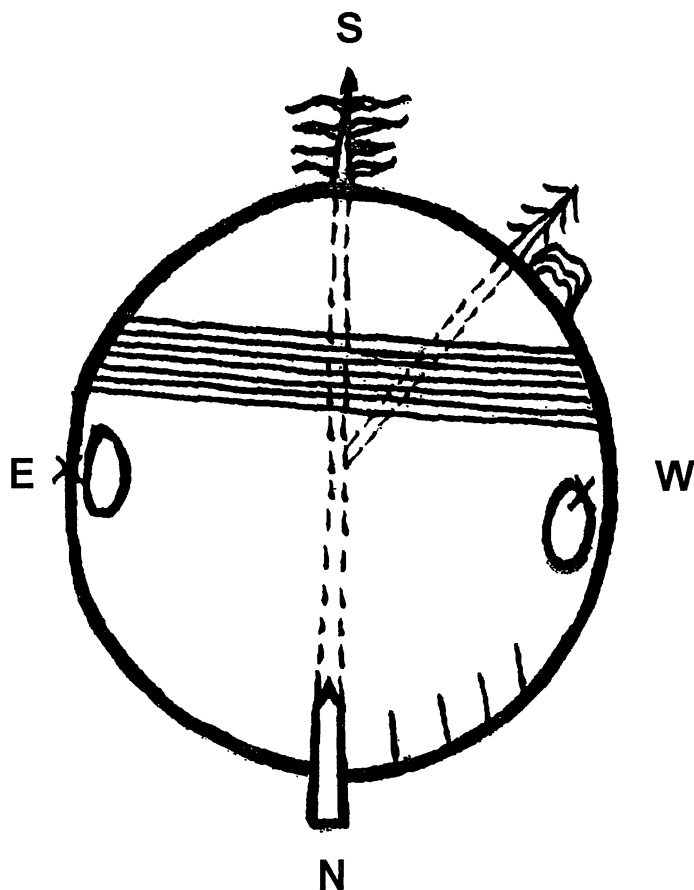


Figure 1.

Nanai folklore tradition. The drawing of the world model by the Nanai shaman Bogdano Onenko with the western orientation of the moon coincides with the world model depicted in a rock painting on the Tiger Rock in the village of Sakachi-Alyan in Central Amur (Okladnikov 1981: 21). A. Okladnikov held that this kind of similarity can be related to the secondary interpretation in the folklore of ancient images (1971: 106) (Figure 2).

The shamanic drawing of the world model made by Bogdano Onenko has been commented on as to the direction of movement –



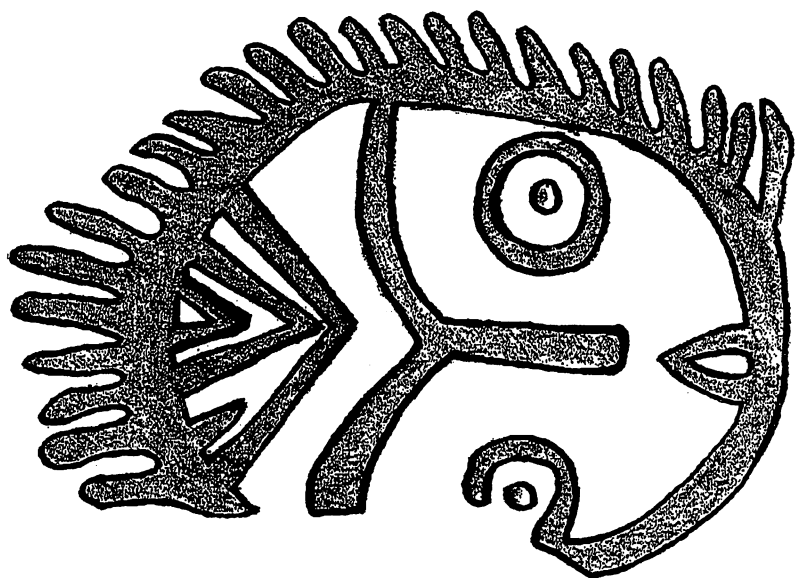


Figure 2.

the route of the spirit *omi* to the world of the dead situated underground. The river of the alive on the earth is flowing on the ground in the direction from the left to the right (by the sun) and is marked in blue, but the underground river of the dead is flowing in the opposite direction, from the right to the left (by the moon) and is marked in red. The spirit of the *omi*, to be born in the people's world, is flying down the river course. It falls from the Tree of Spirits on the earth, which is growing with its roots upwards, into a shallow Lake of Return, situated on the earth on the western side of the forefathers (on the right hand side of the moon of the Universe). After that its route continues through the clouds to the centre of the sky in the upper world where it falls in *Lom Boa*, the Tree of Life, which is in the possession of *Ka mur*, the Master of the Universe. After that the spirit crosses the line to the eastern part of the people to be born in a deep lake (ИЭ МАЭ ПАХ, 1932, pp. 33).

In the cosmogonic myth of the creation of the world the old woman-ancestress *Myameldi*, or the old man-ancestor *Hadau* change the course of the world river, whose one part flows down and the

other up in one direction, which means breaking the enclosed circle of the rotation of birth and death. At the moment of finding the way to the world of the dead the immortality of the ancestors' son who belongs to the mankind, ceases to exist (Lopatin 1922: 238; Sem & Sem 1991: No. 13).

In the shamanic drawing the world river flows from the west to the east in a circle around a flat sphere of the Universe according to the rhythm of the Moon.

In the Nanai shamanic drawing the World Tree in the sky of the Universe has a crown in the form of two trees: the Tree of Life and the snowy Tree of the Weather; on the earth the Tree of the Spirits stands with its roots upwards. If you join the crown and roots with an imaginary line of one tree trunk, it looks like the World Tree with a fork connecting all the worlds of the Universe from the above to the below and dividing the World Egg along the vertical line (the seven-layer sky above and the earth below) as well as along the horizontal line (ancestors on the right hand side and people on the left). The Nanai folklore gives some additional information as to this image. The fairy-tale about the unfaithful wife of a hero, desiring an old man (Master of the Weather), reproduces the archaic motif of the cosmogonic myth about the creation of the world by the element of the wind (Sem 1986). The hero possesses the sacred strength of the supreme gods – the function of punishment of any persons – he throws the old man and his own wife through a tree fork onto an island in the middle of the sea (Sem & Sem 1991: No. 56). Another fairy-tale with a mythical plot tells us about *Sangia mafa*, Master of the Animals, who lives on an island in the sea, and the hero *mergen Arhe*, who gets into another world there (Kile 1996: No. 17).

In order to transfer from the human world to the world of ancestors, the Nanai ritual practice has created the building of the universe in the form of a special ritual construction.

### ***Itoan* – the ritual conical tent – model of the world in rituals**

During the period of the Great Wake, in order to send the spirit to the World of the Dead, the Nanais build a special half-spherical conical

tent *it oan*, which imitates the structure of the Universe, analogous to the one described by shaman Bogdano Onenko. The main direction is east-west, which is marked by two passages and two fires from the side of people and from the side of ancestors (Sem 1973: 93–95). The drawing of the Universe made by Bogdano Onenko depicts two lakes of reincarnation corresponding to the two fires of the ritual. In folklore, they are called *Sangia mama's* (Mistress of the Earth) lakes of fire (Chadayeva 1990: 211). Obviously they are related to sunset and sunrise. When paying their last tributes to the deceased during the Great Wake, the shaman and the people place themselves on the southward side of the *it oan*. In the drawing of the Universe, the upper world of the gods with the upper World Tree of Spirits corresponds to it. In the centre of the southern part of the conical tent stands the shamanic tree *toro*, which imitates the upper tree of life, the World Tree of *Ka*, the Master of the Universe. The figure replacing the body of the deceased *mugde* (family tree) and its spirit *hanya* in the form of a small anthropomorphic figure, *hanyako's* pillows and clothes are put to the northern, opposite side of the *it oan* (Lipsky 1956: 53–54). This way the ritual has created a spatial structure of the model of the world through concrete visible objects: the conical tent, two fires, the shamanic tree, the sides of people and ancestors. According to A. Lipsky, the ritual shamanic tree *toro* has two zoomorphic figures in the form of a winged tortoise-light above and a wild boar's fire jawbone (called crocodile *simur*) at the bottom; the tree trunk is encircled by a snake (ИЭ МАЭ ПАИ, 1932). In Nanai folklore, the vertical line of the Universe is also depicted by the zoomorphic opposition of duck-fish and deer-bear (Sem 1999: 122).

### Mythological plot of the creation of the world

The horizontal world model in the shamanic iconography of the Nanai shamans is depicted as the projection of a vertical spatial world structure and illustrates the mythological plot of the creation of the world. The depiction of the flat world model is characteristic of the Nanai ritual shamanic and curative robes. The back of the ritual robe of the great female shaman Nene Onenko from the village

of Dippy (PƏM, 1992, coll. 11406-1), donated to the museum by her granddaughter L. Zh. Zaksor, a lecturer at the Faculty of the Northern People at the Russian State Pedagogical University depicts a double concentric radiating circle. In the centre of the inner circle there is a tiger drawn above and two birds with their heads pointing to the centre below. The circle is placed above a straight and a zigzag line. The semantics of this drawing are related to the cosmogonic myth about the creation of the world by birds and the plot of three elephants and the formation of the relief of the landscape (Figure 3).

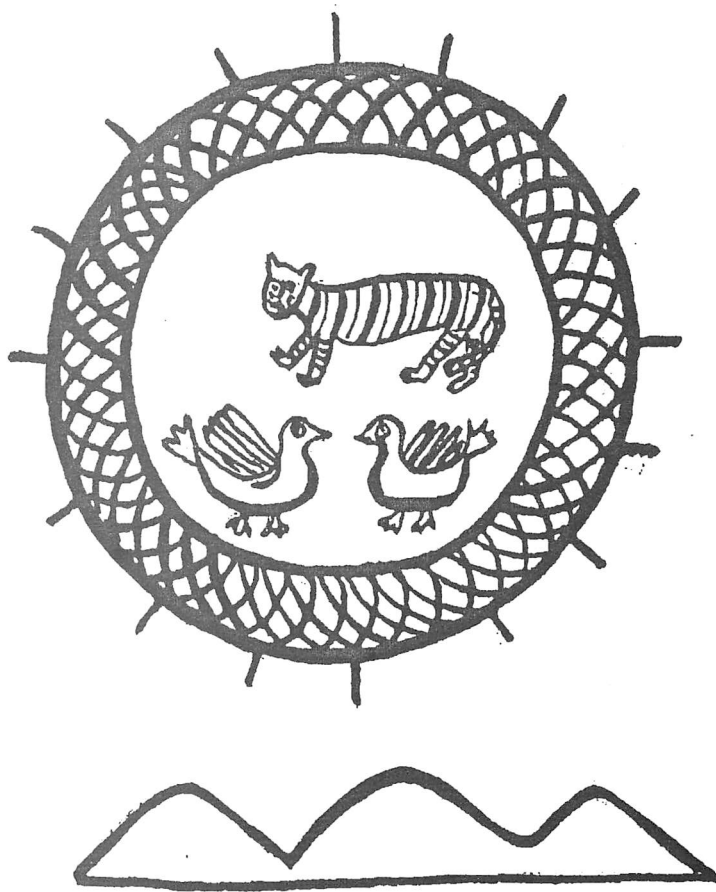


Figure 3.

In Nanai mythology, the plot of the creation of the world by birds is well elaborated and well known in several versions. It is usually inserted in the detailed narrative of the formation of the Universe from water chaos. The more important motifs forming this part of the cosmogonic myth include 1) procuring the land by birds (duck, diver, three swans, eagle) from the bottom of the primeval waters; 2) then the separation and lifting of the sky from the earth, and 3) the formation of the relief of the earth – mountains and rivers – as a result of the action of the heavenly fire-sun (Sem 1986: 32; 1996; Shanshina 1998).

Nene Onenko's shamanic robe depicts the earth (the inner circle) with two birds on it, probably the heavenly duck and the water diver, creating the world. The tiger depicted in the drawing above plays an important part in the Nanai world view. In Nanai mythology the tiger is the Master of the Mountains and serves as the dog for *Boa Enduri*, the Master of the Heaven (Sem 1999: 122). In addition to that, the mythology of the upper-course Nanai relates the image of the tiger to the middle one of the three suns from the creation times. D. Trusov, an orthodox priest, the leader of the Kamchatka mission, made the first of the well known records of the Nanai cosmogonic myth in which he called the primeval sun *mafa*, the second one *mari* and the third one *gorodo* (Trusov 1884; Sem 1996: 134). In translation these names mean bear, tiger and snake. It is the sun in the form of a tiger that ancestor *Guranta* leaves for the people to light the world. Here we should mention that the three suns represented by the three different animals of different colour – black, orange-black and green-black – are in correlation with the three elements of the middle world (represented by the black colour in each animal) and three worlds of the Universe marking the horizontal and vertical structure of the world simultaneously, i.e., they render three dimensions to the Universe.

The three suns in the Nanai cosmogonic myth stand out as the primary fire cause for the birth of the world (Trusov 1884; Sternberg 1933: 493–494). S. Shirokogoroff holds that the Tungus people relate this plot to the Buddhist tradition (1935). The three suns mark the passing time, the sunrise, zenith, sunset, the alternation of day and night, the life circle. In Nanai folklore, the three suns have the form of three swans or three animals marking the three zones of the

world: the mountains, forest and water. The image of the tiger is connected with the upper part, being opposed by the bear (forest) and snake (water) (Sem 1997b: 117). The images of the tiger, bear and fish-animal were depicted on the magic bone ring of the hunter as the masters of the three elements, guaranteeing successful hunting, health, and well-being (Sem 1992: 35–36). In the first drawing made by the shaman Bogdano Onenko, the Master of the Earth *Na* lives at the roots of the Life Tree in the form of a bear *Duente*, and *Ka mur*, the Master of the Universe, in the form of a heavenly deer at the Weather Tree and the top of the heavenly Tree of the Spirits (ИЭ МАЭ ПАИ, 1932, pp. 1–34). The zoomorphic coding of the Universe is duplicated in the Nanai rituals, folklore and beliefs. In Nanai folklore, the evil snake *Sahari dyabdyan*, who has created the Tree of Evil, releases three suns on the Earth at the same time, to counterbalance hero *Hado*, the forefather, who has created the Tree of Good (Chadayeva 1990: 5). In the corresponding version of the Sakachialyan Nanai three forefathers – *Shankoa*, *Shanka* and *Shanva* – release three swans (the three daughters of the Sun) to procure the earth. According to the myth, *Goronta*, the powerful forefather-hunter (in other versions – *Hadau*) kills the two superfluous sources of light, and chillness sets in on the Earth. As a result, fire as a means of surviving on the Earth is embedded in the world model of both the Nanai and the neolithic population of the Amur Region (Trusov 1884; Sternberg 1933: 492–495). In order to liquidate the crisis and establish world order, the myth determined the control of the Heaven over the elemental forces of the Earth. *Ka*, the Master of the Universe, sends two of his sons (symbolising the sunrise and the sunset) in the form of a *mergen* sable and a *mergen* dog, the brave men of the east and the west (sometimes both the images are merged in one – *Arha mergen*) – to marry the daughters of the Earth and Water in the form of a frog and a maiden, or a fish and a wild boar (Kile 1996: No. 8, 12, 18; Chadayeva 1986: 67; 1990: 155, 192). In the myth of the lower course Nanai, the Master of the settlement in the form of a dragon releases two spirits of the earth and water – *Oda seveni*, the twins – in order to rescue the people (Kubanov 1992: 145).

The cosmic vertical of the Nanai world model, depicted in the ornamentation on Nene Onenko's shamanic robe, is not marked with

a tree but the World Mountain, the master of which is the tiger, and the mountain itself has three peaks and in the myth it is related to the motif of the formation of the relief – mountains and rivers. More often than not, the image of a snake or leech *Oya* are mentioned as the means for the formation of the relief, used as a magic wand to increase the growth of the primeval earth (Sem 1986: 33). The dragon's wand in Nanai fairy-tales brings the dead back to life (Chadayeva 1990: 183).

In the ornamentation on shaman Nene's robe, the heavenly and underground waters are mixed in one image of a red snake symbolising the world chaos, where fire and water are merged together and prove to be the initial cause for the progress of time. The regular ornament on the snake – the outer circle of the ornamentation – indicates the direction of the movement. The beams radiating from the snake marking the image of time and space, attribute solar symbolism to it and, in combination with the inner regular ornament create the impression of pulsation. The red colour of the fire snake of the Universe is related to the colour of life – fire, movement along mythological associations with natural and biological indicators (blood, fire, the planet of Venus, etc.). Here we should bear in mind that in the Nanai astral conceptions stars are connected with reincarnation: Venus is the red star of life, Orion regulates the progress of time and is connected with the birth of new spirits of people, Sun bestows life, and on the moon side of the Universe there is a lake where the reincarnation of spirits takes place (Smolyak 1986: 136; Sem 1990: 114; 1999: 122–123). The Nanai curative shamanic drawings usually depict the shining sun and moon marking both the people's and the ancestors' world as well as the connection between them.

Among the ritual sculptural images, the curative shamanic complex always includes the images of stars, the Sun and the Moon, as well as their zoomorphic and antropomorphic duplicates: birds, eyes, spiders, frogs, lizards, snakes; also there are complicated compositions meant to support the vital strength of the sick person and the surrounding relatives.

The image of the fire snake in the Nanai mythology interfuses the heavenly waters, solar symbolics and the water chaos of the earth

(Sem 1986: 32), which is also depicted on Nene Onenko's shamanic robe. The image of the fire snake preserves the Universe in the unity of the space and time – chronothrope (Sem 1999: 121). The image of the snake born from the World Egg is depicted on the rock paintings in the village of Sakachi-Alyan (Okladnikov 1968: 192, 198). In Nanai folklore tradition the heavenly sun snake-dragon is called the son of the Tsar of Birds and it has a robe of fire (Chadayeveva 1990: 181). In Nanai shamanic ritual complex the image of the bird-snake is connected with the figure of the primeval shamanic spirit, the Master of the Wind *Buchu* (Sem 2000: 34).

The Nanai shamanic attributes also include a third vision of the Universe, splitting the uniform image into several fragments, reflecting the specific peculiarities of the mythological-poetical shamanic world perception. D. Solovyov, the renowned researcher of hunting, geographer and collector of ethnographical material donated to the Department of Ethnography of the Russian Museum a unique set of curative and shamanic robes (PЭМ, 1910, coll. 1998-168, 169, 170, 173, 174) connected with the cult of the Thunderer. On the curative jacket, front and the skirt there are three versions of the world model. The ornamentation on the jacket marking the middle world depicts a circle open at the top, with two snakes penetrating into it with their heads from the left and the right (the water and the earth snake, whose master is, according to the mythology of the lower course Nanai of the Samar family, the heavenly dragon *Boa Yaluni*, the Master of the Universe (Kubanova 1992: 3, 145). Below the circle there are two birds-eagles with their heads pointed into different directions. This ornamentation records the beginning of the creation of the world, the birds' search for the primeval dirt to create the earth still only given in the perspective of the opposition between the sky and the earth, the earth and the water in the form of two snakes and two birds. The open circle could denote the epoch of primary creation and timelessness as well as the imperfection of the creative process. The skirt ornamentation (marking the lower world on the robe) depicts the following stage in the creation of the world: the universal circle is closed (World Egg), above there is a three-petal fragment of a flower, possibly three suns, separated by the firmament circle with two handles on the sides (the opposition of the sky-earth along the



vertical and the two fires – Sun-Moon or two Venuses – morning and evening stars in the world of the people and the ancestors along the horizontal). Inside the circle of the World Egg the ornamentation depicts an eagle in the centre below, above on the left there is the tiger or the sable, the figures of the cosmogonic myth of the creation of the world; they are also the personifications of the supreme gods of the Nanai pantheon, especially of *Arha mergen*, the cultural hero of the fairy-tales, the Master of the Weather, the Thunderer, regulator of the natural and life rhythms of the Universe. In mythology, he appears in the form of a red wolf, dog and sable (sunset and sunrise), causing the eclipse of the moon and the sun (Sem 2000: 34; Kile 1996: No. 8, 14; Bulgakova 1983: No. 10). On the curative shamanic robe, there are images of the personified supreme gods of the Nanai religious and cult pantheon – the big-eared Master of the Earth, the Sea, the Fish, the Sky standing on the figure of an eagle, and the Master of Thunder in the form of a dragon, as well as the ancestors of the wolf. The main images of the Nanai folkloric pantheon are featured on the petroglyphs of the Amur Region (Okladnikov 1968: 32; 1971: 209). (Figure 4.)

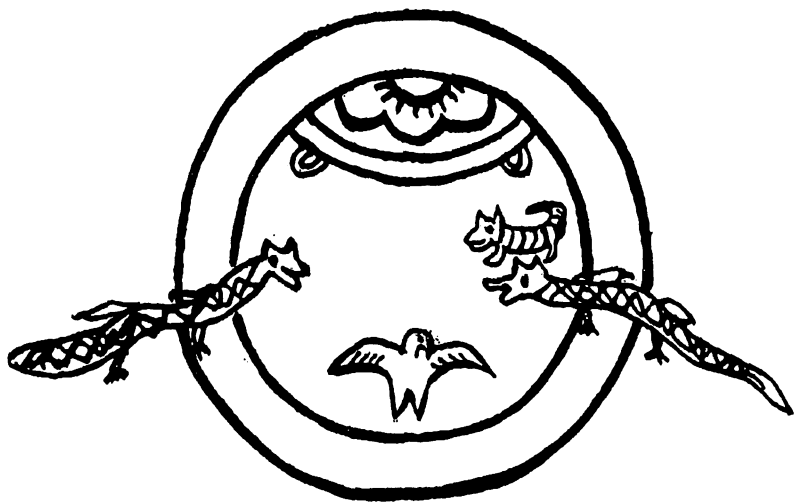


Figure 4.

## Images of the Universe in Nanai cosmology

According to the Nanai traditional world view the uniformity of the perception of the world, the cosmic space, rhythm, movement, and time was associated with the living breathing creature having a certain rhythm and pulsation. In Nanai folklore the hero, travelling to the upper and lower world on the verge of the earth (Sem 1986: 34) perceives this pulsation – this is the transfer from one state to another. In shamanic travels this transfer is recorded as a vibration, and on the shamanic attributes, the tambourine, the icons, and the robes it is depicted as a zigzag, or a dotted line in three parallel lines. The world as a whole is presented in the form of a huge snake or a dragon (a flying lizard, a snake with the head and fangs of a wild boar and the antlers of a deer), or a big deer with branchy antlers, a huge elk (Sem & Sem 1991; Chadayeva 1990; Kubanova 1992). The latter image mostly conforms to the earthly world. What is important is the fact that the image of the world, in its entirety, corresponds to its vertical structure. In Nanai fairy-tales it appears in the form of a deer with branch-like antlers, connecting the primeval marsh and the heavenly upper world, the dwelling place of the supreme gods. In the myth “Heavenly Deer” about procuring a bride from *Boa Enduri*, the Master of the Heaven, the hero *Alha mergen*, with the help of a heavenly goat, ascends to the upper world along the branch-like antlers of a huge deer connecting the sky and the marsh, and encounters a bear standing in the marsh up to its waist. The animals are begging him to forward their request to the supreme god of the Heaven to let them free. When the hero fulfils the request, the sky and the earth separate, the antlers fall down and mountains and rivers are formed, the bear’s fur covers the forest, and a lake appears in the marsh (Sem & Sem 1991). According to the other version of the myth “*Mergen* and his Friends” about a gigantic Deer-Universe the courageous hero *mergen* encounters a tiger, an ant, a beluga and a deer, which he rescues on his way to his bride – the Sun’s daughter. Undergoing his ordeals *mergen* hurries to the rescue of his friends-animals (Sem & Sem 1976). The image of the huge deer with branch-like antlers, along which the hero ascends to the Heaven, has been put down in

the third version of the fairy-tale about the heavenly snake-*mergen*, the son of the Tsar of Birds (Chadayeva 1990: 181).

More wide-spread is the image of the Universe – the World Tree, sometimes with the sun and the moon, or the anthropomorphic tree-woman, the ancestress of the world, people, animals, and plants. The latter is often depicted on Nanai wedding gowns (Ivanov 1954: 229–245). In the cosmogonic myth of the upper course Nanai the ancestor *Guranta* extracts the woman *Myameldi* from the trunk of the world tree, which is also connected with the sacred power of the ancestor (Trusov 1884: 438–452, 468). On the Nanai wedding gown the cosmic image of the tree-ancestress has different versions, among others in the form of two anthropomorphic figures – the male one above, the female one below, or it is combined from two S-shaped figures in the form of a woman in labour, a tree, a bird and a frog (Sem 1997a: 222–227). The World Tree includes the images of three worlds of the universe, the birds marking the top, the deer and other animals – the middle world, the earth, and the frogs, snakes, lizards, and fish – the world below, the water. The anthropomorphic image of the World Tree-Universe often had the upper part of the crown in the form of a fork. In the Nanai shamanic curative drawings two trees can be encountered – the one of weather and the life tree of spirits, or else, three trees with solar symbolism (Ivanov 1954: 262, 264, 280–281), most probably corresponding to the myth about the three suns. Here, we should remember that a tree with a fork is the way to the world of the ancestors, a means of transfer between the worlds of the folkloric persons, and the image of the World Tree having the sun from the one side and the moon from the other, or the sun and the frost, rain (as in the Weather Tree or in the Tree of Spirits) is characteristic of the depiction of the world model not only in the case of the Nanai, but also in the drawings on the rocks of the Priamurye dating from the neolithic age.

In conclusion, it can be mentioned that the Nanai mythological-ritual world model has been preserved in shamanic images and sacred objects used in shamanic rituals connected with procuring the children's spirits, in curative incantation, in the process of leading the spirits. It characterises the spatial-temporal structure of the cosmos through the image of the World Tree, the sunny part of which

reflects the people's world, and the upper moon side – the world of the spirits, the ancestors. The ancestor's image has been extracted from nature and is identical to its macro-structure. Alongside the plant code of the universe the Nanai mythological tradition widely uses zoomorphic images of the cosmic vertical. The Nanai world model and its images are based on natural and biological rhythms and the characteristics of the Universe, the main contents and essence of which is the harmony between all the spheres and phenomena, universal connection and interchange of separate images. When comparing the images of the neolithic paintings from the Amur Basin with the world model and folkloric images of the universe in the living Nanai tradition, we have to recognise their almost complete correspondence. Probably the sacred rocks and stones present peculiar sign-symbolic clichés capable of modelling the images of myth creation in the Nanai traditional culture and they evidently formed the people's world model and world view, interpreting the standards of the ancestors' national mentality and fixing them in their memory through oral tradition and ritual practice.

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*Translated by Tiina Mällo*

## ***Yavun-iki*, the Master of Yugan as the Cultural Symbol of Yugan Khanties**

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Karina Solovyova**

Yugan Khanties are among the most numerous groups of Eastern Khanties – their number in 1999 reached 825 persons (authors' field-work materials (FM) 1999). They live in the basin of the Great and Small Yugan rivers and name themselves accordingly *enet yavun yah* ('people of the Great Yugan') and *ai yavun yah* ('people of the Small Yugan'). Experts rightfully consider the area of Yugan culture as one of the few extant sources of autochthonous ethnicity (Balalayeva, Wiget 1998: 14).

Until recently the territories of the Great and Small Yugan were free from any consistent large-scale industrialisation that would have brought along an active influx of population and the development of new infra-structures. This fact together with the remote geographical location and inaccessibility to Khanty settlements has enabled Yugan Khanties to keep their natural resources, which is one of the key factors of the group's resilience and longevity.

Yugan has kept its system of settlement, kinship structure and traditional subsistence activities i.e. hunting and fishing (Karapetova, Sokolova, Solovyova 1995: 6–10).

As in the past, the most important socio-productive unit of Yugan Khanties is the family or groups of extended families. They share common hunting and fishing territories containing summer and winter *yurtas*, have a "private" subsection of the river as well as common forests and consecrated lands including the graveyard, sacred site and the protective spirit. Within the subsistence territory, each family is given its own allotment that is kept in its use for generations.

During the years of the Soviet rule, hunting and fishing territories first became subdivisions of kolkhozes, and afterwards of commercial enterprises. Nevertheless, the unwritten law was such that certain hunting and fishing territories remained within the possession of the families who had owned them according to the old custom. At present, this is reflected in the Directive of the status of kinship subsistence territories.

As before, Yugan Khanties live in settlements called *yurtas*. This was already pointed out by the Swedish researcher, F. R. Martin, over a hundred years ago (1897: 8). He also provided the names of the inhabitants – Kayukovs, Multanovs, Ryskins, Taylakovs, Kinyamins and etc. – names by which they are known even today. Likewise, the structure of the settlements has remained unchanged. The latter comprise complexes of dwelling houses and outbuildings in which each family has a house on its own, one or two barns to shelter its possessions, a traditional oven for baking bread, a summer kitchen with a cooking-stove, as well as shelves and platforms for dishes and cooking utensils. Normally these settlements are inhabited by one or several extended families. At present, there are 29 such settlements with a total population of 605 people.

As we found out, these settlements also have a Khanty name that is passed on from generation to generation, but those names have not been reflected in literature. So we present some we recorded: Kayukovs' *yurtas* – *tlung poutl yah* or 'people of loong settlement', Kogonchins – *kutl yah poutl* or 'people of the fishing river', Leykovs *nyehus yah poutl* or 'the sable river people', Yarsomovs – *kanrak poutl yah* or 'people of cranberry woods', Kurlomkins – *nohr poutl* or 'pine-cone settlement', Multanovs – *tlankty poutl* or 'snake settlement', Ryskins – *ninkun poutl yah* (FM 1994 Multanov; 1999 V. N. Lyantin).

The family structure of the indigenous population in the 19<sup>th</sup> century matches more or less that of the present one. The representatives of all families living in the Yugan come from three genealogical groups or *sirs* – in literal translation *sir* means 'part' or 'share' – each of which has a common predecessor (Sokolova 1983: 112). These three are *Puppi sir* – the Bear, *Neuh sir* – the Elk and *Mah sir* – the Beaver. The Elk group is the largest including representatives from



the families of Yarsomovs, Taylakovs, Lyantins, Nemchinovs, Uryevs and Pokacheyevs. The Beaver group includes the families of Kogonchins, Kaymysovs, Karayev and Kinyamin, and the Bear group those of Usanovs, Kurlomkins, Sapokrins, Kayukovs, Mul-tanovs and Ruskins. Marriages within the *sir* were not allowed.

The preservation of traditional subsistence activities and social institutions of Yugan Khanties is inextricably connected to their worldview. It accommodates a mythico-historical memory manifest in myths, tales and legends passed on from generation to generation linking Yugan Khaties with a certain region. All this taken together makes this local group emerge as an integral community.

The Yugan Khanties' relationship towards nature and towards the land rests upon a complex system of interdependence and interrelations between the human world, natural settings and the world of mythological figures. What needs to be stressed is that the latter serve as the protective spirits of the regions, whose proportions strictly correspond to the rank of the spirit.

Our aim in this paper is to examine only one aspect of the traditional culture of Yugan Khanties that is quite significant for their ethnic identity. This aspect concerns *Yavun-iki*, the master of the river Yugan. As we perceive it, this figure is a concentrated reflection of Khanty's understanding of nature and society and their interrelations.

Several pieces of research about Yugan Khanties contain evidence of *Yavun-iki* (Kulemzin 1984: 50, 96–98; Ilyina et al. 1993: 220, 226, 228–231; Fedorova 1995: 194; Zenko 1997: 29–31; Karapetova, Solovyova 1997: 69–70; Martynova 1998: 159). However, no author has treated the figure of *Yavun-iki* as one of the most important cultural symbols of this local group. Therefore, we will delineate those aspects that show *Yavun-iki* from this perspective.

The concept of vertical division of the world is common to all groups of Khanties. Likewise, they share the main mythological figures. But in addition, Yugan Khanties typically divide the vertical space into the upper, middle and nether worlds of which the upper and the nether world both have seven strata.

Above the earth, there is heaven (the upper world) with the supreme deity, *Torum*, who “can see all, knows all and is looking onto

the earth through the seven celestial strata” as Yugan Khanties express it (FM 1991 E. G. Taylakov). A. Zenko has also recorded another name for the supreme deity – *Sanki* (1997: 20). The word *sanki* can be translated as ‘light’ or ‘whiteness’. On the other hand, *Sanki* functioned as the supreme deity mainly among southern Khanties – from the regions of Demyan, Salym and partly Konda – with whom Yugan Khanties had had contacts from long before (Kulemzin 1984: 65; Golovnev 1991: 216; Ilyina et al. 1993: 238).

*Torum*’s wife is *Myh anki* or ‘the mother Earth’. She represents the middle world and is responsible for human life in that sphere. But the giver of life for Yugan Khanties is *Anki Pus* (*Pugos*), the chief female spirit.

*Hyn iki* rules the nether world and is the spirit of sickness and death who has seven assistants living in the seven subterranean strata (FM 1991 E. G. Taylakov). Another name he is known by in Yugan is *Pyhty sorin syvyn kon* (‘tsar wearing black robes’).

*Torum*, the creator of the world, *Myh anki*, the mother Earth and *Hyn iki*, the master of the subterranean world, form the basis of the all-Khantyan pantheon. Together with these, Yugan Khanties have also kept the archaic notion of the primacy of female principle in the creation of the world. This notion is connected to the figure of *Chooros nai anki* (*chooros* ‘ocean’, *nai* ‘female deity’, as well as ‘fire’ or ‘flame’, *anki* ‘mother’). Information on her, however, is very contradictory. Based on our scholarship, *Chooros nai anki* emerges as the mother of “the celestial fire and everything living”, and as “the most powerful god” (FM 1991 E. G. Taylakov). A. Zenko describes her in analogous terms (1997: 20), or she is said to be living in the Eastern Ocean (FM 1991 Y. A. Kuplandeyev) and is the goddess of the “Eastern fiery ocean” (Martynova 2000: 173) or “the sea fire” (Ilyina et al. 1993: 238). Some sources state her to be the mother of *Torum* (FM 1991 E. G. Taylakov). Pim Khanties, on the other hand, see *Chooros nai anki* as holding the seven nodes of the seven oceans (FM 1991 Y. N. Nimperov). A. Golovnev’s treats her as a figure of “alien fire” to be identified with the violent, world-wide whirlwind or fiery deluge; she can be so powerful as to “be the mistress of the destinies of other souls” (1991: 216).

Deities together with the main mythological figures from the upper pantheon govern the life in the middle world through the protective spirits of the regions, *Torum's* children, whom their father has appointed as the masters of the tributaries of the Ob. As Khanties see it, all living space is permeated with spirits – whether it be the masters of the forests, swamps, rivers or settlements –, and bearing this fact in mind that they are being attended to by supernatural forces, Khanties shape their behaviour. Each local group inhabiting a river and its tributaries has its mythological figure important to that region and this figure represents the group in the upper pantheon.

Yugan Khanties consider *Yavun-iki* or ‘Yugan Old Man’ to be the master and protective spirit of the whole river. He is responsible for its territory, from the source to the mouth, and for the life of its inhabitants including their subsistence activities (Kulemzin 1984: 96; Zenko 1997: 29–31; FM 1991). He administers over the spirits of the forests and rivers as well as over the protective spirits of the settlements (*yurtas*), of both familial (or domestic) and personal kind.

According to the legend, *Yavun-iki* is the son of the supreme deity, *Torum*, whom the latter has appointed to that position. He is the “tough, glittering” hero for whom a bear appears “a child’s play” (FM 1991 A. N. Taylakova, E. G. Taylakov). As the myth tells us, *Yavun-iki* has seven bears or seven horses and one hundred warriors as his subjects. He also ‘employs’ nine heroes or *yulit mank kum* (Karapetova, Solovyova 1997: 70). Earlier, he was constantly fighting his brothers, sons of *Torum*, over the right to govern certain territories.

The holy hypostasis of *Yavun-iki* is a bear. It was always such that the spirits of particular ranks who were *Torum's* children and masters of the territories – such as *Yavun-iki*, *Kazym imi* and many others – had a sacred appearance in the form of an animal or bird together with their anthropomorphic hypostasis of a hero-warrior or a heroine. Thus, in the Yugan *Yavun-iki* is considered the forefather of the bear family. His looks resemble that of a bear and he even behaves like one. At the same time he rules over the bears. In the prayers uttered during the bloodless sacrifice he is called up with the following words: “Come, *Yavun-iki*, together with your spirits bears” (Ilyina et al. 1993: 228).

According to the legend, he is clothed in a coat that has bear claws; the laces on his *sakh* (an outer garment) are made up of lizards and his shoes are tied with snakes (Karapetova, Solovyova 1997: 69; Martynova 1998: 159).

The bear has an enormous importance in the traditional culture of the Ob-Ugrians. The legends of all groups of Khanties relate a story of his celestial origin, and how *Torum* let him down from heaven (Kulemzin 1984: 164; Moldanova 1995: 2–3; Moldanov 1999: 14–16). According to the legend recorded by us, the bear used to live on Earth, but he didn't behave himself, and so *Torum* had to take him back to the heaven to be "re-educated". The bear still kept misbehaving, however, upon which *Torum* hurled him back onto Earth. But on the way down, he was caught in the branches of a cedar and stayed there so long that he started to rot. Then, creeping snakes appeared on his body, and they fell on Earth turning into two bear cubs, and from these two, all bears on Earth have originated (FM 1990 E. L. Kolsomov). Another legend states that, once upon a time, the bear lived in heaven. *Kon iki* threw him down onto Earth. While falling down, he hit his paw against a stump and this small injury made him walk in the tottering way he does (FM 1990 Y. A. Kuplandeyev). Similar legends have been recorded among Pim and Salym Khanties (cf. *Mify...* 1990: 90; Ilyina et al. 1993: 240). The bear had affiliations with the nether world as well. The materials of V. Kulemzin show that, in Yugan, the bear could help humans to return to life if their death has come prematurely. Thus, the bear was connected with all the three worlds and could act as a mediator between them. Presumably, it was through his bear-hypostasis that *Yavun-iki* was able to reach into the nether world. As A. Y. Kuplandeyeva has pointed out, "*Sakh iki* (which is one of *Kon iki*'s names in Yugan) and *Yavun-iki* descended into the nether world and returned happiness" (FM 1990 Y. A. Kuplandeyev). According to the legend written down by us, he descended to the world of the dead to bring back his wife. Despite his struggle, he was able to rescue her only with the help of his brother, *Sakh iki*. Another fact testifying the bear's affiliations with the nether world is the assistants he had – snakes who epitomise the nether sphere.

The snake is held to be “a sacred animal” in the Ob-Ugrian tradition, and in many cases it is identical to the lizard (Moldanova 1999: 107–108). Among the Yugan Khanties, snakes are thought to bring the news and protect from illnesses. The Yugan Khanties had three allegorical names for the snake: *mykari voi* or ‘the underground beast’, *tlonkty voi* or ‘the string-beast’ and *kou voi* or ‘the long beast’ (FM 1999 V. H. Lyantin). Thus, it is not by accident that lizards and snakes feature on *Yavun-iki*’s clothes, and not only his. For example, the *sakh* of *Kazym imi*, the goddess of Kazym, also features lizards, and her plaits are made up by snakes (Moldanova 1999: 107–108). Such notions are characteristic of eastern Mansis as well (*Istochniki...* 1987: 36). There must be an overall Ob-Ugrian tradition regarding the description of the sacred appearance of the spirits or protectors of regions who possess certain power and influence. Thus, there are certain stock epithets by which *Kazym imi* is referred to such as “shining”, “of iron” and others, and there is a certain canon for describing her clothes.

As the son of *Torum*, *Yavun-iki* was related to the spirits and protective spirits of the middle world, including regions such as Pim, Tromyugan, and Salum. *Torum* had seven children (or eight according to other versions). Different regional groups tell their names (Moldanov 1999: 82–83; Martynova 2000: 171). Only two figures form an exception here: *Mir vannty he* and *Hyn iki* figure among eastern Khanties, and *Kon iki* and *Pyhty sorin syvyn kon* among western Khanties. Their influence is all pervasive thanks to their functions. The one – *Mir vannty he* or *Kon iki* is responsible for peace in the world and attends to people, whereas the other, *Hun iki* or *Pyhty sorin syvyn kon* sends sickness and death.

According to the thinking of Yugan Khanties, the brothers *Yavun-iki* and *Sakh iki* or *Kon iki* were of equal strength originally, and they were constantly at odds with one another while dividing regions. After a while *Torum* gave great strength to *Kon iki* thus dividing their sphere of influence. *Kon iki* or ‘old man emperor’ became the protective spirit of people, whereas *Yavun-iki* became the master of Yugan and the protective spirit of Yugan Khanties. The informants have described *Kon iki* as a hero who rides on a white horse attending to people as well as determining their lives. “Whoever sees him gains

luck and longevity” (FM 1991 E. G. Taylakov, Y. A. Kuplandeyev). Within seconds, he is able to circle the world, or “as quickly as a piece of birch bark burns” (Ilyina et al. 1993: 220; Martynova 1998: 158). He can cover long distances not only on horse back in the middle world but also within the subterranean world of the dead as well.

The second brother of *Yavun-iki* – *Atum navutl iki* or ‘an old fellow leaning to the bad side’ is the master of the underworld. To see him in waking life brings bad luck because he robs people of their lives. He was constantly warring with his brothers as the latter were summoned to assist people.

*Yavun-iki* had several wives one of which was *Kazym imi*, the goddess of Kazym. Yugan Khanties have a legend regarding the birth of reindeer breeding in connection with her. In those legends, it is said how *Yavun-iki*, after marrying the goddess of Kazym, stole reindeer from her and moved them to Yugan (Ilyina et al. 1993: 220; Martynova 1998: 152). *Kazym imi* was revered by Yugan Khanties together with her local protective spirits, and she had a great influence on this region (Moldanova 1999: 105). Another wife of *Yavun-iki* was the local goddess, *Torum evi* ‘iron lady’ (FM 1988 A. N. Taylakova), an epithet that alludes to her power and rank. *Yavun-iki* and *Torum evi* were of equal strength, this is the reason that they separated (FM 1990 E. G. Taylakov).

Being a protective spirit of rivers, *Yavun-iki* spatially restructures his local world in Yugan. By virtue of his bear hypostasis, he has tight connections with the human world; he grants success in hunting and fishing thereby determining human wellbeing. As he is the son of *Torum*, *Yavun-iki* has connections with the world of gods. Thus, he is the mediator between the world of gods, nature and the world of humans. It is not by accident that a bear shaped protective spirit should exist in the traditional world construction of different groups of Khanty as well as of eastern Mansi peoples. He fulfils an important role in their conceptual system (Schmidt 1989: 14; Moldanov 1999: 64, 76). Therefore, *Yavun-iki* is held in high esteem among western Khanties, among Yugan, Tromyugan, Pim and Salym Khanties who have included him in their pantheon. One of the most important moments of the bear celebrations, which present a vivid

manifestation of the Ob-Ugrian world, is the appearance of different guardian spirits of regions. On the basis of those figures, it is possible to ascertain the nature of connections and contacts between different local groups. In Yugan bear festivities, it is through *Yavun-iki* that the spirits appear. They are the protective spirits of the Salym, Irtysh, Pim, Nazym, and Kazym rivers who form the local pantheon of Yugan Khanties (Moldanova 1995: 3).

The figure of *Yavun-iki* is personified in concrete form and thereby he acquires an earthly form of existence. The most important cultural centre in Yugan is connected to *Yavun-iki*.

There are anthropomorphic depictions of *Yavun-iki* which are kept in the small sacred barn by the Great Yugan among the *yurtas* of Kayukovs. A. Zenko presents a detailed description of him after attending a sacrifice to honour *Yavun-iki* (1997: 29–31). *Yavun-iki* has three barns in total, these being: the winter, spring and summer barns, one of which is located in the summer *yurtas* of Yarsomovs. Before, when people had reindeer, his image was carried along to the taiga (FM 1999 A. N. Kayukova). Every year, before the hunting season, the hunters gather on the sacred spot where they bring sacrifices to *Yavun-iki*. In addition, anybody who wishes can travel to the sacred barn holding an image of *Yavun-iki*, when the need presents itself. This person makes a bloodless sacrifice, sacrificing food and spirits. To augment the sacrifice, new clothes (*sakh*), fabric and scarves are brought as well. There are also small wooden images of bears and snakes in the barn – they are called *ai pupuli* and *kou yuh* respectively. Any Khanty can take them along, if they wish, and get help from *Yavun-iki* through them. Tromyugan Khanties take a special trip to *Yavun-iki* and have with them some wood in order to carve the images of the spirits – *lungs* (FM 1999). Until the year 1980, when the Yugan Khanties still had reindeer held in private, they would use them for sacrifice to *Yavun-iki*. At present, only food and vodka are brought. During the new moon they always burn birch bark in order to fill the rooms with sacred smoke (FM 1999 A. N. Kayukova).

The keeper of *Yavun-iki* is chosen from amongst the most honourable persons within the family who are related to the Bear family – *puppi sir* (i.e. Kayukovs and Ryskins). He keeps *Yavun-iki* for three to four years after which *Yavun-iki* is handed over to the

next keeper. The figure is carved by a chosen master who does not belong to the Bear family. In earlier times, the carver was chosen by votes or nominated by the shaman. In the case of the master carver's death, the figure was changed; it is also changed if it becomes old or after every seven years. In case of the death of the keeper (*tlung ort*) the figure of *Yavun-iki* must be handed over to another family (FM 1990).

There are also other relics apart from the images of *Yavun-iki* connected with him. For example, not far from the settlement called Ryskiny his spear is kept, and people believe that *Yavun-iki* lost it there (Kulemzin 1984: 96, 110; Ilyina et al. 1993: 232). Subjects of *Yavun-iki*, *Yalut man kut*, are connected with their own separate sacred places (FM 1990 Y. Usanov).

It is not only myths and legends that connect *Yavun-iki* with his brothers, *Kon iki* and *Atym navytl iki* (*Pyhty sorin syvyn kon*). There are places around the Great and Small Yugan where they are thought to appear (FM; Balalayeva 1999: 152). Thus, there is a sacred barn by the Great Yugan that includes the sable *sakh* of *Kon iki* (FM 1991 E. L. Kolsomov). The barn is located between the *yurtas* of Larlomkins and Taurovs near the Great Yugan. That is why another name for *Kon iki* in Yugan is *Sakh iki*. He is not identified with the very spirit of the image which is kept, according to our informants, "somewhere to the north" but it has a representational function being the protective spirit of the region where the two families dwell. Before the hunt he is always brought a bloodless sacrifice. *Sakh iki* can be taken along only up to the *yurtas* of Yarsomovs as he cannot co-exist with his brothers. Therefore, it is not allowed to move *Yavun-iki* together with *Sakh iki*, for in that case "something bad can befall the Khanties" (FM 1991 E. L. Kolsomov). The families of Aranteyevs, Kolsomovs, and Kurlomkins can be his keepers, alternating every three years (FM 1991 E. L. Kolsomov).

The second of *Yavun-iki*'s brother, *Atum navytl iki* 'old man leaning to the bad side' is connected with a place between the sites of Kurlomkins and Larlomkins. There is a sacred barn together with anthropomorphic images similar to those described by Kulemzin (1984: 118). *Atym navytl iki* serves here as the protective spirit of the



region, and he is always brought sacrifices: fabric, wine or food products.

Kazym Khanties also have sacred places connected to the figures of *Hyn iki* and *As tyi iki* who are the protective spirits of this region (Moldanov 1999: 138).

All in all, through *Yavun-iki* and his brothers and their attributes, the world of upper deities is projected onto the physical surroundings or regions where Yugan Khanties live, thereby giving the region a special sacral significance.

Being a protective spirit of Yugan, *Yavun-iki* serves as a patron of the local spirits and the personal protective spirits of Yugan Khanties. Yugan Khanties think that everyone has their guardian – *tlung*. Upon the birth, it is guesswork who is going to be the personal protector, *tlung iki*, or *tlung imi* (either it is man or woman). When a human being is born then it is said that he is turned into an iron wood grouse (FM 1990 E. G. Taylakov). In prayers, all spirits important to the region are normally addressed starting from the most important ending with the weaker ones (FM 1990 Y. Usanov).

Every family and settlement has its own protective spirit. Thus, the protective spirit of the village Taylakovo is *Torum evi* who is one of the wives of *Yavun-iki* (FM 1991). She is revered not only by the Taylakovs but also by the representatives of all families dwelling in this region. This applies to the other settlements as well. Thus the protective spirit of the *yurtas* of Yarsomovs is *Luk iki* ('old man-wood grouse') (FM 1999), for Ryskins it is *Souh yuh iki* (Kulemzin 1984: 110; FM 1984), and for Kaimysovs, *Lan-lor-iki* ('the old man of the summer lake') (Zenko 1997: 28), etc. O. Balalayeva recorded 38 sacred places in Yugan (1999: 152) – such as lakes, swamps, islands, coppices and peninsulas, mediated through oral tradition – that are not really connected to the protective spirits of the settlements and their holy barns, but are just "special places with a sacred meaning" (Balalayeva 1999: 142).

In this way, the natural environment is personified through mythological creatures on micro and macro levels, whereas the rituals that fulfil communicative and consolidating functions regulate the relationship between humans and mythological creatures.

The worldview of Yugan Khanties is a local variation of the all Khantyan conception of the world. Legends featuring the name of *Yavun-iki* link the past with the present and reflect the people's ties to the land. *Yavun-iki*, the hero, guardian, and protective spirit, is one of the most important cultural symbols of that group of Yugan Khanties who keep the traditional way of life (who are in principle the middle and older generation). *Yavun-iki* enables those Khanties to perceive themselves as a particular society of people i.e. "people of Yugan" existing in a metaphorical tribe. This is a key factor in the preservation of ethnicity of that group. Social and cultural changes are rapid, however, people do not want to lose their identity in the fleeting world.

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*Translated by Katrin Portnov*

*Irina Karapetova, Karina Solovyova: Yavun-iki, the Master of Yugan...*



Photograph I. Alyona Kayukova with her daughter, inhabitants of the Kayukovs' seasonal settlement. Photograph by Irina Karapetova 1999, the Great Yugan.





Photograph 2. N. N. Kayukova, inhabitant of the Kayukovs' seasonal settlement, cleaning fish.  
Photograph by Irina Karapetova 1999, the Great Yugan.



Photograph 3. A. N. Kayukova, inhabitant of the Kayukovs' seasonal settlement, sewing traditional footwear *njur*. Photograph by Irina Karapetova 1999, the Great Yugan.



Photograph 4. Cooking over the fire. Yarsomovs' seasonal settlement, the Great Yugan. Photograph by Karina Solovyova 1994.



*Irina Karpetova, Karina Solovyova: Yavun-iki, the Master of Yugan...*



Photograph 5. Barn near the Yarsomovs' seasonal settlement, the Great Yugan. Photograph by Karina Solovyova 1994.



# **The Re-establishment of Ob-Ugrian “Traditional Family Lands” – Back to the Past or a Step Towards the Future?<sup>1</sup>**

**Yelena Pivneva**

Traditional economic activities and the utilisation of natural resources are the most important factors, supporting cultural independence and ethnic entirety among the indigenous peoples of the North. This gives special significance to the problems, which are connected with the re-establishment and stabilisation of the complex traditional economy of these nations. In the form of a territorial organisation of traditional nature utilisation, in various regions of Siberia, during the last decade, the family lands have been re-established (subsistence lands, the name family lands is not precise enough). This paper deals with some of the problems connected with the functioning of this institute, using the example of Ob-Ugrians in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug (hereinafter KMAO). Can these family lands serve as a basis for ethnic revival of indigenous people? – this is the question I would like to discuss.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, parallel with the collapse of state and collective enterprises, which used to be the framework for the functioning of traditional branches of economy in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, the resettlement of the indigenous people to the lands of their ancestors was launched. The expectations of the Northern indigenous minority nations to maintain and develop their traditional life and environment, which is the basis of their existence, language, ethnic culture and self-identification, are con-

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nected with the implementation of legal acts, concerning land and natural resources. The attempt of indigenous people to legally safeguard the lands of traditional economic activities, was the most important reason for the creation of family lands in the KMAO. According to the "Regulation about the status of family lands in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug" (1992), these lands are determined as a natural-territorial complex where the indigenous people have historically lived a traditional life. Pursuant to the Regulation, the owners of family lands independently use the natural resources or dealing with the traditional economy (hunting, fishing, animal husbandry, reindeer herding, collection of natural products, etc.), within the boundaries of the family lands (Article 14).

In the territory of the indigenous people of the North, it is possible to form communities which are entitled to determine the rules for the usage of these lands (Article 6) and resources (Article 14) and, on a negotiated basis, issue the right for fishing, hunting wild animals, collection of natural products, using other resources of these lands to companies and natural persons (Article 19).

Settlement of disputed questions and conflict situations is carried out, according to the "Regulation about the status of family lands", by the responsible administration or by court. Prerogatives of the administration include rules for the allotment of family lands (Article 9), registration and execution of the document for the right of ownership of family lands (Article 10), deeds of conveyance (Article 12). On the territories of family lands, as long as with the approval of their owners, local (village) authorities may allocate plots of land for hobby hunting and fishing, collection of natural products, for the production of animal food and for herding of the cattle (Article 18).

Today, there are approximately 460 family lands registered in the territory, about 5% of the Okrug's indigenous population lives there. The average area of family lands, 30 thousand hectares, is strongly differentiated between separate regions (from 5 thousand hectares in Kondinsk to 90 thousand hectares in Berezovsk). From the total area of the Okrug, the family lands occupy about 27% of the lands. The largest share of family lands is in the Surgut region of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug – 54% of the territory, in Nefteyugansk – 49%, in Nizhnevartovsk – 25%.

Such territorial organisation for the traditional use of nature was conceived for the protection of the ancient life environment of the indigenous peoples of the North, for the maintenance and revival of traditional ways of life and spiritual culture of the indigenous peoples of the North. How much these objectives correspond with actual circumstances, can be judged with the help of concrete examples from the life of indigenous people living in family lands.

This paper uses the material collected during the summer of 1999, in the Khanty-Mansi region of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug (geographically, the region lies in the Nazym basin, the administrative centre is Kyshik village). Since ancient times, the indigenous people in the Nazym basin have had two ways of using natural resources conditioned by natural-geographical factors. In the lower course of the river, the main occupation of the population was fishing, supported by animal breeding, hunting and collection of natural products; however, since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, horticulture has also been developed.

In the upper course of the river Nazym, hunting and reindeer herding were predominant, whereas fishing and collection of natural products was of secondary importance. The above-mentioned fields of occupation have preserved until today, but great changes have taken place in the structure and technology of reindeer herding and other industries. Narrow specialisation of large kolkhoses ruined the complexity of the traditional economy; the principles of the organisation of traditional occupations have changed. Industrial lands were far away from village centres. Some of these lands began to de-industrialise, they were neglected, the owners of the lands changed. New conditions led to the introduction of such forms of the usage of natural resources, which were not known earlier by the peoples of the North. Modern means of labour and transportation came into people's life. Traditional branches of the economy were organised differently – planes were used for taking people on fishing expeditions, hunters were sent to hunting lands for a long period of time.

The main part of family lands in the Khanty-Mansi region of the KMAO came into use during 1992–1994, into life-long heritable ownership, during the next year; these lands were rented to the indigenous population, with a term of 2–5 years. According to the data

from 1999, 50 family lands were registered (approximately 22% of the total area of the region). An average area of one family land in the region ranges from 2 thousand to 54 thousand hectares.

Almost all these lands are registered to private persons (to the representatives of the indigenous peoples of the North, as well as to persons who had lived in the region for a long time, and to migrants), only two communities appear to be the owners of the lands ("Trenka" in the Nyalinsk territory and "Sogomsk" in the village of the same name).

Residential and household buildings of the owners of the family lands are mainly in the same place where the "ancient" sites of the Khanty and Mansi used to exist. However, the principles of allocating family lands within the borders of the territory, traditionally used by the ancestors, are not always followed (Article 8 of the "Regulation about the status of family lands"). When obtaining lands, the places, which are closer to the village, are preferred. Every landlord has the photocopy of the map depicting his plot of land and the marking of boundaries. In reality, the borders are not indicated and are currently open to everybody. With the consent of the owners, people from nearby residential areas can go fishing, hunting, pick berries, walnuts, mushrooms. The owners themselves say that exact borderlines are necessary only for regulating mutual relationships with oil and gas producers and geologists relating to signing contracts with industrial enterprises, regarding the compensation for damages for trespassing in the lands.

During the expeditions we managed to visit the lands at the river Ityakh, in the Nazym territory of the Khanty-Mansi region, KMAO. 865 persons have been registered there, 451 out of them are the representatives of the indigenous people of the North (the Khanties are in the majority). The total list of people living in the family lands in 1999 included 42 persons – this is about 9% of the indigenous population (436 Khanties, 12 Nenets, 2 Evenks). The owners of the lands who have united into 14 household economies comprise 18% of the number of single-nationality Khanty families or 11% of the total number of families where at least one member is a Khanty. 9 of these families live in the family lands all the time.

The housing sites of the people who live in the family lands are located on high banks, this was also characteristic of the traditional settlement (it helped to avoid water during floods and the wind kept off mosquitoes and gnats).

The farms of reindeer herders are usually deep in the taiga, surrounded with enclosures made of wooden stakes. In some of these places, traditional Khanty houses have been preserved: winter houses with long awnings above the door and a slightly gabled roof, and summer houses with shelters, the walls of which are made of vertically set wooden blocks.

In N. M. Lozhamov's (b. 1916) cabin, which is as valuable as a museum, there is even a *chuval* (a small clay stove), which cannot be seen very often, in modern life. In every household, there are clay ovens for baking bread – an important element of traditional Khanty culture, which has been lost in many regions of the Okrug.

Summer kitchens are similarly very common; these places have a cast iron oven, which is closed from the wind with a wooden construction on three sides. Near the summer kitchen, there is usually a big table with benches and a smaller table for kitchen utensils. The inevitable attributes of Khanty households – piled storehouses – are still in use, meant for keeping tools and dry food products.

Only these elements of material culture which are necessary for industrial activities with a traditional characteristic, are still in use today. Fishing tools, which have been made according to traditional technologies, are constantly in use: nets, seines, weirs, wicks, etc. For the preparation of fish, the Khanties use old barrels and drying poles. There are many traditional ways for the conservation of food and recipes for dishes. Of hunting equipment, nooses and traps are most commonly used, also used for catching bears and gluttons. Several traditional means of transportation are still in use (nartas, skis and boats), and the skills of sewing traditional clothes have been preserved. However, many cultural phenomena have irreversibly disappeared.

The elements of traditional Khanty culture in the infrastructure of the farmlands live side by side with innovative spirit. In their family lands, the Khanties build solid hewn houses with saunas and toilets. Many people have electric generators, for this reason, there is elec-

tricity in the houses, radios and cassette recorders are working, and some even have TV-sets. People use industrially manufactured standard tools, means of transportation and buy clothes from shops. Brought-in goods have become the part of people's nutrition. Many "landers" have flats in villages and stay in the family lands episodically. Some of those people have a steady job; others live on their pension. It is very problematic to survive in these places when dealing only with traditional branches of the economy.

The most important foodstuff is fish (chebak, ide, pike, roach). The shortage and expensiveness of petrol and the lack of promising markets hamper the freighting out of production. Hunting practice and the fur industry seem to be most unprofitable, this is related to the drastic drop in fur prices (in 1998, a fur of a sable cost 200–250 roubles, fox fur – 150, marten fur – 100–150, ondatra – 8–12, hare – 2–5 roubles; elk meat was bought in for 10 roubles a kilogram).

The collection of natural products (cranberries, cowberries, cedar cones) has become a substantial support for the modern household of the local Khanties. However, it is also remarkably difficult to export these products. In order to have enough to eat, the Khanties are trying to grow potatoes in the lands, and to breed sheep (they are brought from the village for the summer, in motorboats).

When asked, why do they still prefer living in the forest, the Khanties would answer: "We are retired, why sit in the village, why here. It is more peaceful here, fresh air, no tractors and no boiler room."

Trying to summarise the above-mentioned, it is possible to say that the allocation of family lands facilitated the revival of an important layer of traditional culture of the Ob-Ugrians.

Today, a large number of various traditional dwellings, household buildings, implements, food, some types of clothing, hunting and fishing tools, means of transportation and other phenomena of the relevant culture are functioning, in different combinations and levels of preservation, on these lands. In the industrial sphere, traditional technologies are continuing to exist. There is a clear tendency among the northern indigenous people for returning to their traditional lifestyle, however, to my mind, it can be hardly possible to solve the

subject of family lands only by their legal determination. The further development of family lands depends on several objective and subjective problems. Dealing with the traditional branches of the economy in the given area does not provide a stable livelihood. People, who currently live on the lands of their ancestors, do not have a permanent source of food stocks provided by the traditional lifestyle, without an additional income, they cannot survive. The amount of money, earned from selling of traditional articles of trade can hardly cover the manufacturing costs due to the collapse of the market system and high transportation expenses.

The "tribal economy", which has been created today, does more likely adapt the people of the North to the conditions of economic reforms and industrial pressure; it isn't the return to the traditional system of livelihood. In connection with this, other questions arise. As the functioning of traditional culture involves, first of all, traditional activities, it is inevitable that this will broach a question about the perspectives of the traditional branches of the Northern economy. It is obvious that among the various Northern nations, and even among distinct groups within one nationality, the situation is different, depending on concrete natural-economic and social conditions. The situation is not unambiguous in various branches of the Northern economy. Together with the latter, there are moments which, unfortunately, decrease the optimism regarding the future of Northern economies. For the indigenous peoples of the North, the traditional ways of obtaining the means of existence in modern conditions involve a number of problems – it can be the heritage from Soviet times or brought to life due to the new socio-economic situation. Today, the traditional branches of the economy are in deep crisis. They cannot guarantee an adequate material level of life for the indigenous peoples, and, according to the prognoses of numerous specialists, are doomed to perish. First of all, due to the shrinkage of raw resources, conditioned by the industrial penetration of their residential territories. Secondly, due to the reluctance of a large part of young people to live in an "uncivilised" way and the remarkable lumpenisation of indigenous people (increase of marginal groups who have totally lost interest in work).

The current and most deep crisis in the traditional sector of economy of the indigenous peoples of the North can probably be surpassed only with the large-scale support by the state. In this case, from the point of view of maintaining the traditional set-up of these nations, the priority should be given to the households who can provide themselves with food and preserve traditional culture. The protection of the natural environment should be of special concern. It is presumed that the above-mentioned problems should not be examined without the context of modern transformations in the lifestyle of indigenous people.

It is necessary to consider the ever-changing economic and social-demographic realities of today, and, in particular, the far-reaching processes of assimilation and acculturation, which destroy the ethnic basis of northern indigenous communities. Remarkable stratification has taken place in the society of aborigines, it is very common that only a small number of people from among these nations continues to conduct traditional lifestyle, whereas the majority of population lives in villages and towns and works in other branches of economy. Currently, there are no reliable data regarding the number of indigenous people who are involved or would like to be involved in traditional economy. The large number of children who were born and brought up in villages and towns and who went through the system of boarding schools regard the new environment as something natural and traditional. The current situation in several places of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug impedes the idea of the revival of traditional lifestyle. So far, the attempts of finding a way out of the existing situation have not led to expected outcomes.

*Translated by Mall Leman*



# **Reindeer Herding as a Possibility for Maintaining Ethnic Traditions in the Modern Environment. (The Ob-Ugrian Experience)<sup>1</sup>**

**Yelena Martynova**

Ethnologists are more and more convinced that in order to support an ethno-cultural economy among the small nations in the North today, it is of utmost importance to maintain and develop the traditional branches of the economy (hunting, fishing, reindeer herding). According to the observations of numerous specialists, the functioning of traditional culture among the Northern nations is first and foremost connected with reindeer herding. It is precisely the reindeer herders who, in their everyday life, have remained faithful not only to the traditional means of transportation (reindeer yoke), but also to traditional dwellings, clothing, household implements and food. Within the group of indigenous people of the North who mostly are involved in fishing and hunting, the layer of traditional ethnic culture has been maintained less strongly. The same applies to the functioning of native language. The inhabitants who practise reindeer herding also better preserve their native language. It is not accidental that, in the legislative acts regarding the indigenous smaller population groups of the people in the North of Russia, which are being worked on currently, reindeer herding is defined as a branch of the economy, enhancing the maintenance of ethnic differences. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Ob-Ugrian people (Khanty and Mansi) had

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two systems of reindeer herding – the taiga transport-type and tundra nomadic. I will not describe the origin of these two types, but briefly define the relevant ecological conditions.

Taiga transportation reindeer herding is more characteristic of the Ob-Ugrians, spread mainly in the taiga zone – among the Khanties in the lower course of the river Ob (Beryozovo district and Kazym river), the Yugan and Pim rivers, Agan and Tromyugan rivers, Vakh river Khanties and among Sosva and Lyapin rivers Mansi, and also in the areas of forest tundra – among the Khanties around Obdorsk (Salekhard) town and on the Kunovat river.

The traditional subsistence system of these inhabited areas was based on the hunting and fishing industry. Before the period of Soviet changes, the tundra nomadic reindeer herding was prevalent in the lower course of the river Ob – among the Obdorsk and Kunovat groups of the Khanties. Among these people, reindeer herding was the most important branch of the economy and hunting and fishing were of ancillary relevance.

It is also characteristic of taiga reindeer herding that the number of herds is smaller, people are settled (seasonally), the reindeer are used for transportation purposes, both the interests of reindeer herding and industry have been combined, there are existing suitable means for keeping the reindeer in summer and wooden enclosures for keeping the animals (Kozmin 1986: 51).

The tundra system is characterised by the following: the size of herds is remarkably larger (200–250 and more animals); during summer, the reindeer are grouped in herds of 400 or more, they are seasonally moved southwards and northwards; throughout the year, the herds are guarded with the help of reindeer watch dogs which are incorporated within the herd, there is an extended reproduction of the animals, reindeer products are predominantly used in everyday life and the reindeer are used for transportational purposes (Golovnev 1993: 86).

Many elements of the material culture of the Ob-Ugrians are connected with reindeer herding. Thus, already during the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the movable type of dwelling – *chum* began to spread widely among the Sosva and Lyapin rivers Mansi and the Khanties living in the lower course of the river Ob. Many specialists

assume that *chum* was taken over from the Nenets (*Narody Sibiri* 1956: 580; Khomich 1986: 20).

Despite all this, the *chum* has so much been adapted into the Ob-Ugrian environment that it is regarded to be of their own. In winter, the main means of transportation among the Mansi and Khanties who deal with reindeer herding, was the reindeer team. Uralic Khanties differentiate between five types of nartas for driving and 11 types of nartas for carrying purposes, and, depending on their usage, every one of them had its certain characteristics (Randymova 1999: 188).

As the terms for designating nartas are explained in the Khanty language, it is believed that these emerged in the Ob-Ugrian environment. The lower-Ob Khanties and Northern Mansi have a complex entire set of religious beliefs, connected with reindeer herding – every family has a “sacred” narta, where they keep the items of worship, the belief in the soul-patron reindeer.

During the years of Soviet control, the traditional taiga system of the group of Ob-Ugrians was influenced by the tundra system regarding the increase in the size of herds and the change of nomadic routes. In large villages, reindeer kolkhozes and state farms were created, where the dispersing system of reindeer herding was prevalent. It must be noted that in these economies, the main principles of traditional reindeer herding were maintained. Men formed into brigades and worked as herders, and their wives were busy in the *chums* (*chum* workers).

Together with their parents, pre-school children and school-children, during their school holidays, were also in the pasture lands. Among one group of the Khanties who lived in the middle-Ob basin, the traditional taiga system was preserved, without major changes; in many kolkhozes within this area, small reindeer brigades were formed. I want to especially point out that the reindeer which were individually owned by different families, were always pastured according to tradition; this meant that the “ethnic” Khanty and Mansi system was maintained.

According to field research, the profession of a reindeer herder was inherited – usually, it was the children of reindeer herders who went to work in reindeer brigades, after they had finished school. At

least, I have not heard of a situation where the children of fishermen or hunters became reindeer herders.

The maximum number of the reindeer in the Khanty-Mansi Okrug in 1953 was 87 900 animals. Since the end of the 1950s, a decrease in number can be noticed: 1964 – 70 900; 1974 – 55 700; 1984 – 52 100; 1994 – 39 200; 1999 – 32 300. Since the 1950s, the number of individually owned reindeer of the Khanties and Mansi began to decrease, conditioned by the policy of the state, which aimed at depriving and nationalising the means of production. The small number of private reindeer made it easy to herd the animals into kolkhoz and also state cattle, since the latter part of the 1960s. All this was leading to a situation where in many places, the Khanties and the Mansi totally stopped being involved in reindeer herding. The number of people who knew the habits and customs of reindeer herders, decreased considerably.

It is characteristic of the contemporary ethno-cultural development of the Ob-Ugrians, that, on one side, many elements of traditional culture and everyday life have been lost, and on the other side, there is more regard shown towards their own history and towards their traditional lifestyle.

In connection with the above-mentioned, there is an underlying foundation of vitally important “symbols”, which can serve as a basis for supporting the further development of their ancient culture. One of the “symbols of traditionalism” is reindeer herding. Today, there is a relatively wide spread awareness among indigenous people that reindeer herding is one of the most important conditions for maintaining and developing national tradition.

In 1995, during the ethno-social research of the Khanties in the Nefteyugansk region, people were asked to answer the question “Why do you (want to) breed reindeer?”. Many of them said: “In order to support the Khanty traditions.” I want to point out another, to my mind, interesting phenomenon. Regarding ethnic self-concept, the Khanty population in Oktyabrsk, Belyarsk, Khanty-Mansiysk and Nefteyugansk regions, differentiates between the ‘Ostyaks’ and the ‘Khanties’. (According to the scientific point of view, ‘Ostyak’ is the old name of the Khanties, used officially until the year 1931.) Local people connect the ethnic name – Ostyak with the Khanty

word *as yah*, meaning 'the Ob people'. The people who live in the villages on the shores of the Ob river are called the Ostyaks; they are under the strong influence of the Russian population ("the Ostyaks have lived like Russians for a long time"). Characteristic features of the "Ostyak" households involved the development of domestic animals (horses, cows, sheep) and horticulture. "The real Khanties" in these areas are those who practise (or practised earlier) reindeer herding. This understanding is widespread among those asked: "Real Khanties are those who are with the reindeer, in earlier times, they lived in *chums*."

I do need to underline that reindeer herding as a branch of the Northern economy, and *chum*, as a type of Northern dwelling, were not the ethnic key elements in traditional life style among the Ob-Ugrian people. In ethnological literature, the Khanties are, first and foremost, considered to be fishermen and the Mansi – the hunters; it was characteristic for both these ethnic groups to build hewn right-angled pile houses.

The importance of reindeer herding as an ethno-determining branch of the economy is also proved by the fact that until now, among the population who deal with traditional branches of the economy, it is regarded very prestigious to marry a reindeer herder. During private conversations with the Khanties and the Mansi, I often noticed that many parents want to marry their daughters into families of reindeer herders. In this case, the reindeer is expressed as a certain symbol of wealth: the more reindeer there are in a family, the richer the family, and, consequently, the more prestigious the marriage.

Annual holidays, "days of reindeer herders", held regularly in many villages and towns in the North of Russia, also evidence the important role of reindeer herding in preserving and developing of ethnic traditions. At present, the day of reindeer herders is not accepted as much as a professional holiday, but as an ethnic celebration.

This day includes the holding of sports competitions including Northern events and the performance of folklore groups.

The following fact is of special interest. During the ethnographical expedition in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug in the summer of 1999, we met a Russian-Khanty family Nikonovs, who had family lands in the Nazym basin. The head of the family was a Rus-

sian, he did not have a steady job; the wife was a Khanty, worked as a teacher in the Kyshik village secondary school. They had three school aged children. The Nikonovs already kept the reindeer for the fourth year (20 animals in the herd). According to their words, they began to breed the reindeer in order to get meat, and they regard their life in the "family lands" as a hobby. As the wife cannot stay in family lands all the time, the husband who originates from Tyumen Oblast, takes care of the reindeer. Nikonov had been quite successful in acquiring the skills of reindeer herding, he knows a lot about the traditional Khanty culture (peculiarities of the national kitchen, customs), he can manufacture traditional working tools. The family of Nikonovs is, according to specialists, a rare example of an assimilation of a Russian into the Khanty environment. I think that, in the given process, dealing with reindeer herding was not of the least importance.

Despite the fact that many people have admitted that reindeer herding is the most important resource in order to maintain and develop ethnic traditions, it is undergoing a very difficult period in the Khanty-Mansi Okrug today. There are two types of reindeer herding in the Okrug – state-owned (state farms) and private. State owned reindeer herding is carried out only in two state farms – "Kazym" and "Saranpaul". The situation in reindeer herding state farms is, according to specialists, very critical. This branch of the economy in real terms does not bring any profit. The absence of a production line for processing raw materials, is one of reasons for inefficiency. Most often, it is only the reindeer meat and the horns that are being used, but raw skins are left to decay. Female specialist workers deal with the processing of skins, but, after slaughtering of the animals, they manage to manually manufacture only a small proportion of the product. From then on, there is a problem regarding the marketing of the end product.

Another common situation today – there are not enough women in the brigades, which deal with the dispersing system of reindeer herding. The share of women among the small indigenous nations of the North, who have secondary, incomplected higher or higher education, is relatively large. When young women obtain education, they prefer living in villages and do not want to be involved in reindeer herding.

Private reindeer herding began to increase in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug since the 1990s. However, the number of private reindeer in personal stock has not practically increased, despite the fact that local authorities have supported reindeer herding, including the purchasing of animals.

According to the data given by the employee of Scientific Research Institute for Renaissance of Ob-Ugrian Nations, T. G. Kharazin, the number of private reindeer in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug has been the following.

Regions	1997	1998	1999
Beloyarsk	4704	3178	3097
Beryozovo	2083	–	2208
Khanty-Mansiysk	104	–	123
Surgut	5788	5865	6112
Nizhnevartovsk	727	1202	1235
Total number in the Okrug	13406	12000	12775

The largest extent of private reindeer herding is in the Surgut region of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug; in many ways, this can be explained by the specific traditional economic activity of local Khanty groups. The largest private herd contains 500 reindeer. It is important to underline that there is no economic demand for reindeer herding, for 20–30 years already, the reindeer have no longer been used for transportation. Therefore, the indigenous people use motor sledges “Buran” for transport in winter. However, according to their words, many families take “the final attempts to maintain the reindeer tradition”. During the summer period for herding, special “reindeer enclosures” are built for the animals (measuring a length of several kilometres); the reindeer are fed with reindeer moss, dried bread, bread, and mushroom. The reindeer herders themselves regard it to be difficult to keep the reindeer, it needs a lot of time and energy, but nevertheless, people deal with this branch of the economy, despite the fact that for reindeer herding, they have to permanently live in the taiga.

In all habitation areas of the Ob-Ugrians, the indigenous population is divided into the "village" and "camp" people. The first live in relatively well-provided for villages, the unemployment rate among these people is high, they do not practically deal with traditional branches of the economy. They have alienated themselves from the traditional way of life and culture. The second category – the "camp people" or forest Khanties (Mansi), live in wooden surroundings, either in groups consisting of 2–4 families, or separately with their family, in their family lands; they deal with the traditional spheres of economy. Life in the taiga, without shops, schools, medical institutions and other achievements of an industrial society, whether we want it or not, implies the dealing with traditional fields of economy and the maintenance of the numerous elements of traditional culture. Almost none of these families want to resettle in a village. When we asked them: Why?, they answered: "Villages are for drunkards and idlers."

Today, the southernmost area where Ob-Ugrians are involved in reindeer herding, is the Salym basin (Nefteyugansk region, Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug). Only 40–50 years ago, the number of animals in a private herd was up to 50 heads. At the end of the 1990s, there were only 50 reindeer left in the region, kept by three families (about 15–20 animals per family). It is interesting that the significance of reindeer herding has changed completely: it used to be for transportation, but now it conveys a worship-ritual meaning. Traditionally, the reindeer is regarded to be practically the only sacrificial animal among this Khanty group. According to the respondents, the Khanties from the neighbouring Surgut region, who live in the basins of the rivers Great and Small Yugan, and who do not work with reindeer herding, turn to the above mentioned Khanties, in order to get animals for carrying out sacrifices. There is a queue for the "sacrificial" animals, for several years ahead.

There is the revival of reindeer herding in a Khanty-Mansiysk region where there are 123 private reindeer, owned by three families, according to the data from 1999. Reindeer herding has lost its meaning in transportation, the reindeer are not used for transport, they have been replaced by motor sledges. In the taiga, where there are enclosed pasture lands, semi-nomadic reindeer herding has lost its purpose. In the near future, the Regional Department of the North is



planning to buy 100 reindeer for the Beryozovo region and to form a reindeer herding brigade comprising six persons (a co-operative society, under the status of a state enterprise). These people will, in turn, herd animals in their own family lands. According to the potential herders, this is, first and foremost, an attempt to alleviate the problems of unemployment among the indigenous population. The future brigade leader of reindeer herders, N. S. Khorov, has made a proposition to carry out training in reindeer herding skills, for the young members of the brigade.

According to many reindeer herders, the main reason for reducing the number of animals in their stock is because wolves kill the reindeer. I have heard an opinion that earlier, the quantity of these grey predators was remarkably smaller. Now, the number of wolves grows every year. Wolves are a great nuisance for reindeer herders and so far, there are no effective means for destroying them. There is no finance for ordering a helicopter to shoot the predators; not only private owners, but even the state farm can afford this.

Another of today's problems – there is a shortage of women in the reindeer herding brigades of the state farms. The majority of them have secondary, incomplete higher and higher education. When young women obtain education, they prefer living in villages and do not want to nomadise in a *chum*. The scarcity of women in this sector has a negative impact on the living and working conditions in reindeer herding brigades because a substantial part of the work in a nomadic situation is carried out by women – sowing and repairing of leather clothes, preparation of food, the arrangement of both *chum* and camp.

It is also necessary to note that reindeer herding does not practically bring any profit. One of the reasons for this is the absence of a production system for processing raw materials. Most often, it is only the reindeer meat and the horns that are being used, but raw skins are left to decay. Female specialist workers deal with the processing of skins in the brigades, but they manage to manually manufacture only a small proportion of the product.

Despite the existing difficulties, the Khanties and Mansi, together with other peoples of the North, are determined to solve the problems in this branch of the economy. The Union of Reindeer Herders in Russia and the Union of Private Reindeer Herders in the Khanty-

Mansi Autonomous Okrug pay a lot of attention to the questions regarding the preservation of the reindeer herding culture.

It is important to emphasise that there is no economic demand for reindeer herding, for the last 20–30 years, reindeer have no longer been used for transportation because during the winter period, the indigenous people use motor sledges “Buran” for transport. However, according to their words, many families make “the final attempts to maintain the reindeer”. During the summer period for herding, special “reindeer enclosures” are built for the reindeer (measuring a length of several kilometres), the animals are fed with reindeer moss, dried bread and mushroom.

The reindeer herders themselves regard it as being difficult to keep reindeer because this needs a lot of time and energy, but nevertheless, people deal with this branch of the economy, namely because this maintains the traditional system of livelihood.

It is important to underline that reindeer herding has never been observed as a profitable branch of the traditional economy, and currently, the Khanty and the Mansi evaluate this as the most “ethnic” of all economic activities, aimed at the preservation of traditional characteristics of culture and livelihood. The reindeer are kept “in order to obtain meat” and as a “means” for the struggle against unemployment, because, among the traditional Northern branches of the economy, only reindeer herding provides steady work.

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*Translated by Mall Leman*

# **The Influence of Environment on the Identity of Pim River Khanties<sup>1</sup>**

**Anzori Barkalaja**

The geographical area covered by this article lies in Western Siberia, and concerns, more precisely, the basins of the rivers Pim, Tromyugan and Lyamin in Surgut region. The Khanties who inhabit this region, according to language and culture features, belong to the Eastern group of Khanties. The semiospherical area I have chosen covers the connections between environment<sup>2</sup> and identity among the people traditionally living along these rivers.

In earlier papers, I have distinguished among the aborigines' three groups: the Forest-, the Village- and the City-Khanties (inspired by the term City-Sámi used by the Sámi living on the territory of the Republic of Finland). This division is also justified by the influence of the Khanties' environment on their identity and models of behaviour.

In this article, I will not touch upon the questions of identity either as a phenomenon or as a notion; I will merely use some of its characteristics as a basis for study and comparison. The main concepts concerned by the present research are the feeling of geographical identity, the way of life and the world view (including the religious system). One important feature of the Khanties' geographical identity is the river-based division: e.g. the Pim river Khanties, the Kazym river

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<sup>2</sup> Under the term 'environment', in addition to the geographical environment, I also mean semiotic environment like world view, mentality, the cognitive map of perceived reality, etc.

Khanities, etc. Each territorial unit (in the area chosen, the rivers flow into the same river) is governed by a determined god or goddess (Barkalaja 1996a: 127–128) (as the Khanities do not distinguish clearly the types of spirits and the boundaries between spirits and the humans beings are most confused, the terms ‘god’ and ‘goddess’ must be taken as most relative – Barkalaja 1996a: 125–126). Other criteria have been lately added to the river-based division, as the type of living environment when the Khanities split as far as their paradigmatic way of life is concerned.

For practical aims will build my short historical presentation of the Khanities’ cultural contacts on the world view concept. The world view is constantly influenced mainly by both cultural contacts and environmental changes. I will touch quite briefly upon the contacts of the Khanities both with Russian culture and with tsarist and Soviet rule, for these factors as the main elements, which influenced the Khanities’ world view have been already analysed in my master’s thesis and previous papers (Barkalaja 1999a; 1999b).

Until the 1960s, the Khanty communities on the rivers Pim and Tromyugan lived almost in isolation. Practically no influence of tsarist rule on Khanty lifestyle and identity has been recorded. The attempts of the church to convert the Khanities *in corpore* practically failed (Karjalainen 1918: 11; Bazanov 1936: 14–15, 32; Shcheglov 1993: 104; Barkalaja 1999a: 71–72; 1999b: 53–57): christianisation through “double religion” (Zamalejev & Ovchinnikova 1991), which had succeeded with Russians, did not succeed, in spite of the emergence of some interesting syncretistic family traditions and beliefs (Barkalaja 1999a: 74–77; 1999b: 57–66). Nevertheless, these features were not widespread and are recorded as regular only on the Southern Khanities’ area. Formal as they were, the Khanities’ connections with the church, were mostly due either to the violent methods used in order to baptise them (Bazanov 1936: 16–17; Karjalainen 1918: 12–13; Barkalaja 1999b: 55) or to the opportunities thus given of gaining economic profit (Balzer 1978: 435–438; Shcheglov 1993: 104).

Although the lifestyle of the Khanities living in Surgut region was at first disturbed by the Soviet rule, did the new power’s activity discontinued because of the environmental conditions. For example,

in the basins of the Pim and the Lyamin rivers sporadic campaigns of collectivisation took place: e.g. the creation of fish collective factories and scattering private reindeer herds, the building of a village, which were afterwards moved piece-by-piece into the new location according to the preference of the colonist leaders, followed by the decay of the same village and the return of the Khanties to their traditional lifestyle (Semyon Pesikov, Lyamin river, 1993). Religious persecution, the so-called shaman-hunt, also was carried out less effectively than in the Kazym area (let us recall the Kazym war), on the banks of the Ob river and in other more accessible places (Leete 1998; Barkalaja 1999a: 72–73).

The actual invasion of the foreign culture in Pim, Lyamin and Tromyugan regions occurred with the start of oil production in the Surgut area in the 1980s of oil deposits (oil production had started in Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug as soon as the end of the 1950s – Gorshkov & Popov 1998: 38). The mass migration caused by the “oil rush” reached the city of Surgut and later the town of Lyantor which was built in place of the Pim village. Between the 1970s and the 1990s, the population of the Surgut region increased 7,4 times, the urban population 9,4 times (Sokolova 1998: 95).

A road network was built in order to meet the needs of oil industry causing the massive felling of timber. The invasion of industrial culture was very sudden and brutal, and submitted the native populations to a serious cultural shock. Unlike what happened during the collectivisation, now the living environment of the Khanties was being destroyed, their lands were taken for oil production.<sup>3</sup> The main factors causing the above mentioned cultural shock, apart from the loss of their lands, were a humiliating approach towards the Khanty mental culture repression against the main preservers of traditions, the shamans and mainly the impossibility of leading the traditional way of life (Leete 1998; Barkalaja 1996b: 52–53). Some families were broken by psychical tension and died out for different causes

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<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to observe the course of creation of the oil industry and the roads leading to it. The roads usually pass through the former Khanty settlements, marking the way the geologists followed looking for oil and moving from one host to another.

(most commonly because of alcohol abuse. Most of the fatal accidents, suicides and murders were and are still committed under the influence of alcohol. The groups involved in abusive alcohol consumption mostly belong to the younger and middle-aged generations i.e. to the main basis for people's reproduction) (Barkalaja 1996b: 56). Some families, nevertheless, succeeded to recover from the shock and started to look for new opportunities for survival (Barkalaja 1996a: 131–132; 1996b: 57–60; 1997: 65–66; 1999c: 63). Although the situation has somehow improved after the *perestroika*, we can still observe some clearly racist behaviour in the coloniser's everyday communication with the natives as well as severe violations of Khanties' rights, up to murders committed by the Soviet militia (Barkalaja 1996b: 54–55, 57; Taagepera 1999: 373–387). As far as the Khanties can live on wooded grounds, the influence of the depressive factors mentioned above hasn't any irreversible effect. The factor leading to fatal consequences is mainly the takeover of Khanties' lands and their forced migration from their native areas. All the natives from the Pim river were gathered into the village of Lyantor, which in the 1990s was given the status of a town. In the Tromyugan area, they were collected into the village of Russkinskie (Barkalaja 1996b: 56).

Under the influence of external factors, a social stratification emerged among the Khanties, based on the changes in living environment. The families not directly touched by the invasion tried to preserve their traditional way of life and world view. Inside the *socium*, a structural change in positions among the Khanties who had retained their forest-oriented lifestyle could also be noticed. Some families who belonged formerly to the peripheral sphere became, in a very short period, the leading families of the region. One example of such a group is the large family of the Kanterovs. As the Kante-  
rovs occupied a low social position in the old system, they were mentally better prepared to react by non-traditional means to new extreme situations. As they couldn't any longer solve problems and behave according to a model relying on shamanism, they were more open to the outside world and it was easier for them to borrow new elements. For example, they were the first who started to use motor-

powered equipment, who brought electricity and television to their forest households. Moreover, members of this family became mediators between the Forest-Khanties and the local officials of the colonial power, thus acting as a link between two different worlds.<sup>4</sup> The same family was the first in this area to break taboos (e.g. the taboo of mushroom-eating<sup>5</sup>) and to introduce new technologies (e.g. cultivation of potatoes not only on the village fields but also at their forest households; introduction of the so-called Russian house – including an attic and gable roof; use of aluminum wire in making fishing gear, of plastic as a cover in tent-house building; introduction of sauna, etc.). Such innovation on the material level leads also to cognitive and world view transformations as well. Yëgor Kanterov, the actual leader of the Kanterov family, has told me, more than once, that he is a non-believer, that he believes in science. According to him, no assertion, even if it relies on tradition, can be taken seriously unless it is “scientifically” proved (through the empirical experience *inter alia*). This attitude brings about different interesting phenomena. For example, the Kanterov family considers the radio, *a priori*, as the source of truthful information. Also, references to the impersonal category of scholar as a source of information, confers higher authority to statements and announcements. Their intensive orientation towards machine-centered culture and way of life provoked unexpected counteraction from the traditional world. If the obligation for organizing regional *myyrs*<sup>6</sup> communicated by the gods via dreams

<sup>4</sup> I became aware of the separation that the Pim river Khanties draw between “Khanty world” and “Russian world” when I asked why the Khanties do not use their shaman powers to fight the Russian invasion. They replied that a shaman may have his influence on another Khanties but not on the Russians because the Russians are coming from a different world. The Pesikov family tradition, where Semyon Pesikov’s elder daughter got under the protection of the “Russian god” and later started to lead a “Russian way of life” shows how seriously the Khanties take the existence of the “Russian world” (Barkalaja 1999b: 66).

<sup>5</sup> The reason why it was not allowed to eat mushrooms was their heavenly origin. The utilitarian explanation is that mushrooms were a major addition in the reindeer’s unvaried food ration (information from the members of the Kanterov family, the Ai-Pim river).

<sup>6</sup> Collective sacrifices by the Khanties living in the region (look in Barkalaja 1997; 1999c).

can be explained through the subconscious influence of social prestige, it is still difficult to explain the following case. After the death of the guardian of the family's holy dolls, "the gods elected" as new guardian the grandson of the deceased, who didn't know nor cared much for oral inheritance and traditions. The young man refused to take over the function and after that he started to be a victim of accidents. His uncle pressured the shaman, demanding the charge of the sacred dolls for himself, but the gods "remained stubborn". But when the accidents started to become life threatening, the boy finally accepted the functions and the accidents stopped. He established got married, became interested in traditions and, following the advice of "councillors", performed the rites needed for taking over the position (Barkalaja 1996a; 1996b: 57–58).

The second example comes from the same region – the upper course of the Pim river. The father died, and his wife was advised to move to the "national village" in the town of Lyantor for a "better life". The most active advisers were the town officials who described the advantages of city life (later it was revealed that the oil companies were expecting to take over the lands). As she was yielding to the pressure, her dead husband appeared in her dreams and advised her not to move to Lyantor, in order to avoid the situation where their sons would become Russianised and that the family would die out. According to Khanty traditions, the house of a deceased is abandoned, unless the master himself stipulates otherwise before his death. In this case, the spirit gave the permission for going on using the house and promised to help his wife. Later the woman felt the presence of her husband, especially during hard times. The children were sent to boarding-school but they were taken back to live in the forest as soon as they got the three-grade basic education. Following the example of the Kanterovs, she managed to settle her relations with the oil company and town officials and is still convinced that staying in the forest, although economically disadvantageous, was the right thing to do. We can find more examples where "another world" or "the world of legends" (Lintrop 1995: 102–103; 1996) manifests itself and influences the decisions taken by the Khanties, for example in determining the dates for sacrifices and the persons



performing them, in the procedures for turning someone into a shaman (Barkalaja 1996b: 57–60; 1997: 59, 67), etc.

The Khanties draw a line between the “Khanty world” and the “Russian world”: belonging to one or to the other gives, in their beliefs immunity against the phenomena that we call “supernatural” means of influence (Barkalaja 1999b: 68)<sup>7</sup>. The city as the environment in everyday life is the strongest precondition in belonging to the “Russian world”.

The number of the City-Khanties is constantly increasing due to the natural growth in population, for many natives try to solve their problems by abandoning their original world and trying to become “Russians”. This process is similar to the Estonian experience, where rural people tried to settle in towns and to become “Germans”. For the same reasons, some Khanties moved to the city; their tendency to go outside their own ethnic group and their obvious preference for Russians or similar ethnic groups reveals their behavioural change (Barkalaja 1996b: 54–55, 57). In some specific cases, the rejection of the Khanty world is connected with the world view or, to be more exact, beliefs. One of the sons of a family living on the Lyamin river abandoned the old way of life because, according to the family tradition, only one man from each generation will stay alive (Barkalaja 1999b: 63). Mostly, the reasons for leaving are of an economic nature (people go to the cities to look for an “easy life”). Another motivation for leaving is the eventual rise in social status caused by the external cultural and political environment. This was supported by the soviet election system: at every level, a certain number of people from different social classes and also from native ethnic groups were systematically included. It is interesting to analyse the new stratifica-

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to notice that the division of Khanty into “ours” and “strangers” is not carried by the negative approach about which we are warned by warns Lawrence Grossberg (1996: 96–97) but rather by the productive state of mind that defines the individual’s efficiency in a certain environment. This state of mind is described in the Western cultural sphere in three ways: “(1) the subject as a position defending the possibility and the source of experience and, by extension, of knowledge; (2) the agent as a position of activity; and (3) the self as the mark of identity” (Grossberg 1996: 97–98) with everything resulting from them.

tion based on behaviour and attitudes, among City-Khanties which reveals their identity consciousness.

Some of the City-Khanties reject any possible connection with their people and ostentatiously speak Russian with their fellow countrymen, although they are able to speak in their native tongue. Further amalgamation with Russians is hampered by the excessive difference in the two ethnic groups' phenotype which plays an important role in the racism-favorable environment. If they succeed in marrying someone from the Russian-speaking community, their children will be raised to be "Russians".

There are also City-Khanties who have preserved contacts with their relatives. Many of them have their personal *ugodie* – inherited kinship-territory (Ventsel 1998: 4). Their behaviour shows clearly the different strata that compose their identity feelings.<sup>8</sup> These Khanties are mostly working in fields connected with the regulation of economic and legal relations between the native people and the oil industry. Their priorities are first to improve their own economic conditions, then to take care of their relatives, and finally to assist the other native people. Such behaviour sparks off serious tensions among the Forest-Khanties: the family protects "its own" City-Khanties, while but the others react to them in an extremely negative way. Thus, the claims concerning the City-Khanties' estrangement have quite opposite reasons depending on the source (Ventsel 1998: 6). It is therefore difficult to obtain an objective picture on the City-Khanties using interviews, for the information received is substantially controversial. The main feature, we are concerned with, is that these City-Khanties working in "executive positions" try to preserve their connections with their family lands and live a kind of double-life, fully participating on one hand in sacrificial rituals, but still trying to hide any signs of this part of their life in the city environment.

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<sup>8</sup> To some extent this state of mind can be described with terms like 'fragmentation' and 'hybridity', described by L. Grossberg in his inductive overview on the essence of identity (1996: 91–92). In fact, he describes the possibilities for having several contemporaneous identities which may lead to the situation usually considered by the positivistic paradigm as schizophrenic, as from the Olympian heights of empirical positivism the situational objectivity of mullah Nasreddin is not to be expected.

City-Khanties working in the field of ideology, education and culture (i.e. the so-called intelligentsia), especially younger women, form a separate group. They are clearly hesitant and embarrassed when they participate in traditional events and rites. But, they are extremely involved and authoritarian in staging old traditional rites in festivals etc., acting as higher experts than the old men who perform the rituals themselves.

The lack of self-confidence in behaviour is particularly obvious among the Khanty village intelligentsia (schoolteachers, cultural workers, etc.). In a participatory experiment we have provoked during our expeditions domestic prayers. In these cases, the uneasiness both in following the ritual and in the emotional reactions to this was so manifest among this social group, that people were close to hysterical behaviour. This crisis perception is possibly caused by the opposition at the level of consciousness between on one hand the traditional collective memory based on shamanistic world view and, on the other hand, the basic code of the Soviet Union's educational system. This which implicitly included the oppression of native cultures (as the fight against nationalist relic) and the depreciation of the religious world view ("religion is opium to the people", "giving culture to the natives, excluded from development").

The Village-Khanties are the most mixed group, which embraces almost all of the social groups as far as economic and social positions are concerned (Barkalaja 1996b: 55–56). This part of Forest-Khanty families, who were compelled to leave their original environment, and has not been able to adjust in their new cultural environment, has in the meantime lost the "feeding" connections with the "Khanty world" because of the lack of its material rallying component – the activity area corresponding to the family's sacred places. In this group, alcoholism, suicides and accidents are most widely spread. These families are condemned to die out.

I have thus chosen the attitude towards the religious tradition as a basic element for comparison between the Forest-, Village-, and City-Khanties. According to Joachim Mol, religion is the solemnisation of identity (Gopalan 1978: 124). Social identity is preserved by performing common rituals (Mol 1978: 191) and by having common sacred places (Barkalaja 1999b: 68). If one does not have any sacred

place, one loses orientation in ethical values and one's social behaviour becomes inconsistent. Also, behaviour towards the *socium* ceases to be constructive and one suffers social degradation. Sacred rituals performed in sacred places code again and again one's conscience as archeacts<sup>9</sup>, functioning as "the recreators of universe".

Nevertheless, through the traditional "Khanty world", the "world of legends" has not lost its power on the Khanties who have maintained the connection with their forefathers' legends and their traditional environment. This power is most often becoming apparent through supernatural experiences. Supernatural experiences play an important part in counterbalancing the evolution towards the so-called Russian way of life and identity: the changes in actual life are thus mentally stabilized through spiritual world and the families' connection with life in forest is preserved.

The archetypes to be found in myths contain the fundamental codes for identity, values, ethics etc. These codes affect human behaviour. In myth studies, researchers argue about the primacy of ritual (action) or myth (instructions for action). The method of connecting both (Sidorenko 1999: 85) has also been studied, but a closer approach shows that this method just confronts rituals and myth, putting them into the same system. It seems nevertheless that archetypes and archeacts (as respectively myth and ritual) are related more like electric and magnetic fields: they constantly recreate each other giving thus the basis for light spreading. In this comparison, culture (in our case the Khanty world) is seen as light.

According to their social position, different families chose different ways of reacting to changes, but all the families which try to preserve their traditional identity are characterised by the highest importance given to spiritual tradition. In some cases this attitude is conscious, while in some cases it is unconscious and appears in instructions for behaviour given through different supernatural experiences. These supernatural experiences counterbalance most strongly the move-

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<sup>9</sup> P. Burnel's term 'archeact' has been used by I. Sidorenko in analysing the function of a cultist act from the aspect of protecting person's spiritual world (Sidorenko 1999: 58, 62).

ment towards the so-called Russian lifestyle and identity, thus stabilising through the spiritual world changes occurring in real life, preserving families' connections with traditional forest life<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> A good example is reindeer herding among the Pim river Khanties: it does not have any great economic importance but plays an important role in the sacral world and identity.

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# **Religion as a Factor in Preserving a Nation's Self-consciousness (using the Udmurt example)**

**Tatyana Minniyakhmetova**

The topic discussed in this article has not been thoroughly studied in Udmurtia, although some researchers have briefly touched it upon.<sup>1</sup> Thus, there is no existing comparative data and comparative analyses about different ethnic groups living in this region. The absence of such data complicates the study of this problem and creates many controversies. This brief research does not lead to final conclusions, but rather emphasises some aspects in those complicated issues.

Socio-economical, political and cultural conditions cause the forming, strengthening and continuation to the younger generations of habits, aims, values, ethnic identities and feelings. In the different stages of the historical formation of *ethnos*, the ethnic psychology and the ethnic self-consciousness have peculiarities that later become the ground on which some specific characteristics of mentality, behavior and lifestyle are developed (Shklyayev 1998: 5).

The natural and geographical conditions, religious factors and contacts with other ethnic groups have had great influence on the formation of the Udmurt ethnic mentality. Either in Russia or in Udmurtia, the Udmurts have been set aside from the problems of the State or the World. All the occurring changes have their influence on the Udmurts and the Udmurts themselves do not ignore changes in society.

Such a situation means for us new words and expressions, some of which do not interest the ordinary people but some, meanwhile initiate great interest and discussion.

Lately, ethnic identity has become fashionable among the Udmurts. It is discussed everywhere by experts, politicians, officials,

and by everybody else. Sometimes these discussions lead to absurdity: "Will the other nationalities be driven out from Udmurtia?" – ask the neighbors of the Udmurts. Very negative and disdainful expressions about the Udmurts can be found both in the official and tabloid press. Sometimes the sacral matters of the Udmurts are discussed in an ironic and humiliating manner.

Ethnic identity can be defined as a human spiritual condition which has developed on the basis of former generations' experiences and which is developed further by the whole culture, being also reflected in the nation's behavior. The unity of human behavior depends on their worldview. Only the understanding of the nation's worldview and behavior gives us the opportunity to observe how people understand certain matters.

A factor that helps to preserve self-consciousness is religion, which has its part in the formation of ethnic characteristics. The Udmurt religion was influenced by beliefs connected with nature, kinship and common oral heritage as such. Although Orthodoxy was spread among the Udmurts, it did not suppress the traditional Udmurt worldview. Orthodoxy spoiled the Udmurt way of relating to nature, but nature continued to influence the formation of Udmurt characteristic features. The ethnic psychology has been shaped mostly by belief, religion and ritual connected to natural phenomena.

It is known that until today a high self-consciousness (language, folklore, teaching the Udmurt language at schools, reading the press, etc.) has been preserved in those groups, which still practice the ancient Udmurt religion. Thus, 90% of the Udmurts living beyond the Kama River consider Udmurt as their native tongue. Among the Udmurts living in Udmurtia, this percentage is 75,7% (1989) (*Natsionalnyi sostav...* 1991: 40).

In 1990, 48 out of 60 Udmurts living in Bashkir villages were educated in Udmurt or took a course in the Udmurt language and literature. By the year 2000, Udmurt schools and classes were opened in eight villages – not only in Udmurt but also in Russian, Bashkir and Tatar villages where there is some Udmurt population (according to data of the Ministry of Education of Bashkortostan Republic). This Udmurt group also reads the press more than the



others, in 1999 it published a newspaper called “*Oshmes*” with a 3000 copy circulation (according to this newspaper, January 2000).

The saying *Mi chyn udmurtjes* ‘We are the genuine Udmurts’ (Khristolyubova, Minniyakhmetova 1994: 3), spread among nature-believing Udmurts from beyond the Kama River is also connected to Udmurt traditional religion. Unlike the other Udmurts, they have preserved their ancient religion until today. The strongest curse word they use is *kräshin*, meaning ‘baptised’, which is not used in conversation with people belonging to other ethnic groups. Thus we can see that the main characteristic of self-consciousness among the Udmurts from beyond the Kama River is religion. The Udmurts belonging to this group have actually migrated to their areas of inhabitation. The researchers have noticed that their migration has been caused by political and economical changes. The Udmurts themselves connect their migration to the regions beyond the Kama River with the wish to preserve their religion (Nasibyllin 1972; Sadikov 2000: 9–10; Minniyakhmetova 2000: 4).

This view is often explained and elaborated to the growing generation by the contemporary Udmurt folk stories. Although the Udmurts’ fight for ethnic equality has never turned into a national struggle for freedom, it still was expressed as a protest by, – escaping to the woods, isolation from the other peoples, emigration to distant regions. This is also why Udmurts appeared in the regions beyond the Kama River. The first written evidence about their presence in this area is dated 1572 (Radishchev 1952: 255). The biggest wave of Udmurt migration to this region occurred in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Sadikov 2000: 9–10). It is remarkable that they settled in areas which, still in the Early Middle Ages, according to archaeological sources, were inhabited by Finno-Ugrians.

The following of ancient religious norms does not isolate this group from modern civilization and from taking advantage of this. Everybody who wishes has the opportunity to live in their native land or in a faraway city, to study or to work, to wear whatever clothing they prefer, to eat every kind of food, to buy and to use computers or cars – this is not prohibited by traditional religion.

Belonging to this traditional religion does not mean intolerance towards the other confessions and ethnic groups. Those people try not to disturb others and expect not to be disturbed themselves.

The neighbors of the Udmurts living beyond the Kama River are of the Turkish race, Russians and Maris. Different from the Udmurts living in Udmurtia and communicating mostly with Russians, the Udmurts living beyond the Kama River have more contact with different Turkish ethnic groups. Unfortunately, they are often therefore publicly insulted and humiliated. What can be done if our neighbors do not respect our values?

The Udmurts follow the rule: *Az'vyl oz'y karo vylilljam, soin oz'y karyny kule* ('If something has always been done in a certain manner we must continue doing it in the same way').

The Udmurts from beyond the Kama River have not lost the traditions connected to the old religious practices. Also during the Soviet times, in spite of prosecution, they continued to worship their gods and spirits.

Traditions and originality are mostly preserved in the traditions and rituals connected to kinship and relatives. Every generation acknowledges its debt to their forefathers.

The members of this Udmurts' group are much more active than the other Udmurts. They actively participate in all Udmurt activities – congresses, festivals and seminars. Before the elections in Udmurtia, the Bashkir Udmurts travel throughout the country agitating the people to vote for the Udmurt candidates.

After the law on ethnic-cultural autonomy was accepted in Bashkortostan, the Udmurts also started to discuss the possibilities for their own cultural autonomy.

In 1994, a new house of prayer was built in the Vil' gurt village of Tatyshly county. The re-establishing of sacred places has become a common practice in many regions.

Many Udmurts from beyond the Kama River, including several well-known people, have preserved their traditional religion until today.

An especially interesting personality appears to be Kasim Galikhanov – an architect and artist, who designed an architectural project for preserving the Udmurt traditional religion in the capital

Izhkar. Another prominent artist – Mensadyk Garipov also originates from the same ethnic group. His works are well described in Svetlana Chervonnaya's book "All Our Gods are with us and Fighting for us. (Ethnic Identity and Ethnic Mobilisation in Russian Nationalities' Contemporary Art)":

"The graphical cycles by Mensadyk Garipov depict complete artistic phenomena – illustrations of Udmurt myths, songs and incantations; compositions on themes from Udmurt traditional customs. He recreates with almost encyclopedic completeness the religious mythological image of the Earth. He was well acquainted with the subject and handled it in a very subtle manner. The characters of his illustrations always wear Udmurt folk costumes and they are surrounded with objects whose historical and ethnic accuracy has been checked in detail" (Chervonnaya 1999: 101–103). The author of the book has the highest opinion about Garipov's work.

In my short overview, I brought out only some examples where we can observe the originality of the Udmurts from beyond of the Kama River, which is in my opinion, closely connected to their religion.

The situation in this region is far from being satisfactory – new problems occur every day.

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*Translated by Marti Mätas*

# **The Ainu in Japan: Ethnic Identity and Cultural Definitions**

**Gábor Wilhelm**

At the beginning of the year 1997, the Japanese government officially recognised the Ainu as an indigenous Japanese minority group. This was the first time in Japan that a minority ethnic group had gained specific treatment because of its ethnic differences, at least at the level of official categorisation. In the precedents of this political act, there belong very close contacts between the Ainu and the Japanese inhabitants (mainly in Hokkaido) of more than 100 years that resulted in the assimilation of the Ainu to the Japanese way of life, furthermore the Ainu's participation at international human and ethnic rights organisations and a legal case in Nibutani. The Ainu, in the 1980s, began to take part in the new ethnic movement because they recognised their own situation to be very similar to that of other ethnic groups, i.e. of the Native Americans, Aboriginal Australians or Arctic peoples. Parallel to this development, Ainu culture became, in the last decades, either a tourist attraction or museum artefacts.

This paper aims to show how this new situation influenced ethnic policy in Japan, how legal cases and human rights arguments entered the field, and what kind of role Ainu culture plays in this process. I wish to focus on the actual and changing social contexts of ethnic identity formation that have constrained the choices the Ainu could make and argue that all ethnic identity formation, claims and recognition are at any levels political. I also wish to emphasise that ethnic classification, in itself, seldom influences fundamentally people's way of life but it can be used in certain circumstances as an effective tool to draw attention to specific social situations, rights claims etc.

In order to address this complex process, I wish to concentrate on a single event: the Nibutani dam case between 1993 and 1997. In my view, this occasion can serve as an instance to show how concepts such 'culture', ethnic rights, identity and ethnic policy behave in very concrete contexts of social interactions from which they did not necessarily originate (Wilson 1997: 13). I do not wish to assume that social actions that constitute the case are in any respect representative either for the Ainu or even for Japanese institutions. I am not even sure that such actions exist. But in my opinion, these actions can be viewed as possible ones that can tell us something about the structure of ethnic interactions and the ideologies behind them.

In the following, I will sketch briefly the theoretical framework I wish to use for the analysis of the Ainu case. By this, I will emphasise the contextual and political nature of ethnic identity formation or ethnicity (Barth 1969). I also try to concentrate on the question of how different *types* of contexts of ethnic interaction can be identified, and how they powerfully influence the process of identity formation. I suppose that these types of contexts constrain the strategies the Ainu can and have used and also the way in which Japanese governments have handled this problem. This consideration means that by analysing ethnic identity we must exactly point to the context on which our interpretations focus. In order to narrow the field of my investigation, I will concentrate on the context of interaction between the Ainu and the Japanese, without dealing with contexts of ethnic identity formation *among* the Ainu. I shall examine several periods in this respect since, as I see it, to understand Ainu and Japanese ethnicity we need to go back a little time in history.

### **The analytical framework**

Ethnic identification can take place under very different social, political and economic circumstances and it can also have different forms (Keefe 1992) but it also seems to be a direct consequence of interactions with and contact between different human groups. These

groups can be of very different complexity and their position in a social hierarchy can also vary to a high degree. It is therefore no surprise to observe that these groups have not the same power to enforce their classifications, which themselves are of different nature and complexity according to their specific functions. It is important to emphasise that it is this power and not the actual content in itself that gives essence to classifications and produces effects during interactions.

The range of possible classification contexts varies from everyday interaction between roughly equal groups or individuals to those between state institutions. These latter types of social agents use the most rigid and most powerful classification systems, which are guided through disciplinary techniques for enforcing them. This kind of institutional differentiation of the social and the natural world is perhaps one of the simplest among all the possible types. It is because in the case of social institutions complexity must inevitably be reduced for political control. In this respect, it stands in sharp contrast to the much higher complexity of everyday classification systems with their easily and often shifting contents used for descriptions of socially close persons. It follows, from all these, that identity formation is continually *constructed* through (the different kinds of) interactions (Turney 1999: 424).

Attention should be paid to the fact that it is not always the type of the community itself that determines the kind of classification but rather the type of context in which the interaction takes place. And again, during interactions between different kind of social agents the differentiation system of the more powerful agent counts. This observation can give some hints for answering the question of why ethnic (as well as other) classifications seem so natural and essential for the agents involved. This is not too surprising for the complex institution practising political and social control because of their function as a necessary means of control, the rigidity of their structure and the sense of importance and emotions that surround them. On the other hand, the classification systems used in everyday contexts between non-dominant and close social actors were described as shifting and highly contextual in content and force. Nevertheless, minority groups often also tend to naturalise their ethnicity or cultural identity

in almost the same fashion as dominant institutions do. The reason for that can be deduced from the 'enforced contextualisation' of identity formation. If a non dominant group or individual interact with a dominant one it is always the latter's frame of classification that can only be used because of the different context defining power of the two agents.

As long as the form (context) and thus the content of ethnic categorisation is influenced and controlled only by the dominant institutions, the conflicts concerning the status of the minority groups have little impact on the classification system and the political, moral position of these institutions. This is even so if the distinctions made by dominant social actors concern groups that develop their own distinctions. Controversies can affect the classification when formerly non-dominant agents begin to gain political influence. In this case, conflicts over classification closely reflect non-agreement over social order.

It would be perhaps unfair to say that dominant institutions are unable to deal with changing situations, but their interactions and conceptual tools seem to be much less flexible and situation-dependent than everyday ones. Part of the explanation for this observation can be found in the following argument. As previously mentioned, dominant institutions are too complex, removed and their social function too limited in range for handling effectively the everyday complexity of the changing world through control. In institutional settings, the importance for control increases and, at the same time, the ability to deal with complexity decreases. Institutions need, for controlling, easily identifiable social actors that are not changing in their structure and role from situation to situation, and that have at least sharp conceptual demarcations. If there are too many agents to be controlled or to be described, institutions must step back to be as abstract as possible in their categorisation and thus try to objectify the flux of social life. They need tools, therefore, to form stable categories that are able to cover the rich world of the actors' everyday behaviour. In order to identify these kinds of categories of social agents, they often refer to their power position in the social hierarchy. As we can observe throughout the world, ethnic minority groups are in most cases



located at the non-dominant end of the actual social hierarchy, but already inside the territory controlled by the dominant actors, and in this respect they are unwilling to be identified and recognised as *separate* actors, heterogeneous groups by those dominant institutions. From this point of view, they represent at least 'local variations' for the state. In order to oppose all these considerations, to have a more fine-graded categorisation, a new conceptual tool is needed for both parts of the ethnic interaction. And this means is called 'culture'.

If we examine the contexts of ethnicity or of ethnic interactions, we may find that their content is in most cases about rights, control, maintenance of social roles, and not about ethnic symbols like costumes, songs or rites. These visible ethnic markers may, of course, play an important role in decisions as to whether some interactions should be initiated with certain groups or individuals, that is whether these individuals or groups belong to the same ethnic community or not, a feature that can be of importance in some cases. On the other hand, in most instances the interactions are about control over the use of such symbols; and also, ethnic symbols are often used in *post hoc* interpretations and for manipulations of a great number of social interactions. These ethnic markers, however, seldom build the central themes of ethnic ideologies as part of lived (that means cultural) experiences since they are too complex to be conceptualised by institutions with regard to their interest in control and abstract categorisation.

The question of what kind of function ethnic symbols have in ethnic ideologies of the dominant institutions is highly dependent on the specific interests and aims of these groups. Looking at the present discourses on ethnic affairs, ethnic symbols seemingly tend to dominate both minorities' and dominant groups' arguments (having close ties to 'culturalism'). This has been a comfortable position for the dominant institutions since after giving up in defining ethnic (that is *other* and *exotic*) groups in terms of status, social hierarchy, and territorial location, for instance, not too many tools remained that were consistent with the classification type they used for reducing complexity. Some of the difficulties in dealing with ethnicity, however, may stem from this stance because ethnic groups are all but material

entities like hats, skirts or ritual artefacts (Corlin 1993: 51). They are instead located in people's minds as categories, arising from constantly altering social interactions and events. On the other hand, to try to transform these ever-changing events into stable cultural categories do both the dominant and the peripheral groups practise a frequent strategy in order to be able to define, to interpret or to manipulate them. During this process, both parts tend to turn to cultural elements that look firstly as historic and serve as reference points for differentiation but that at closer examination reveal their historical, constructed, and often fictitious character.

It would be very unfair, however, to narrow the use of cultural definitions only to contexts of interaction between dominant and non-dominant social actors. The strategy of reducing complexity builds a necessary condition of classification at a comparative level that is also practised in international ethnic discourses. During these, 'indigenous' people are demarcated by cultural terms pointing to their – at least former – 'traditional' and 'authentic' way of life, to their specific relationship with their environment. Yet with closer examination, this kind of classification seems to be applied to just contexts of and roles in interaction between dominant and non-dominant groups, and thus shows strong resemblance to 'peasant' status as defined by Wolf in the 1950s, as Wilson (1997: 10) remarks.

On the other hand, through analysing the negotiation processes concerning ethnic markers and ethnic classification, both the peripheral and the dominant groups' social and political position can be highlighted. This means, that during these interactions, certain claims, aims or ideologies will be articulated, the boundaries of the groups may be redrawn, individuals might be mobilised for specific goals and so on, although the contexts with their close cut constraints for the possible changes have been already set by political or economic processes.

### **The Nibutani dam case**

On the 28th of March 1997, a local court in Sapporo recognised the Ainu as an indigenous minority of Japan. This was the first

acknowledgement of this type in Japan's history. The court's recognition was shortly followed "on the 8<sup>th</sup> May 1997" by the Congress' 'Act on the Promotion of Ainu Culture and the Dissemination and Education of Knowledge on Ainu Tradition', which promotes research on Ainu culture and language, and preservation of Ainu tradition and customs. This replaced the Hokkaido's Former Aborigines Protection Act of 1899. On the other hand, special human rights are not mentioned in the law, in contrast to the court's decision.

The Ainu Law of 1997 can be interpreted as the direct consequence of the court's decision. Nevertheless, it had also some other precedents.

- ◆ In 1984, the Hokkaido Ainu Association – the biggest Ainu organisation – presented a bill to the government for the recognition of the Ainu as an ethnic group with a right for self-determination and demanded the replacing of the Hokkaido's Former Aborigines Protection Act of 1899.
- ◆ An Ainu activist (Chikap Mieko) brought a lawsuit in 1985 at the Tokyo District Court against a photographer and a publishing company claiming that her photos were published without her permission and that the Ainu in the book were depicted in derogatory terms.
- ◆ Ainu delegates worked on the 1989 ILO Convention on Indigenous Peoples (No. 169).
- ◆ The government in a report to the United Nations publicly recognised the Ainu as an ethnic minority in 1991.
- ◆ In 1992, the United Nations recognised the Ainu as Japan's aboriginal nation as a response to the Ainu's appeal.
- ◆ In 1993, the Ainu participated in the United Nations Year of Indigenous People.
- ◆ Japan ratified, in 1995, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (although with some reservations).

Sonohara (1997) gives a detailed chronicle and a legal analysis of the Nibutani dam case. I wish here to summarise some of the basic events of the Nibutani dam case and, after that, an anthropological interpretation of how ethnic and legal concepts are used in actual social and historic contexts.

In the 1960s, Hokkaido Development Bureau planned a dam construction on the Saru River, in Nibutani village to ensure the water supply of an industrial area. To this end, in the early 1990s, the Hokkaido Land Expropriation Commission expropriated local Ainu farmers' land with compensation. But two of the owners filed a lawsuit in the Sapporo District Court against this decision.

The court's final decision, in 1997, declared the expropriation illegal. On the other hand, since the dam construction has already been completed, it only compelled the government for substitution.

According to the Ainu plaintiff, Article 13 of Japan's Constitution guarantees the Ainu protection of their ethnic dignity. The two Ainu pointed to the importance of their rituals, which again are tied closely to their land. I shall show, on the other hand, that they seemed to argue that their right to the land originates from their status as being members of a group (the Ainu), which was the first owner of this land. The court accepted the Ainu's claim to be an indigenous group and it based the definition of indigenous groups on international legal texts. The court described the Ainu in similar fashion as these texts do, that is, as a group with a distinct identity and culture that has important values. Its members have the rights to protect, enjoy and hand down their own culture because this ensures the preservation of their ethnic identity. Annual ceremonies, sacred sites, and a close relationship to nature build more specifically indispensable elements of cultural values.

Several important points are to be mentioned with regard to the legal arguments of both the Ainu and the court. These can shed light on some of the characteristics of a substantial type of ethnic context, on that between dominant and non-dominant social actors.

There is no doubt that the two Ainu articulated their position not as single individuals but as representatives of a group. Anyone can have close – even spiritual – ties to their land and these ties may go back, in certain cases, several generations. Because of the universality of this feature, this can not be taken as a powerful argument against expropriation. However, this is also true if we, for instance, define the group as the village. Many, if not most villages, have their cemeteries within their territories. Nevertheless, this seldom prevented them from expropriation. The argument's core may thus lie

elsewhere. It has something to do with the claim that the present owners are in a sense the *original* owners of the land, that is the recent generation of a long chain of ancestors who *always* owned the land and who were thus the first owners. It is impossible to follow this argument without constructing an abstract, so to speak, timeless group that must be defined nevertheless by concrete features. One of the easiest ways to do that is to define it as a cultural entity, as a hunting society, connected through this economically and spiritually, to the land. The identification of this Ainu group can happen with the help of rituals and the membership in that group but these are markers and not the basis for the primordial land right.

The court, however, stopped halfway in the acceptance of this line of argument. It recognised the Ainu as a group with their own culture; however, it narrowed the scope of dispute on this feature. According to its view, the Ainu live in certain – culturally defined – respects differently from other groups and they need to live so, since otherwise they would lose their distinct identity. Therefore, they have the right to hold ceremonies, but the emphasis is clearly on the behavioural aspect of the rituals and not on the control and ownership of land. That is why the court declared that the maintaining of the Ainu culture could also be guaranteed with substitutes (of land). What seems very important is that in this conceptualisation of a culture, the indigenous rights system does not build a part of this same culture.

It must be noted that neither Ainu plaintiff explicitly included this aspect of ethnic rights system in their argument. One may speculate that to describe and to translate this rights system into the modern one would have been completely too difficult and it is until now not very well known (Macdonald 1993: 411–412). It was an internal classification system for everyday use (Tabata 1993: 37), too flexible to build a basis for demarcation of the Ainu as a group *compared to* the Japanese and not easily recognisable as a cultural marker. And it is also true that this rights system ceased to exist a long time ago. It is thus very difficult to fit it into the culturalised and historical picture of culture maintained by the social institutions.

In the Nibutani Dam case, two Ainu leaders tried to get recognition from a Japanese national institution (a local court) for the Ainu as a distinct indigenous people and for their land rights. As we have seen with mixed results. The Ainu based their concept of the Ainu people on cultural terms, and thereby they adapted to the Western (international and Japanese) legislative system that could serve as a conceptual framework for both parts. The court accepted some of the consequences that followed from this definition while others, which were related to autonomy and land rights, were rejected. The Ainu seemed to use ethnic symbols as cultural resources that could be mobilised to underline arguments for claims regarding other resources. They used a classification system that seemed to help in bridging the present and the past. The Japanese court, on the other hand, took this stance of cultural definition at face value and urged the Japanese government to support the Ainu's maintenance of their traditions. In other words, the dam case is, in my view, about land right and not 'culture' as such but, in the end, the court accepted only this latter view and interpreted it as a case for cultural rights in the very traditional sense of 'culture'.

### **Ainu ethnic identity**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Japanese government followed a massive assimilation policy with respect to the state's minorities, including the Ainu. It seemingly has had real difficulties handling different ways of life especially if these were connected to the use or control of territory. This position had clear historic roots and as such, it is clearly a political construct. It went smoothly hand in hand with the ideology of Japan as a mono-ethnic state, and with the claim of ethnic and cultural homogeneity (Howell 1994: 69). Thus, in modern Japan, all kinds of cultural (including linguistic, social) differences were treated as at least local variations of the same Japanese culture. Even the Ainu language was classified as a dialect of Japanese and as such, it could not be used in the education of Ainu children. For official politics, the Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act of 1899 is often viewed to be a cornerstone. First, it prohibited all 'tra-

ditional' activities, that is fishing and hunting for the Ainu and secondly, it increased the speed of language assimilation with the setting up of Ainu schools (Ogawa 1993: 237). Additionally, in everyday situations, the Ainu had to react to the massive discrimination and the negative stereotypes against them, and even to legal prohibitions concerning their physical appearance and customs. This attitude of the Japanese, together with the assimilation policy, created a very strict frame of context within which the Ainu, as a minority, had to respond to the assimilation which was, at that time, almost complete in many domains of Ainu daily life. There remained little room for them to emphasise their decreasing 'otherness' because none of their legal efforts to do so could have changed the majority's negative evaluation. There were too few Ainu existing to form a group that seemed important enough for this aim and they were in many (and mainly economic) respects on the periphery of Japanese society. Therefore, one of the main escapes from this situation was to complete the assimilation with the majority.

In this context, the very burden for the Ainu, for emphasising their separate identity and for receiving recognition for their ethnic status, lay in the very unbalanced power relationship between them and the Japanese and the absolute inflexible way in which the Japanese handle minorities. Because of this fact, the Ainu had no means of creating an identity for themselves that could fit into the given framework classification and social interaction. At the same time, the rigid and discriminative position of the Japanese inevitably caused the break up of the everyday schema of ethnic interaction, with its more flexible way of managing relationships.

The power, of the dominant framework over the Ainu's strategies influencing choices, can already be seen in their reaction to the establishment of Ainu Schools in the late 1890s and in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ogawa 1993: 237). Through wide-ranging schooling, generations of Ainu children grew up without the ability to speak Ainu anymore. Their parents' generation was the last that never attended school. Nevertheless, Ainu criticism, which began to increase against such practice, did not oppose education in general, in order to save language, and at the same time, against cultural assimilation. It protested instead against discriminatory education

(Ogawa 1993: 244), and wanted the same kind and level of education as the Japanese had.

The growing nationalism in Japan in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century further increased the assimilation policy of the Japanese government and the rigidity of the classification system used by them in cases of minorities.

In order to understand more precisely the Japanese stance with regard to the position of the Ainu (and more precisely of all minorities in Japan) and the Ainu's reactions against this, we must follow back its roots well into the Tokugawa period. Contrary to the 'culturalist' view that has been used in institutional ethnic discourses that regards cultures as bounded, discrete, homogenous and only slowly changing entities, recent anthropological and historic analyses emphasises the process-like, changing and contextual character of a people's way of life. As Howell (1994) points out, describing different groups' way of life ('culture') is a very complex inquiry since it shows regional, situational and periodical variations and is always cross-cut by social differences. This again must be differentiated from ethnic contexts in which groups draw back or refer to such cultural features in their argument with regard to ethnic rights or ethnic recognition. In this latter case, Ainu culture is defined either as an 'authentic' or 'traditional' one, originating from its former isolated position, and is characterised by hunting, fishing, small economic units and animism, or a more or less assimilated one merging into standard Japanese culture.

With regard to 'traditional' Ainu culture, Howell (1994: 79) remarks that 'Ainu' or 'Japanese' labels could not be applied to groups before the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century in Hokkaido. Conflicts between specific groups or settlements were of economic interest, that is, of control over trade and commodities. It is only after the end of the so-called Ainu-Japanese wars in 1672 (the Shakushain's War), which settled the question of dominance over economic issues, once and for all, that the picture of distinct ethnic – Ainu and Japanese – groups living in demarcated territories emerged. One of the reasons for this can be found in the absence of dominant institutions not only in Hokkaido, but also in Japan. Until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the central authority was



rather weak in Japan and so ethnicity was not clearly defined (Howell 1994: 72).

After the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the economic way of life of some groups in Hokkaido changed radically. They gave up agriculture and focused entirely on hunting and fishing. Many factors may have contributed to this change. Among them, the most important ones seem to be their middleman position in trade, through this their increasing dependence on commodities, and the fish demand of groups that controlled trade (Howell 1994: 77). The hunting groups, after the 15<sup>th</sup> century, are often labelled as Ainu in literature. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the effects of the transformation in different Ainu groups' way of life, which was caused by their specific and dependent role in the relationship and economic conflicts with the Japanese traders, became increasingly visible. As an answer to the Japanese control, formerly small and independent settlements allied under powerful leaders. It was a further consequence of the expansion of the fishing companies that Ainu settlements were relocated to coastal areas (Tabata 1993: 35).

In the Japanese policy with regard to the Ainu, much accentuated changes can be detected in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, which may also be seen as clear consequences of Japan's position in a changing international political and economic context. The changes of its structural position forced Japan to redefine its relation to the groups living on its periphery (in both territorial and social terms). In the new international environment, the Matsumae group in Hokkaido gained an important role in demarcating the ethnic and – parallel to this – the political boundaries of Japan. The Ainu served in this policy as a 'buffer-ethnic' and area, both practically and ideologically, in this latter view helping in the self-definition of Japan as a homogenous state. This process was directed to the forming of Japan as a national state in the Meiji period. Until this, however, the Ainu politically and ethnically remained on the border of Japan under indirect rule of the government.

Howell (1994: 87–88) gives a very clear and detailed description of how, in this period, the Ainu were incorporated into the Japanese status hierarchy that served as the frame of ethnicity. Although the Ainu had increasingly become assimilated culturally to their Japa-

nese environment in the Tokugawa period, it was mainly the political differentiation between the Ainu and the Japanese that was important for the authorities. Therefore, they regulated the Ainu's visible ethnic markers, prohibiting them from imitating certain Japanese cultural traits in order to maintain this basic distinction. This became increasingly ideological in its nature since this distinction ceased to be clearly recognisable in any other domain. We should not be too surprised, therefore, if we find that Japanese collections of Ainu artefacts, which are generally younger and less documented than Western ones, contain in most cases items that emphasise visual characteristics of Ainu culture (motifs, designs). It must also be remarked that this was the very time when the Ainu were 'discovered' and popularised by Western travellers, missionaries and scholars. In their descriptions, the Ainu's physical type was emphasised, and parallel to this, much was speculated about their origin. We must keep in mind that it was these descriptions and the collections of artefacts that served as the basis of more recent cultural definition of the Ainu's 'traditional' way of life.

The force of institutional categorisation becomes visible if we look at – seemingly cultural – representations of the Ainu, for example in museum exhibitions. The Ainu gallery in the permanent exhibition of the National Museum of Ethnology (Osaka) was one of the focal points of discussion between Japanese and American ethnologists on the pages of *Museum Anthropology* in the 1990s (Niessen 1994; 1997; Ohtsuka 1997; Shimizu 1997). While, for the Japanese curators, it was a political act to display the Ainu as a separate ethnic group with distinct culture, and they did this in co-operation with an Ainu cultural leader, Shigeru Kayano. Niessen's critic (1994; 1997) centred on the politics of exhibitions, on the creation of a fictitious image of the past with the help of 'traditional' ethnographic objects and settings. What made mutual understanding impossible during the discussion was the non-recognition of the context within which the ethnologists offered their arguments and the distance these contexts created with regard to the everyday life of the Ainu whether living a hundred years ago or at present.

To sum up the historical changes, it can be said that during the early stages of the forming of Japan as a modern state, neither the

Ainu nor the Japanese used cultural terms for articulating ethnic identity. Cultural categories for ethnic differentiation thus originated rather in Japanese political demarcation, in scholarly descriptions, and later in international human rights discourses.

Japan's successful forming of a national state ended with the ideological incorporation of the Ainu (and of all other peripheral groups). In 1870, the Ainu were thus formally identified as Japanese. In 1997, with the new law, Japan recognised the Ainu as a separate ethnic group with distinct culture but again, "did not mention recognition and protection of indigenous rights", "... nor does it provide for cultural *rights*" (Sonohara 1997: 42).

## Conclusion

In the 1970s, a world-wide wave of ethnic identity movement arose among so-called fourth world communities and intellectuals and parallel to this a new interest in ethnicity questions emerged among social scientists. This ethnic process was highly connected with the fight for cultural rights, and in parallel with this, the respect for ethnic minorities increased (Corlin 1993: 51). The deeper reason behind this seems to lie in the changes in the general context of identification. Because of the emergence of modern and global information techniques and with the help of them, interactions, minority communities became immediately parts of a global network. This modified fundamentally their political positions and their references of identification at the same time. Being defined as indigenous peoples they have now international forums at which they could apply for rights and recognition as a special kind of cultures, connected closely to their native lands. In the new framework, their only choice has not been to adapt to the dominant culture's rules and ideology but they have become an active and potent part of forming these rules and ideologies through pointing out their already changed political position. These changes can be realised only as far as trans-national institutions – such as the United Nations – are able (or not able) to influence individual governments and thus national policies through *their* political position and power. Indigenous groups have now the choice

and chance to define *their* own position in the international and – with the help of this – in the national framework too. They are able now to define which contexts – the national or the international – they would like to participate in under the new circumstances. They are no longer seen as representatives of a backward stage of social development, but as people with close and long contact with their environment in the new context. To my view, these structural features of the international ethnic contributed to the fact that ‘indigenous people’ found it easier to participate in international organisations than in national institutions (Wilson 1997: 13), they narrowed, however, the room and the language for expressing identity.

The good news is thus, that through the international ethnic rights movement, a shared language has evolved that can be and is used by both state institutions and ethnic groups. The bad news is, however, that terms like ‘Ainu’ lose their former meanings, as they become part of a new categorical system.

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