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Aboriginal peoples of Chukotka

Larisa Abryutina*

Résumé: Les peuples autochtones de la Tchoukotka

Avant que les peuples autochtones de la Tchoukotka eussent été introduits à la culture européenne, ils avaient un mode de vie traditionnel définissant leur culture matérielle et spirituelle. Lors de leur intégration à l'État russe, toutes les sphères de leur vie ont subi diverses transformations. Cet article présente une vue d'ensemble de l'histoire des peuples autochtones de la Tchoukotka (Yupiget, Chukchi, Evens, Koryaks, Chuvans, Yukagirs et Kereks).

Abstract: Aboriginal peoples of Chukotka

Before the Aboriginal peoples of Chukotka were introduced to European culture, they lived a traditional way of life which defined their material and spiritual culture. During the integration into the Russian State, all spheres of their life went through various transformations. This article presents an overview of the history of Aboriginal peoples of Chukotka (Yupiget, Chukchi, Evens, Koryaks, Chuvans, Yukagirs and Kereks).

Introduction

Before the Aboriginal peoples of Chukotka were introduced to European culture, they lived a traditional way of life which defined their material and spiritual culture. Aboriginal peoples of Chukotka have different cultures and belong to different language groups. However, they share a lot of characteristics in their development. The main factors are: 1) they evolved in isolation from other cultures and for a long time were not ready to meet with more developed cultures, 2) as they were not protected, they went through the most radical influences by the State. Indeed, during the integration into the Russian State, all spheres of their life went through various

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transformations. To better understand these changes, it is necessary to present a brief history of the Aboriginal peoples of Chukotka. This article is devoted to that.

General data on Chukotka

The Chukchi Autonomous *okrug* ('region') is located in Northeast Asia, occupies the Chukchi Peninsula, an adjoining part of the continent and some islands. It is bordered by the Bering, Chukchi and East-Siberian Seas, and is separated from Alaska by the Bering Strait. The total area of Chukotka is more than 700,000 km². Chukotka incorporates eight administrative districts, three large cities, 13 urban-like settlements, and 57 villages (16 of them abandoned) (Anonymous 2005: 2). The administrative centre is Anadyr. Chukotka is the most remote region of Russia (the distance from Moscow to Anadyr is more than 8000 km). Air transport is the only type of transportation inside Chukotka, and also between Chukotka and the central areas of Russia. The topography varies: mountains and ridges alternate with boggy lowlands. Chukotka is also included in the Arctic and Subarctic climatic belt. In the economy of Chukotka, mining is the leading industry, engaged in extraction of gold, silver, stone and brown coal. There are stocks of tin and mercury, tungsten and oil that are yet to be developed. The electric power industry, including a nuclear power station in Bilibino, is developed.

The population

Today about 70% of the entire population of Chukotka are non-aboriginal people who live in the cities and urban-type settlements. They work in different spheres of the industry, in management and services. Most are Russians (50%), Ukrainians (10%), Byelorussians, Tatars, peoples from Caucasia, and others.

Most of the Aboriginal people¹ of Chukotka live in the countryside and work in the agriculture and service spheres. The Aboriginal peoples of Chukotka are: Yupiget², Chukchi, Evens, Koryaks, Chuvans, Yukagirs and Kereks. In the following section, a few historical facts are given for each group.

Yukagirs were a numerous people in the past. Today only a small number of Yukagirs inhabit the continental part of the modern territory of Chukotka.

¹ According to the Russian Federal Law 82 of 1999, the Aboriginal peoples are people that reside in the areas of the traditional settlements of their forefathers, preserve their traditional lifestyle, economy and activities, who perceive themselves as an independent ethnic entity, and whose population in the Russian Federation does not exceed 50,000. A register of the Aboriginal peoples is approved by the Government of the Russian Federation based on information provided by the authorities of the administrative territories where the Aboriginal populations reside.

² "Eskimo" is their official name in Russia.

Chuvans were settled in the central part of Chukotka in the past. Later, two ethnographic groups were formed: nomadic and settled. Chuvans have lost their native language which was related to that of the Yukagirs. They now speak both the Russian and Chukchi languages. Modern Chuvans have partially kept traditional activities.

Chukchi lived in the western part of modern Chukotka until the 13th to 14th centuries. The Chukchi were invaded by Yukagirs and moved to the Chukotka Peninsula where they met Yupiget. The Chukchi people were partially assimilated with the Yupiget and have adopted many elements of their culture. Step-by-step Chukchi settled the length of the East Siberian, Chukchi and Bering Sea coasts. Chukchi settlements were situated near to the Yupiget settlements at a “distance of arrow flight” (Leont’ev and Novikova 1989: 23). Some Chukchi were sea hunters, while others partially hunted wild reindeers and developed reindeer breeding on the tundra (Afanas’eva 1999: 18). Later, the Chukchi became reindeer herders, owners of great reindeer herds, home builders, and served in their own military. The Chukchi population gradually increased and their tribes were divided into two groups: nomadic reindeer herders and settled sea hunters. All the Chukchi tribes have kept unity of language and culture. Continental Chukchi groups have gradually extended to all territories of modern Chukotka and to some neighbouring regions, but in the middle of the 20th century, the nomadic reindeer breeding lifestyle ended (*ibid.*: 20). Now Chukchi all live in settlements and work in different spheres. A small number of Chukchi continue to work in reindeer breeding.

Yupiget are the most ancient people of the Chukotka and Beringia regions, generated in the northeastern part of Asia nearly 5,000 years ago and then they moved along the coast of Chukotka, North America and Greenland (Turaev 2005: 356). By 1000 BC, the Yupiget settled these Arctic spaces as their home. The Yupiget of Chukotka have three different regional languages: Central Siberian Yupik, Naukan Yupik³, and Sireniskii (recently extinct). Their primary means of subsistence is marine mammal hunting. The historical development of Yupiget in the Chukotka region has been united with that of the Chukchi. Ancestral military conflicts disappeared with this convergence. This union was promoted in part by their oppression by Russian military groups. Mutual penetration of cultures and constant contacts were established with other Aboriginal peoples of Chukotka. Each Yupik and settled Chukchi had friends among the nomads. They helped each other with transportation, food, and materials for crafts. Friendly communications helped defend them from enemies and to attack other people, including those living in Alaska (Nefedkin 2003: 197). In the 20th century, many Yupik settlements were moved. Now, most Yupiget live in new settlements (Provideniya and Lavrentiya); villages (Novoye Chaplino, Sireniki and Uel’kal); and in the city of Anadyr. Only a small number of Yupiget continue to hunt sea mammals and fish. Many have abandoned these activities and work in different spheres.

Koryaks are related to the Chukchi. During ancient times, the Koryaks lived around the coasts of the Bering and Okhotsk seas. They were divided in two groups:

³ In this language, the word “Yupiget” is not used.

settled (hunters and fishermen) and nomadic (reindeer herders). After the arrival of Russian people, the Koryaks became the object of attacks from the Chukchi. The majority of Koryaks now live in the Magadan Oblast and in Kamchatka.

Kereks lived to the north of the Koryaks in antiquity on the Bering Sea coast and became assimilated by the Chukchi and Koryaks. Today, there are only few Kereks in Chukotka.

Evens came to the southern and western areas of Chukotka in the 18th century from the taiga zones located west of Kolyma (the Magadan Oblast). Moving to the east, they have reached Kamchatka and have settled on Yukagir and Koryak lands.

Religion

Aboriginal peoples of Chukotka were animist. They believed that living and non-living objects in the environment have spirits. Shamanism developed on this base. The shaman's role in Chukchi, Koryak and Yupik communities was very important because only the shaman could carry out communication with the world of spirits. Yukagirs, Chuvans and Evens have accepted Christianity and their religious views have turned to an interlacing of traditional beliefs, shamanism and orthodox mythology. Chukchi, Yupiget and Koryaks continue to be animist.

Traditional activities

Reindeer-breeding in Chukotka is of two basic types: tundra and forest. Tundra reindeer breeding was developed primarily by the Chukchi, but also in part by the Chuvans and Koryaks. The characteristics of tundra reindeer herding are small reindeer used for meat and for skin; large herds (up to several thousands) travelling the long routes of nomads. Summer migrations were done by foot, and in the winter by reindeer sledges. Forest reindeer breeding was developed primarily by the Evens for transportation and hunting. The characteristics of forest reindeer breeding are tall reindeer and small herds. Migrations in the winter and summer implied riding the reindeer.

Sea hunting was developed first by the Yupiget, and then by Chukchi. The animals hunted are whales (Gray whale and Greenland whale), walruses and other sea mammals. Hunting whales is seasonal depending on their migrations. Other animals are hunted all year on the coast, on the sea ice and in the open sea. Traditionally, the Yupiget and Chukchi used skin boats, harpoons, spears, and nets for hunting. Polar bears are also hunted.

Land mammal hunting is the primary subsistence activity of Evens and an auxiliary subsistence activity for other Aboriginal peoples in Chukotka. The main species hunted are elks, wild reindeer and argali (wild sheep). The basic ways of

hunting are by pursuit, ambush, and various pitfalls. Fur animals are harvested by shooting and in traps. Fishing and gathering wild plants and berries are activities of all Aboriginal people of Chukotka. Wild plants were prepared, stored and used to preserve meat and fish. Today a significant part of the Aboriginal population has abandoned traditional activities as many people moved from villages to settlements and cities.

The first Russian settlements

The first Russian settlements appeared in Chukotka in the 17th century (Afanas'eva 1999: 7). An attempt to subordinate and control all Aboriginal populations in Chukotka as it was done in other territories annexed by Russia, was unsuccessful. Yukagirs, Chuvans, part of the Koryaks and Evens obeyed the Russian authorities, accepted Christianity and helped Russia with the colonisation of the territory but other Aboriginal peoples (especially the Chukchi) showed resistance. There was a serious conflict when Cossacks (soldiers from special Russian army divisions) started to hunt reindeer in places where Chukchi lived (Turaev 2005: 356). The Chukchi attacked the Yukagirs and Koryaks who had accepted Russian citizenship, by assaulting their reindeer and property. Then, the Russian government decided to completely destroy "aggressive Chukchi" by means of a "military hand" (Nefedkin 2005: 26). However, this proved impossible; as military campaigns were unsuccessful, leaders of the Russian armies were killed, and Aboriginal groups under Russian nationality were not protected. Chukchi assaulted their herds and their lands.

Chukchi rebelliousness was caused by their social organisation and religious vision. Each Chukchi community made all decisions independently. They were coordinated only with their fellow tribes and with friendly Yupiget as they did not trust anybody anymore (*ibid.*: 21). In time the Russian government refused strong-arm tactics and stopped oppressing the Chukchi with the Decree of 1779. The Yupiget and Chukchi were integrated in the Russian empire at end of the 18th century (*ibid.*: 20). However, they did not pay any contributions to the Russian tsar as the authorities included them in a category of persons labelled "not absolutely dependent foreigners."

After 1779, Russia started to trade with Aboriginal peoples. The authorities developed laws and tried to establish relations with each ethnic group to stop the corrupt activities of Russian merchants, and limit alcohol trading. However, by the end of the 19th century, there were American traders, hunters and gold miners in Chukotka. All these newcomers worked there without any rules and controls. They did not pay any taxes but paid with alcohol. It seriously affected the traditional activities and standards of Aboriginal people. Epidemics and famine became prevalent and whole settlements disappeared (Dikov 1974: 119-124).

Step-by-step the Aboriginal peoples' activities, vision and psychology began to change. Instead of guns, deals were made through peaceful contacts in trade. Alcohol became a currency and new illnesses were introduced. From the end of the 19th century until the beginning of the 20th century, the nomads of Chukotka started to live a settled

life. Sedentarised Aboriginal peoples were made equal to Russian peasants and schools were built. The first school was established in 1883 in the village of Markovo. In 1910 there were schools for the Yupiget in Chaplino and for the Chukchi in Uelen.

The Aboriginal peoples adapted and gradually integrated into the Russian State, but they did not lose their independent cultures, their own resources and subsistence way of life. In imperial Russia, the Aboriginal peoples of Chukotka were not officially registered and later on lacked papers needed to allow and declare Aboriginal rights on their lands, as well as self-government.

The Soviet authority

The Soviet authority was established in Chukotka in 1923. From that time there were sweeping changes in the destiny of the Aboriginal peoples of Chukotka (and in the Russian North as a whole). The objective of the Soviet government was to rescue “moribund” Aboriginal peoples by transferring them from “primitive” society to socialism. That transfer began gradually in accordance with ethnic features and recommendations of scientists from the Committee of Assistance to Nationalities of Northern Peripheries (part of the Committee of the North) which existed from 1924 to 1936.

A literacy program began and Chukchi, Yupiget, and Evens learned writing. Both permanent and nomadic schools were established so that Aboriginal children would not have to be taken away from their parents, their natural environment, traditional way of life, and customs. Non-aboriginal (Russian) teachers studied Aboriginal languages and came to the villages and the tundra. It had positive results. For example, in 1932, 20 hunters were trained to read, and there were 42 pupils between the ages of 6 and 18 years studying at school (Vakhtin 1993: 3). The gifted youths were directed to institutes in central areas of the country. The development of high-grade medical aid and mobile medical groups began.

There were radical reforms like: obligatory expropriation, collectivisation and the creation of cooperative forms of economy. Those who resisted were repressed. Their reindeer were confiscated and delivered to the collective and State farms. There were also arts and crafts companies established to collect and market products. The governmental prohibition of trade of alcohol was a benefit. At this stage more attention was paid to social class and political characteristics than to ethnicity.

There was a struggle against religion also, both shamanism and Christian beliefs. Shamans were apprehended as social and political enemies. Therefore they were arrested, imprisoned, or drowned. On a boundary post of Verkhovskiy’s Cape, shamans were shot, and their corpses washed away in the sea (Pisigin 2001).

The Chukchi National Region

The Chukchi National *Okrug* ('Region') was approved in 1930. Chukotka was divided into districts for collective farms and State farms, which led to changes in the use of land, reindeer migration, and pasture technologies. Aboriginal people lost touch with their traditional diet. The authorities now perceived Aboriginal people as part of the Soviet people. Therefore, Aboriginal people were forced to submit to the general plan of development (including industry). The concept of gradual adaptation of Aboriginal people was rejected, and the Committee of the North was discontinued in 1936. After 1943, schools were built in villages located a distance of 3 km or more from the nearest school, and where 15 or more children lived. Teaching at many Aboriginal schools (40 of 72) was conducted in Aboriginal languages (Dikov 1974: 257, 349).

Super organisations played an important role in Chukotka. The largest of these were the Central Administrative Board of Northern Sea Shipping Routes (Glavsevmorput) and the Trust of Distant Construction (Dal'stroy). These organisations impacted on the development of Chukotka from the middle of the 1930s until the middle of the 1950s. Some Aboriginal facilities were also under the control of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD). This organisation often assigned former prisoners to work in traditional Aboriginal communities and farms. Everything possible was done to destroy the way of life of an Aboriginal population which had developed over the course of centuries (Chilingarov and Kokorev 1997: 49).

During the Second World War, military planes flying from Alaska to Siberia passed through Chukotka. The Aboriginal peoples of Chukotka participated in the war. They were military pilots; volunteers sent to the front (though at that time Aboriginal peoples were exempted from military service); involved in the construction of tanks and planes; they gave gifts of furs, fur clothes and meat, etc.

The "Iron Curtain" era

After the end of the Second World War, armed forces were concentrated and security measures amplified in Chukotka. Contacts between the Aboriginal people of Chukotka and Alaska were regarded as dangerous. In the opinion of the KGB, these relationships were being used by the intelligence service of the USA to gather military secrets (Gavrilov 2006). The authorities decided that small and "unpromising" villages of the Bering Sea coast were to be abandoned (Anonymous 1968). Populations from coastal and island villages were moved for "improvement of supplies," "increase of safety," etc. For example, in 1958 the population of Naukan was moved to Nunyamo which soon was also abandoned, and people dissipated in other coastal villages. Results from these displacements were sometimes unsuccessful, and often it was impossible to live a traditional lifestyle in the new place (see Krupnik and Chlenov in this issue). The same changes took place in continental Chukotka. The Aboriginal populations were induced to resettle from the tundra into villages. The results were collectivisation,

integration into agricultural enterprises, and inculcation of socialist propaganda to the Aboriginal population.

Many Aboriginal peoples accepted the Soviet order. In 1953, 18% of the communists of Chukotka were Aboriginal people (Gorokhov 1960: 114). However, there were eruptions of resistance during post-war time in Chukotka. For example, in 1949 in the Markovo area, former reindeer herders gathered reindeer and ran to the tundra. These individuals were later arrested and condemned (Gavrilov 2005). The number of cases of sexual assaults on Aboriginal women by non-aboriginal men in Chukotka increased significantly. Although these cases were largely ignored, the results of so much sexual assault was, obviously, a primary factor of assimilation of Aboriginal peoples (Rozhkov n.d.). By 1959, almost all individual households were involved in collective farms and State farms (Table 1). By 1960, 27 Aboriginal villages and nomadic hamlets had been liquidated (Anonymous 1995: 1).

Table 1. Chukotka population censuses in 1939 and 1959.

| | | 1939 | 1959 |
|---|--------------------|--------|--------|
| Total population of Chukotka | | 21,400 | 46,700 |
| Percentage of urban population | | 15.4% | 62.1% |
| Percentage of agricultural population | | 84.6% | 37.9% |
| Number of workers' settlements | | 1 | 11 |
| Percentage of people working in Soviet organisations | workers | 20% | 45.9% |
| | employees | 16.3% | 32.6% |
| | collective farmers | 27.8% | 21.4% |
| Percentage of individuals not working in Soviet organisations | | 35.9% | 0.1% |

Source: Dikov (1974: 317)

The development of socialism set new tasks and goals. One of the main goals was to stop nomadic life which was incompatible with a socialist way of life. First, it was decided to remove the household (family) component of nomadic life. Children, women and elders were transferred to the State farms and collective farms where better living conditions had been created. Administrators and newcomers were mainly non-aboriginals. The “forcing out” of women and elders from the tundra led to the loss of the traditional material culture (*e.g.*, fur clothes, footwear, dog-sledge, etc.). The most negative result of such resettlements was the destruction of families and a gap in relationships between the generations. Resettlement and dispersion of groups of the population also did away with the former concept of education. Now children were moved to villages where they were placed in boarding schools to get the standard education in Russian.

The life of Aboriginal peoples in villages which replaced their traditional way of life was fraught with problems. There was not enough housing for them, but good

dwellings were required for the families of the growing number of non-aboriginal personnel. The authorities demanded that the process of resettlement in villages be accelerated. Therefore, families of nomads who came to villages temporarily had to live in hostels rooms or barracks. The authorities recorded these temporary inhabitants of villages as “settled” people although they actually remained nomads in a technical and psychological sense. Concentration of Aboriginal people in large villages led to local increases in environmental impacts, sanitary and hygienic problems, and social trouble. Aboriginal people became acquainted with foul language, drunkenness, and debauchery.

The communist economy

At the 24th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1971, it was stated that Aboriginal peoples of the North had lived under socialism since 1961 (Vakhtin 1993: 42). Activities of Aboriginal peoples were concentrated in 24 State farms and three collective farms which provided employment for the population and food maintenance for Chukotka. Dairy animal industries and plant growing took root on State farms (Dikov 1974: 281). In villages located on the coast where sea hunters lived, reindeer breeding was introduced. Since 1953, reindeer herds were present in 44 of the 47 collective farms. Reindeer herders started to use insecticide which appeared subsequently to be unhealthy to people (*ibid.*: 338).

Whale hunting was done the industrial way and the role of Aboriginal hunters was transformed to towing whale carcasses from a modern whale-boat to the coast. Sea mammal hunting permitted the creation of fat processing, ivory carving workshops, a factory for processing skins, fox farming, etc. In 1964 there were 11 fur farms housing about 5,000 fur animals. The development of agriculture provided also employment to the Aboriginal population. By 1975, all farms in Chukotka were owned by the State (Anonymous 1995: 2). However, a portion of the reindeer in the State herds were the personal property of herders. These reindeer were often used as a reserve for reimbursement of losses from the State reindeer.

At that time, villages in Chukotka had excellent supplies of different goods, food, newspapers, magazines, and books (as Aboriginal people read a lot). Both ground (caterpillar) and air transportation became available. Remote communities and reindeer breeding camps had cultural events such as concerts, films, a mobile library, assortments of industrial and grocery goods. It was also in the 1970s that the concept of “primary medical aid” was implemented. Medical establishments were built, more beds were funded, and the medical staff increased. In Chukotka there were 1.6 times more doctors than on average in the country (State Committee of Statistics 1999). Means for free-of-charge medical treatment and prosthetics of teeth were allocated. Mobile medical groups took x-rays to try to diagnose and treat tuberculosis. Special attention was brought to pregnant Aboriginal women. They were taken out at any stages of pregnancy from places of traditional activity, from villages to city, and one month before the birth were taken to a maternity hospital. After birth, the mother and the

newborn were placed in the children's ward of a hospital for the first month. Unfortunately, there were shortcomings. The system of public health services concentrated on diagnosis and treatment of infectious diseases, but ignored whole classes of other diseases. Ethno-cultural and ethno-psychological features of Aboriginal peoples were completely ignored. Despite significant funding, qualified outpatient department and specialised help were not easily accessible to Aboriginal people in the countryside.

Secondary education became common during these years (Nutetegrene 1971: 15). Aboriginal people going to educational institutes had privileges and special access to courses for people of the North⁴. Many Aboriginal people worked as the authorities. Between 1932 and 1993, among nine leaders of Chukotka there were eight Aboriginal persons: Tigrenkeu, Tevlyanto, Otke, Ivan Rul'titegin, Anna Nutetegrine, Lina Tynel', Nadezhda Otke, and Vladimir Etylin.

In 1980, according to the new Constitution of 1977 and new laws, all "National Regions" of the North were renamed "Autonomous Regions." At the same time, the new government's regulations for the Aboriginal population of the North and the financial budget for their "areas of residence" were approved. Unfortunately, this structure led to irrational use of the allocated funds. At about the same period, attributes of a socio-economic crisis appeared.

Chronicle of an announced crisis

In the recent past, Aboriginal peoples of Chukotka suffered from many destructive factors such as reprisal, expropriation, resettlements, destruction of traditions and worldview. Some further factors played negative roles:

- An extensive development of industry compressing the territories used by Aboriginal peoples for their traditional way of life and activities; destroying and polluting the environment.

- Mass inflow of populations from different regions of the USSR that diminished the percentage of Aboriginal peoples, and strengthened the assimilation processes and the radical transformation of Aboriginal culture.

- The increase and development of villages prevailed over the preservation of traditional activities. Investments in the economic, cultural, and social bases of traditional activities were poor as they represented only 2-5% of the sum used to develop farms in Chukotka (Zadorin 1990: 29). As a result, reindeer husbandry became unprofitable. Before, raising and selling one reindeer brought 20 rubles in profits, in 1986, raising one reindeer led to losses of 50 rubles (Otke 1987: 3).

⁴ This is how the author of the present article received her higher education.

-With the transformation from a traditional way of life into an agricultural industry with administrative management, people from other areas of the country supervised all spheres of work and life of Aboriginal peoples. The knowledge, experience and needs of Aboriginal peoples started to be ignored.

-Mass poaching caused destruction of hunting and fishing resources.

-Many of the authorities' measures had initially an humanistic motivation, but led to serious destructive consequences because of poor implementation.

Children separated from their parents

During the Communist period, Aboriginal children were placed in preschool establishments and boarding schools. Schools brought literacy, Russian culture, and enabled some Aboriginal peoples (and then their children) to reach a high and safe place in society. However, many Aboriginal people who went through the all-Russian school program, could not find their place in life—neither in their traditional culture, nor in the Russian one. The advantages of boarding schools were neutralised by the following circumstances:

-Excessive, forced separation of children from parents.

-Unjustified isolation of children from parents as well as from their natural, social and cultural environment.

-Overwhelming number of non-aboriginal personnel in children's establishments.

-Minimal teaching of Aboriginal languages and prohibition of using it among students.

-Due to lack of knowledge from non-aboriginal reformers and personnel regarding Aboriginal diet and culture, a radical change of food was imposed on Aboriginal children which caused difficulties in their metabolism.

-Fosterage outside of family and school education of Aboriginal children caused the formation of “not normative” types of persons unable to acquire their culture through traditional mechanisms.

The schools located in villages and cities had common curricula and new teachers who did not adapt Aboriginal children and teenagers for the European lifestyle and socially-significant work. At the same time, the young left behind the traditional lifestyle and activities of their ancestors. They were ashamed of being Aboriginal and ran away from the tundra. Groups of rural and city Aboriginal people began to keep away from a decreasing group of people leading a traditional life. This situation created a lack of young staff among reindeer herders and in other traditional aspects of living.

At that time, an unusual gender disproportion was established: the young men chose to remain in the tundra and the girls preferred to live in villages and cities. As a result, few families were formed but a high rate of unmarried women had children. Groups of rural and city Aboriginal peoples began to keep away from a decreasing group of people leading a traditional life.

Excessive regulation of life and deprivation of self-realisation opportunities

In the Soviet years, a bureaucracy consisting of functionaries, Communist Union of Youth, trade unions, and other Soviet bodies was generated. This structure penetrated all society from the capital to the smallest village, even to brigades of reindeer herders and sea hunters. All commands were dictated from above. The life of the Aboriginal peoples, from birth until death, was completely planned and solved for them. The people were placed in a role of passive existence. Independent decisions over even elementary questions of daily life were impossible to take.

All these radical and long-term transformations overcame any opportunities for Aboriginal peoples to adapt by themselves, and led them into a state of psychological prostration (Babakov 1993: 306). Many Aboriginal people now have somatic and mental diseases, or have lost interest in life, work, and children. Mass drunkenness and alcoholism were consequences of the events destroying the ability of the Aboriginal people to adapt. Alcoholism was the result of increased delivery and trade of alcohol (especially hard liquor) in villages, and then in the tundra. Heavy drinking became a common phenomenon of whole brigades. Tens of Aboriginal people died in the village of Omolon in the late 1960s, poisoned by Cuban rum. The short interval of forced sobriety during the anti-alcohol reform (between 1984 and 1987) was followed by a new wave of alcoholism and suicides. These conditions demanded radical State measures, but only symptomatic ones were implemented. For example, although there were no medical bases for it, a program of early hospitalisation for pregnant women was created. Physicians were compelled to transform hospitals into refuges for mothers and babies because of the poor living conditions and drunkenness found in their villages. Isolation in hospitals kept many babies alive, but when mothers and children returned to the village or the tundra, it appears that the long hospital stay added stress and negatively impacted the babies' health and development of immunities.

Thus, even during the Soviet period, what seemed to be an "overdose" of positive measures proved to be destructive factors leading to bad consequences. The resulting crisis masked and restrained the structure of the State institutions. As will be discussed in the following section, the market system destroyed these artificial props and all the problems became exposed.

From the crash of the Soviet system to well-being?

The crash of the Soviet system led to a sharp deterioration of life conditions in Russia, including those of the Aboriginal peoples of Chukotka. Other factors linked to the redistribution of powers were also at work. Hence, during the Soviet period issues regarding the development of Aboriginal peoples of the North were solved by the central authorities. Now this responsibility has been assigned to regional authorities which do not have sufficient means for competent problem solving. Privatisation and reorganisation of all economic principles and mechanisms caused the destruction of the State farm system. The plan of reorganisation was not discussed with the population. It did not consider cultural, historical, economic, social and psychological features of Aboriginal communities. Furthermore, the reorganisation was hampered by serious circumstances:

- As a result of privatisation, the State farms were dismantled in Chukotka.
- The “carcass” of administrative structures fell apart.
- Private soldiers and executives did not know how to manage a business.
- After the disintegration of the State farms, Aboriginal people did not get involved in manufacturing, management, supplying, or sales.
- Many Aboriginal people waited for orders and help from the regional leaders. Such behaviour was caused by deep depression which arose during the Soviet time and increased after reforms.
- The senior generation who were the last carriers of traditions died without transferring their experience and knowledge.
- The youth did not wish to work in declining traditional jobs promoted by the State. Brigades of reindeer herders and sea hunters had no income. Without regional leadership, the production, supplies, and sales started to collapse.

The creation of commercial organisations (farms, open company, joint-stock company, etc.) was ineffective. Some new commercial farms were ruined at once, having lost all means of production, and reindeer herders moved to the villages and cities. Only a small number of commercial farms have survived. A few enterprises survived, as a rule, in the form of sovkhozes (State farms). The remaining commercial farms have been transferred to municipal management. However, time has been lost and to restore them will be very difficult.

After the reforms, Aboriginal sea hunters did not have money to rent the industrial whaling boat and whale hunting was not conducted in 1992 and 1993. The two-year pause had negative effects on the life conditions in coastal villages since the subsequent decrease in harvesting of whales and walruses led to the destruction of fur farming,

processing of fat to feed the fur animals, and hence, to unemployment. Later, the revival of old ways of hunting by boat with guns and hand-held harpoons began in some villages. However, with such boats it is possible to harvest only small grey whales. Harvesting of whales and walruses is also complicated by the poor equipment of hunters, low salaries, restrictions by frontier guards and requirements of the International Whaling Commission. During the market reforms, the basic existence of some Aboriginal traditions was destroyed. Many people abandoned the traditional land and activities. In villages and cities, many of yesterday's reindeer herders and sea hunters, do not find suitable work and become marginalised from society by alcoholism and criminality.

In this new economic situation, unprofitable enterprises were closed, which led to a mass outflow of the non-aboriginal population. These people were most of the workers and competent experts. During the period from 1992 to 1996, 40,000 people left Chukotka, including rural teachers, medical personnel, and other experts from various spheres. However, it did not solve problems of employment of unemployed Aboriginal people. Vacancies were closed or new people from other areas of the country were invited. As a rule, this new generation of transient personnel is far from understanding Aboriginal issues.

The troubled conditions and despair induced many Aboriginal peoples to search for rescue in religion. In Chukotka, from the first days after the collapse of Soviet power, there came representatives of different churches and sects. Some believers, submitting to rules of their new belief, refused their traditional culture and traditional food. Their new religion also caused anxiety and illness.

New public organisations

In the 1990s, public organisations were created in Russia such as the “Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East” (RAIPON), the “Association of Indigenous Peoples of Chukotka” (AIPOCh), and “Yupik,” a Yupik organisation. In 1996, the Chukchi Association of Traditional Marine Mammal Hunters of Chukotka (ChAZTO) was organized. Today, ChAZTO consists of 300 professional hunters, 500 individual hunters, 2,500 family members of hunters, 25 Aboriginal villages, and 10,000 traditional consumers of sea mammals. Furthermore, since 2003, ChAZTO and AIPOCh have been in charge of establishing whale quotas in Chukotka.

AIPOCh and other organisations of Aboriginal peoples have been cooperating with each other at the federal and regional levels. Aboriginal organisations are in a difficult situation since having no financial bases for existence, the activities of their members decrease. Furthermore, the attitude of the Government of Chukotka has been complex and rather than recognising the importance of public organisations, the Aboriginal leaders were first discredited. In 2003, the Government of Chukotka created an Advisory Group made up of representatives of Aboriginal peoples. The chief of the Department of Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples' Affairs and the Governor of

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Chukotka supervise this incorporated structure, which is also supported by the people's Congress.

The present situation

In 2001, elections were held in Chukotka and new leaders were elected. The new authorities have recognised that there is a socio-economic crisis that needs to be stabilised to remove social tensions. Special attention is now given to Anadyr where the bulk of construction is located. The rural development program provides for the growth of reindeer operations and allocates equipment, weapons, and transportation to sea hunters (nearly 400 people working in 50 enterprises).

Despite successes, there are many unresolved problems. Among them are the management of traditional territories and the destroyed traditional economic activities. In the first years of work, the new administration of Chukotka carried out an expensive and widely advertised program to mass export children on summer holidays to southern regions of the country. Based on good intentions, it should be useful for the health of all Aboriginal children. However, it has actually perpetuated an earlier problem of seizing children from their parents, traditional activities and values. Also, there are still no elementary schools in the tundra. Municipal authorities continue to take children away from their traditional lifestyle and place them in boarding schools. In villages, the senior classes of schools are closed. Children now go to study at schools in the regional centres or outside Chukotka. The former system of support for Aboriginal people to attend university is also reduced.

One positive phenomenon has been the introduction of obligatory medical insurance. However, the number of medical institutions in villages has decreased, as have the volume, quality and availability of medical aid. At the same time, when gathering demographic statistics, the population is divided by district (city or rural) without separate information for the Aboriginal population. This demonstrates a limited understanding of the principle of "equal rights and opportunities for all people." This position is evident in the policy of not collecting medical statistics on the Aboriginal population. How, then, to identify specific problems and organise programs for the Aboriginal population? Drunkenness and alcoholism continue, and have involved several layers of that population. It is promoted by the absence of legal forms of prosecution for moon-shining and private trade of liquors. Many Aboriginal people, especially those retired, are dependent, and indebted to dealers of alcoholic drinks.

If changes are now for the better, it is so only in comparison with the first years of market reforms. If compared to the Soviet period, they do not appear to be successful. It is impossible to forget that the social and economic basis of Chukotka was constructed in the pre-reform past by the hard work of people and former leaders of the region.

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