

***JOURNAL OF  
CONTEMPORARY ANTHROPOLOGY***

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

---

**VOLUME IV**

**2013**

**ISSUE 1**

---

Indigenous People and Political Agenda:  
the Issue of Social and Ecological Change of the Nomadic  
Siberian, the Evenki, in Russia

**Jaehoon Lee**

Ph.D. Candidate  
Department of Anthropology  
University of Florida  
Gainesville, Florida

**Indigenous People and Political Agenda:  
the Issue of Social and Ecological Change of the Nomadic  
Siberian, the Evenki, in Russia**

**Jaehoon Lee**

Ph.D. Candidate  
Department of Anthropology  
University of Florida  
Gainesville, Florida

**ABSTRACT**

Siberia is one of a few regions of the world in which hunter-gatherer communities survived until very recently. Many of their descendants have sustained their old subsistence economies, such as hunting and fishing, nomadism, or reindeer herding. This paper contains the ethnohistory of the indigenous Evenki people in Siberia and provides a critical summary of how changes of colonial political systems and management policies throughout the Evenki's history have affected their cultural identity and changed their concept of territorial value. It is emphasized in this paper that, as seen in the case of the Evenki in Siberia, a sophisticated understanding of the environment and subsistence systems of the indigenous peoples in the world is an essential process for all policy makers whose decisions would directly affect the life system of indigenous or isolated peoples.

## **INTRODUCTION**

While this paper presents an overview of the ethnohistory of the Evenki, its focus is how the history of the political changes of the Russian colonizer has affected the overall cultural life of the Evenki in Siberia. Some examples will be presented portraying the active roles of land management policies that have played a part in changing the cognitive concept of territorial value for the Evenki. This paper seeks to emphasize the need for more effort on a sophisticated understanding of the Evenki and their culture by the Russian authority. This paper consists of two parts: first, brief but contextual aspects of the Evenki; and second, concise discourses about the relations between the political framework and the Evenki, on behalf of the indigenous people of Siberia.

### ***Siberia and Its Ecological Context***

It is known that the term Siberia is etymologically connected with either Mongolian term, 'siber' indicating 'beautiful, wonderful and pure,' or the Tartar term, 'sibir' indicating 'the sleeping land' (Bobrick 1992:28). Although around 25 percent of modern Russian nationalities resides in the region, it is a "people rich" region inhabited currently by more than 30 different groups of indigenous peoples (only 2 percent of them is indigenous people; 1.6 million indigenous peoples out of a total population of 32 million) (Mote 1998:1; Reid 2002:4). Siberia has been under the control of the Russian authority since the end of the seventeenth century and is usually classified into three different regions: Western Siberia, Eastern Siberia, and the Russian Far East by geographical order from west to east (Mote 1998:29).

The topographical zones of contemporary Siberia can be classified into three different regions: a great treeless tundra (along the whole Arctic coast), a broad belt of forest (the Ural Mountains to the Okhotsk Sea), and an arable semi-arid desert steppe (the southern Urals to the Mongolia). The overall climate for Siberia is extreme: for instance, the average winter temperature for Siberia is between -30° and -40° C (-22° and -40° F) and the average summer temperature in the tundra region is still less than 10° C (50° F) (Forsyth 1992:7; More 1998:28). Although northern Siberia has the most fragile ecological conditions to the extent that most major rivers and seas are grounded on permafrost for the majority of the year, the southeastern region has less-cold temperatures and its acidic soil support larch woodland with cedar scrub. Even though it is believed that domesticated animals and plants arrived in Siberia around 3000 B.C., hunting and gathering was the main subsistence of peoples living throughout the area until very recent periods (Mote 1998:33).

### ***The Evenki in Siberia***

The Evenki (or Evenks) are the most widely dispersed indigenous people in Siberia. Although their communities are scattered, they currently inhabit a broad region from most of Central Siberia through Mongolia and Manchuria. Despite a relatively small population, the total area that the Evenki inhabit, at present, is about 2.5 million square kilometers (1.55 million sq miles). The Evenki populations range from Central Siberia and the Arctic Ocean in the north to Manchuria, eastern Mongolia and Sakhalin in the south; and from the River Ob in the west to the Pacific coast of the Russian Far East in the east. However, most of the Evenki live in Eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East regions. They live side by side with the Even (Evenki cousins) and the Sakhan (descendants of northeast Turkic tribes who migrated during the fifteenth century) (Anderson 2002:7; Mote 1998:25, 182).

According to the 1989 census, the Evenki population within the Russian Federation was 29,901 (Sokolovski 2003:6). They have an autonomous national territory where 3200 of the Evenki live now. It became a national area in 1930 and an autonomous area in 1977. The head of the district is an Evenki but his representative power in Moscow is very limited (Fondahl 1994:123). The district is located in the forested taiga zone, with tundra vegetation in the north and many natural resources such as coal and timber around the district remained untapped. The Evenki are well known for reindeer herding, hunting and fishing in Siberia and the main occupations of the native Evenki are reindeer raising, fur trapping, and fishing. In general, for the Evenki in Siberia, wild reindeer, elk, moose, bears, wolves, boars, sable, stoat, fox, and otter are major resources, while various fish, especially salmon, are also major resources for their subsistence (Fondahl 1994:120).

They are formerly known as Tungus in the western world, even though the terms, Tungus or Tungusic, are currently mainly designated for one of the language families. Although the name Evenki became the official designation for the people in 1931, in some regions the Evenki people “call themselves bae, ile, orochon, or khamnigan” (Anderson 1999:142). Since then, some other neighboring groups of peoples such as Lamuts and Even, who are originally close to the Evenki, are officially considered to be a different ethnic people.

## **ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT OF THE EVENKI**

### ***Ethnic History of the Evenki***

The earliest extant written accounts of the possible ancestral people for the Evenki are from ancient Chinese records. The Liang-Shu (the Chronicle for Liang Dynasty, A.D. 502-557) includes some descriptions about people living in the north. According to them, the people inhabiting the forests herd deer-like cattle and make use of carriages that are pulled by the deer (Nentwig 2003:37). Another Chinese Chronicle, Sin-Tang-Shu (New Book of Tang Dynasty, A.D.618-907), written between A.D. 1044-1060, includes a more detailed account of northern reindeer people. It describes that the Ju tribe living north of Lake Baikal does not have sheep and horses, but deer, and they use the deer to pull carriages (=sleigh) (Nentwig 2003:37). Although the contacts between people living in ancient China and Siberia must have occurred frequently, one of the apparent contacts of reindeer people with other northeast Asians took place in 1636. It was the year that the Manchu, who are believed to be one of the Tungus descendants and who conquered China in 1644, conquered most of the Amur region in Siberia (Forsyth 1992:93). For several decades after that, the reindeer herders paid tribute, mainly in fur, to the Manchu rulers in China five times until the contact was lost in 1664 as the Russian colonization of Siberia was initiated (Nentwig 2003:38).

The identities for the people living throughout Siberia and Inner Asia regions are difficult to classify not only because of the area’s vast size but also its long history of human habitation. Scholars usually agree that the Evenki, who might have been divided into various distinct groups, could be divided into two main different groups by the mode of subsistence: the northern Evenki (engaged in reindeer husbandry and hunting), and the southern Evenki (engaged more in horse and cattle pastoralism) (Fondahl 1994:120). For the Evenki inhabiting the southern area, fish and some wild game are the principal sources of protein. However, they also breed and raise livestock. The northern Evenki are largely dependent on hunting and fishing, and raising reindeer in large scale (Anderson 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002).

### ***Marriage, Family, Death and Ideology***

Many early ethnographers in Siberia generalized the people living throughout the regions inhabited by the modern Evenki people as Tungus. Despite some distinct features among Tungus from different regions, many of the key features in their individual cultures share similarities (Czaplicka 1914; Shirokogoroff 1933). The first ethnography of the Evenki people in Siberia from the English-speaking world is from David G. Anderson's fieldwork of the Evenki of Taimyr (see Anderson 2002). There is another book, published originally in Russian and translated into English later, about the Tungus, by Marie A. Czaplicka (1914). Although her book is based on her field trips, it contains information compiled from some early works from other researchers in Siberia. The most well known ethnographic work of the Tungus is from Sergei Mikhailovich Shirokogoroff (1933).

According to some reports from Czaplicka, the Tungus have very strong family and clan organization. However, it is reported that there is no proper term to describe family in the Evenki language (Fondahl 1994:121). Each family is therefore identified by its clan name and regularly participates in clan-based activities. In many cases, the clans are organized by artificial creation without any kind of real blood connections. Although each family or families could be separated from the clan when searching for new hunting grounds, still the family members think of themselves as belonging to particular clans. The clan system has been preserved well among those living in isolated districts (Czaplicka 1914:52). The clans that decided to inhabit Russian settlements were banished from their original clan system, as expulsion from the clan was considered to be one of the major social punishments for the Evenki (Fondahl 1994:121-122). Czaplicka reported that exogamy is commonly practiced with bride and dowry customs, even though some Tungus practice polygamy as well (Czaplicka 1914:105-106). It is currently reported that the rate of marriage with non-Evenki has increased (Fondahl 1994:122).

There are different practices for the funeral ceremony of the Tungus in Czaplicka's report (1914:145-165); for instance, some Tungus hang the corpse, which is sewn up in a reindeer's skin, upon a tree, some Tungus hang the coffin on high posts in the forest, and some pastoral Tungus living in the Baikal province bury the coffin in the ground. Some burial practices were common to many tribes: a reindeer and a dog are often killed for the funeral ceremony and the items belonging to the dead are put in a wooden coffin or, in some cases, armor and cooking-vessels were separately hung on a nearby tree (Czaplicka 1914:155-156).

While most indigenous people in Siberia believe that "everything around them was animate, possessed of personality and living force" (Reid 2002:4), the Evenki are best known to the western world for one of their terms, "shaman", which indicates a spiritual mediator for animals, people, and places (Shirokogoroff 1935). The shaman is regarded as a person who can *know* and is believed to be a person chosen by the spirits of nature. He or she could turn himself or herself into various animals through a spiritual journey using techniques such as dancing, fasting or ingesting psychedelic plants (Reid 2002:5). Major functions of the shamans, through their "soul-journeys", are for fighting bad spirits or bad nature to heal the sick, divining the future, and competing with the enemy (Reid 2002:5). Although the term "shaman" comes from the Evenki, it is reported that shamanic activities from other hunter and gatherer societies in the world share remarkable similarities (McIntosh 2003:5). It is not, however, an organized religion, which usually have sacred texts (Reid 2004:8-9).

### ***Reindeer Herding***

The most important animal for the subsistence of the Evenki is the reindeer. The Evenki often use reindeer for overland travel because they can journey 80 kilometers per day carrying about 80 kilograms over an area that is too tough for horses (Fondahl 1994:120). Traditional reindeer herders travel in groups of one to three families over vast areas. Since gift-giving was a more common activity than trading for the Evenki, reindeer were mostly exchanged as gifts among the Evenki, but occasionally sold to Russians (Fondahl 1994:121).

Scholars believe that domesticated reindeer appeared about 2000 years ago (Shnirelman 1999:121-122) and that first occurrence of reindeer herding as a major subsistence form was from the Samoyedic taiga population of the Sayan Mountains, through the first half of the first millennium A.D. (Ermolova 2003:23). When reindeer herding first emerged in the Sayan Mountains region, peoples of the Uralic Samoyeds, such as Nentsy, Entsy, Sel'kups, Nganasans, including the possible ancestral groups of the modern Evenki, diffused across the eastern region and introduced reindeer herding to the tundra region of northern Eurasia (Humphrey 1980). The common type of deer herding between the Sayan and Tungus is supported by various literatures, and the cultural link between the two peoples is also well supported by their similar shamanistic activities (Maksimov 1928, cited in Vainshtein 1980:137).

The northern Evenki raise large herds (1000 deers or more) of reindeer principally for meat as well as transportation purposes. The southern Evenki, on the other hand, practice taiga-type reindeer herding and raise only 20-30 deer per family, using them predominantly as a source of milk products as well as pack and riding stock (Donahoe 2003:12; Ermolova 2003:23). However, it is reported that in some exceptional cases, the southern Evenki also kill their reindeers for meat (Ermolova 2003:23). In fact, ethnographic data indicates many different types of deer-herding traditions among the peoples in northern Eurasia; the data mainly describes several points of variation: the function of reindeers (whether or not they are ridden), the methods of pasturing (whether or not the aid of dogs is used), and the milking practices (Vainshtein 1980:130). It is known that contemporary reindeer herding exhibits great regional variations because of different environmental, cultural and historical background of each group in Siberia (Ermolova 2003:23).

### ***Property and Land Concept***

Although each clan might recognize specific areas for their hunting and herding of reindeer, more than one clan may share the areas without conflict (Fondahl 1994:121). In fact, no strict concept of boundaries for territories exists for the Evenki; they do not have a concept for the ownership of land (Fondahl 1994:121; Sirina 2005:205). Actually in the Evenki language, no word properly translates into the English word "property". The closest meanings to the word "property" we can find in the Russian-Evenki dictionaries are "oneself", "themselves", "wield", and "know" (Anderson 1998:71, note1:236-237). Therefore, the concept of property, to the Evenki, is not regarded as a legal and economic relationship in human society (Fondahl 2003). Rather, their concept of property involves "a proper relationship between humans and other entities, which constantly monitor and adjust themselves to human agency" (Anderson 1998:70). Interestingly, their right to take some resources, such as wood, water, and animals from the land is granted by knowing the land properly. Since knowing something on the land represents the capacity to get the sources from the land, broader knowledge of the land is essential to also get social status and respect (Anderson 1998:70, see also 2002:117-131). They believe that while the hunter tries to know both the animals and the land, the animals and the land also come to know the hunter. As indicated, they are concerned more about the relationship between people and

land, than exclusive relationships between peoples (Anderson 1998:70). One example for this relationship is displayed by one of the Evenki practices of repaying gifts of wild deer fat or coins to the land after they have a successful hunt or when they enter new lands. Evenki shamans therefore play a leading role as mediators connecting the relations between the sentient world of nature and human beings.

### **EVENKI AND RUSSIAN CONTACT**

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the Russians encountered the Siberian people for the first time, there were more than 200 native tribes speaking 130 different languages and dialects. More than half of the natives are, however, extinguished, including the disappearance of 75 ethnicities: the worst outcome of contact between the indigenous peoples and the newcomers was spreading the epidemic, such as smallpox, influenza and syphilis to Siberia (Reid 2002). These European diseases broke out in 1630 and “may have killed as many as half of all Khant, Mansi, Nenets and Ket. In the 1650s smallpox crossed the Yenisey, killing up to 80 percent of the northern Evenk and Sakha, and nearly half the Yukagir” (Reid 2002:48). The administration of Siberia by the Russian Empire started in 1637, and the Russian authority began to regard Siberia as an integral part of Russia in 1763 (Wood 1991:9). While economic exploitation and the appearance of new settlers from Russia continued in Siberia throughout the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, it was reported that the Russian population of Siberia had already increased a couple of times by the eighteenth century (Wood 1991:3-7). Under the rules of Tsarist Russia, all kinds of political, economic and civil rights of the indigenous people in Siberia were not considered as important issues at all (Wood 1991:14).

### ***Soviet Authority in Siberia***

In 1918, after the collapse of the Tsarist Empire in Russia, the Bolsheviks were present in almost every Siberian province because the Russian people in the west were encouraged to immigrate to Siberia. The Soviet authority categorized twenty-six peoples of the Far East within its Soviet Union into “the numerically small peoples” who use distinct languages. This process of categorization emphasizes numbers within populations in order to define what is indigenous, without considering all other ethnical contexts (Shnirelman 1999:119). Therefore, some groups of peoples with a numerically large population are not considered to be indigenous peoples, even though they have historical and cultural backgrounds that need to be regarded as indigenous (Shnirelman 1999:119). Currently, around thirty different ethnic peoples in Siberia are officially acknowledged as the indigenous peoples by the Russian authority (Sokolovski 2003:6). It is necessary to mention here that ‘ethnic group’ was synonymous with ‘nationality’ for the Soviet scholars, while neither of which directly meant ‘citizenship’ (see Bringa 1993; Shanin 1986; Slezkine 1994).

While concerns on how to approach and manage multiethnic-societies in the Soviet Union had been regarded as one of the important political issues for the Soviet authority, the study of the ethnic phenomena in Russia was largely influenced by Stalin’s definition of “nation”, which is “a historically evolved, stable community based on a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture” (Stalin 1950, cited in Slezkine 1994:415-416). Scholars focused on ethnic self-identity as ethnic entities and put efforts into classifying ethnic communities or groups, which were regarded since the late 1940s as nationalities, although there were continuous arguments over which aspects of identities are really connected with ethnicity (Bromley and Kozlov 1989: 426-432). The Soviet scholars

generally agreed to see ethnicity as “a culturally self-reproducing set of behavioural patterns linked to collective self-identity” (Shanin 1989:413). This way of looking at ethnicity in the Soviet regime was connected with political strategies; Lenin’s awareness of multi-ethnicities in the Empire was essential for the socialist revolution, which also needed to attract non-Russian nationalities. In fact, in the ethnic pyramid which was directly related to any kind of privileges during the Russia’s Tsarist regimes, the Tungus was placed at the bottom (Shanin 1989:416). While Russianness was mainly defined by “inherited and adopted” ethnicity, all other ethnic identities, except Russian, experienced the pressures of ethnic assimilation of Russification (Shanin 1989:416).

The policy, supporting ethnic rights regardless of possible arguments on whether or not it was truly ideal from the viewpoints of the indigenous peoples, was later codified as one of the major principles of Marxism-Leninism during Stalin’s rule. As indicated in the slogan, “ethnic in form, socialist in content”, nationality was incorporated into the Bolsheviks’ ideology and the Soviet Union authority later allowed establishing Autonomous Districts for some of native peoples in the 1930s (Shanin 1989:418). It was intended to protect and to maintain subsistence economies and traditional cultures. In fact, the mother languages for the indigenous peoples living in the Autonomous Districts survived much better than those outside administrative control (Shnirelman 1999:120). The autonomous districts however have very weak jurisdictional power compared to any regular Russian province, although they have their own parliaments. Ironically, the army, national transport, and all other major social infra structures were totally under central government, the Soviet authority. And in the late 1930s, policies for changing the indigenous to Russification was implemented and was promoted not only by modernization and settlement but also by adoption of the Russian culture, especially the language. This situation made possible the destruction of identities for various groups, especially those who did not have autonomous republics (Matveeva et al. 1997:306). Paradoxically, in reality the Soviet authority’s policy emphasizing both the statehood for the Soviet Union and the nationalistic identities for each ethnicity in the Union created the sharp confrontation between uniformity and diversity, and oppression and endorsement.

### *After the 1980s*

Although the Bolsheviks tried to abrogate all traditional aspects of indigenous life, such as shamanism and the clan system, most of them were still practiced by the indigenous populations in Siberia. With the advent of Gorbachev’s policies of Perestroika, Glasnost and Demokratizatsiya in the late 1980s, the indigenous in Siberia were able to make their discontent heard vociferously in Moscow for the first time (Mote 1998:132). As a result, “a kind of ‘native rights movement’, somewhat similar to that in North America”, emerged in Siberia in the late 1980s; unsurprisingly, the waves of nationalism among the indigenous have been rising (Forsyth 1992:409-417). This movement was in fact built on an ideas already budding out since the initiation of Stalin’s ethnic favoring policy. The increase in educated local indigenous elites and their ethnic awareness put socialism behind ethnicity, and the resulting increase of nationalist tensions in the Soviet Union influenced the political agendas of many Soviet rulers (Shanin 1989:418-422). Therefore, one of the most important tasks for the politicians overtime has been making policies that reflect a balance of rights for both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples (Mote 1998:137).

Consequently, the “Association of Peoples of the North,” that started as an advisory body for the Gorbachev administration to promote the rights of the indigenous in northern Siberia, was

established in 1989, and its first congress took place in 1990, with the purpose of proposing agendas such as ethnic discrimination, the land rights of the indigenous, and the creation of traditional tribal councils (Matveeva et al. 1997:306; Mote 1998:174). The organization later changed its name to the “All-Russian Association of the Numerically Small Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East” in 1997 (Mote 1998:174). Throughout the early 1990s, many local indigenous peoples, most of whom already had their autonomous regions, declared their sovereignty. Nevertheless, since they do not have a right of a veto over land, intended for governmental purposes (Sirina 2005:207), many indigenous activists have requested more political rights on their land in order to prevent any kind of potentially harmful projects undertaken by the Russian Federation; the Evenki in fact have requested the right to become decision makers on any developmental projects occurring in their ancestral lands (Damilon and Plumley 2003:40; Matveeva et al. 1997:311). While there has been a gradual increase of conflicts regarding power over controlling territory and various issues related to indigenous rights between Moscow and the ethno-territorial units, in 1994, the Committee for the North and Minority Peoples was created in the Council and the federal government passed a pro-indigenous law ‘On the Foundations of the Legal Status of the Indigenous Peoples of the Russian North,’ which was however vetoed by President Yeltsin in 1995, due to pressure from the oil lobbyists (Matveeva et al. 1997:311).

After the fall of communism and the dismantling of the Soviet Union, the collapse of the collective farm system automatically occurred very quickly through Siberia. Russian and Ukrainian comers left the land and the most of the former state farms near the Evenki Autonomous District had been broken up into clan communities by 1993 (Anderson 2002:162; Popkov 1994, cited in Anderson 1998:67). This made some Evenki earn more territory and consequently some Evenki sought to return the traditional ways of the Evenki subsistence. However, as the case of reindeer ownership, which was dispossessed by the state and is now legally possessed by multiple ownerships (private, municipal and state), Russian government officers have experienced difficulty in distributing land ownership, which is also both collectively shared and private, to the Evenki (Sirina 2005:205-207). The Russian government gave the right to claim the ownership of the territory for traditional land use to the people who organize themselves into a community and who want to sustain their traditional lifestyle. However, this has resulted to of multiple ownerships due to possible multiple identities from each individual, village, community, or state farm, which also can be divided by different economic patterns of subsistence. In order to deal with so many different cases of multiple ownerships, the Russian authority recommended that local indigenous peoples create an association of communities based on their traditional clan system to share ownerships of the land (Sirina 2005:205). Oftentimes this plan do not work well because some local Evenki, especially those who had not sustained their traditional hunting, fishing, or reindeer-herding, do not accept the newly forced communities (Sirina 2005:205, 213). And, it is even more complex for some Evenks living together with Russians because of their ethnic identity; some urbanized Evenks, who share Evenki-Russian ancestry, have the option to declare themselves to be either Evenki or Russian. In this case, if they do not choose to go back to their traditional activities, they are not regarded as indigenous people despite their “strong ties and associations with their nomadic relatives and neighbors” (Turaev 2004:148-9, cited in Sirina 2005:204). Based on current Russian legislation, Evenks who declare themselves as indigenous people and who sustain or want to engage in the traditional ways of their subsistence economies could acquire their rights to the ownership of land that they or their ancestors had occupied and used (Sirina 2005:204).

In addition, the federal policy emphasizing the traditional clan community for the indigenous has produced another problem to the Evenki and other indigenous peoples in Siberia. There was belief among scholars and politicians that the clan communities were able to be managed freely by the indigenous without any governmental assistance and remained under the free management system without any direct involvement by the federal government (Gorochov 1992, cited in Sirina 2005:209). Most current clan communities reflect the traditional way of life for the indigenous, while some also function as “economic structures”, which is one of new concepts that they have to be familiar with; for example, some clan communities have evolved into modern businesses, such as mining (Sirina 2005:211). But these communities have experienced economic hardship due to the failure of their businesses. It was a predicted and expected result because there were two factors that they should have prepared for beforehand (Sirina 2005:210): first, the clan communities are still heavily dependent on the administrative structure and second, the communities need more time to become acquainted with a self-management system in order to survive market competition, which is totally different from their traditional egalitarianism.

On the other hand, the Evenki, especially those living in multi-ethnic settlements, have faced another kind of challenge. They have been very much discouraged from keeping their traditional economic activities, such as reindeer husbandry, hunting and fishing. For instance, the Russian officials give Evenki hunters the quotas and hunting permits very late in the season when the wild reindeer have already migrated to other regions (Bychkov et al., 1992:59). An even worse situation for the Evenki is the removal of children from their families for residential schools. The children beyond the first or second grade are taken by helicopters each fall to the school. They are only able to be with their parents for two holidays before school ends in the spring semester. This inconsequence makes the children unfamiliar with their traditional identity and make them eventually seek a Russificational livelihood. This kind of long-term strategy has produced a disordered identity on the Evenki generation and caused a short life expectancy mostly due to a high rate of suicide (Bychkov et al., 1992:60; Poelzer and Fondahl 1997:30).

To put it briefly, since the late 1920s as the Bolshevik executed many Evenki people who own many numbers of reindeers as rural property holders, some local subsistence for the Evenki has been based on hunting and fishing only. After the late 1980s, however, remote Evenki communities are renewing one of their major traditional ways of living, reindeer breeding, and some Evenki living in the state farms have decided to leave the farms and drive their reindeer into the forests to look for a better living in the taiga (Mote 1998:140). Reindeer herding is now the symbol of resistance or independence for the indigenous people in Siberia against the Russian influence and has caused the emergence of large-scale reindeer-herding throughout the tundra region of Siberia (Golovnev 2000:146). However, the reindeer herding Evenki are now being challenged by a new difficulty. Because of acid rain produced by the industrial complex in Siberia, some areas of the tundra are no longer suited for reindeer herding (Anderson 2002:62-67, 116, and 169). Increasing numbers of restricted regions for nature protection, for example, the creation of the World Wildlife Fund-Sakhan Resource Reserve, put also the Evenki into a difficult situation, since most of the preservation areas include reindeer pasture, hunting areas and ancestral burial grounds of the Evenki (Fondahl 2003:29).

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The indigenous in Siberia have occupied around 60 percent of the modern Russian territory, although their population is less than one percent of the entire population of the Russian Federation. They have experienced an enormous influx of newcomers involved in industrial

exploitation because their inhabited areas are rich in natural resources. As with other indigenous peoples throughout the world, indigenous Siberians have suffered centuries of deprivation and experienced the loss of not only land but also their cultural identity. According to recent reports, although the Evenki strive to keep and practice their old system based on a traditional clan organization, some of them are more concerned with current policies of the national and federal governments, which have been directly or indirectly affecting their lifestyle. Therefore, family, territorial principles, and nationalities, which are mostly new concepts for the Evenki, are more commonly centered on their current life, especially among peoples who no longer engage in traditional subsistence forms (Sirina 2005:203).

Currently the hardships of the post-Soviet economic transition continue to harass the indigenous populations in Siberia and produce social problems, such as high rates of infant mortality, homicide and suicide, and erosion of traditional cultures: it has been noted that the number of some groups for indigenous populations dropped sharply in the last several decades (Forsyth 1992:401). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, these problems are openly recognized and the indigenous populations have tried to organize themselves more effectively to seek better ways of preserving their identity and land; it has been reported that Russian migration and industrial exploitation in Siberia have slowed down (Matveeva et al. 1997:306). The indigenous however “have also had to face a new set of challenges, the most important of which, land privatization, threatens the security of their land rights and their aim of creating ‘reserved territories.’ The growing demands for access to the resource-rich areas of the north by domestic and international mineral extraction companies has raised the issue of what rights the native peoples should have in the future economic exploitation of their homelands” (Matveeva et al. 1997:306).

Without exception, hegemonic and economic interests in Siberia have put the Evenki into this delicate situation. Since developing natural resources in Siberia have directly affected the mode of subsistence for the Evenki, they have been forced to change not only their habitation but also cultural identity (Fondahl 1998). As the Evenki try to maintain their old customs and traditions under those pressures, they also voice their discontents to obtain their rights as any other indigenous population does in the world. While the meaning of land for the Evenki has been shifted from “a relationship to land based on a personalized entitlement to a growing consciousness of territory and the incumbent notion of rights” (Anderson 2002:170), they are looking for their equitable role and right in decision-making over critical resource-development initiatives on their native territory (Dampilon and Plumley 2003:39). They are now placed in a vulnerable position in transition period to the world of market economy and unavoidably they need to be familiar with the concept of privatization or ownership of land. Therefore, they might have to face a legal status for each ethnic or clan territory.

While the ethnicity and cultural identity of any people in the world have been playing an important role in our modern societies for decision-making as they are involved and connected into economical and political issues, the case of the Evenki people in Siberia is a good example in showing that the indigenous have suffered and struggled due to poor administrative plans which have been authorized and affected by the political authorities that do not have enough ethnoecological considerations for the indigenous peoples in Siberia. Political issues from the past Soviet regime to the current government of the Russian Federation should have been strongly factored in and considered in the process of making policies for the indigenous. It is also obvious that many local government administrators must have not given enough importance to the indigenous knowledge and biodiversity of the indigenous people before deciding on any policy.

affecting the subsistence system of the indigenous peoples although the governmental authorities from the previous Soviet union to current Russian government have tried to approach the indigenous peoples in Siberia based on ethnographical data by many scholars.

The winds of change from Eastern Europe had hit and affected peoples' life not only in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and Russia but also the Evenki in Siberia in the last several decades. Time has passed and people's ideology has continued to change with the stream of time. Now the Evenki are asserting their place to be the center in the stream of change of human history. They want to be the subject for any kind of change, rather than just being the object. It might be too early to predict or discuss the political future of the Evenki, whether the Evenki eventually become the realistic subjects of their own property as they wish or not. However, it is apparent that there is rising ethnic consciousness among the Evenki and the existence of some competition even among the Evenki regarding more rights in the community or individual properties. It is also evident that while many territories for the indigenous are already subordinated to federal law and involved with environmental issues, the traditional subsistence lifestyle of the Evenki have had direct impact from such conditions. Therefore, it is necessary that concerned voices for the poor socio-economic and cultural position of the Evenki should be heard by the local government and eventually by the central government. Policy makers in the Russian Federation should acknowledge the situation for a balanced political and social benefit between the majority and the indigenous so as to avert any kind of violent struggle that could ensue between ethnic groups or between the majority and the indigenous in Siberia. It is apparent that keeping the unique knowledge of reindeer husbandry and cognitive value of land property for the Evenki people are important parts of their social memories that deserve to be maintained in their daily life and passed on to the next generations.

## REFERENCES

Anderson, David G.

1998 Property as a way of knowing on Evenki lands in Arctic Siberia. *In* Property relations: renewing the anthropological tradition, ed. C.M. Hann, pp. 64-84. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

1999 The Evenki of the lower Enisei Valley. *In* The Cambridge encyclopedia of hunters and gatherers, eds. Richard B. Lee and Richard Daly, pp. 142-151. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

2000 Tracking the wild Tungus in Taimyr: identity, ecology, and mobile economies in Arctic Siberia. *In* hunters and gatherers in the modern world: conflict, resistance, and self-determination, eds. Peter P. Schweitzer, pp. 223-243. Megan Biesele and Robert K. Hitchcock. Berghahn Books, New York.

2002 Identity and ecology in Arctic Siberia: the number one reindeer brigade. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Bobrick, Benson

1992 East of the Sun: The epic conquest and tragic history of Siberia. Poseidon Press, New York.

Bringa, Ton

1993 Nationality categories, national identification and identity formation in “multinational” Bosnia. *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, Special Issue ‘War among the Yugoslavs’ 11(1-2):80-89.

Bromley, Julian and Viktor Kozlov

1989 *The Theory of Ethnos and Ethnic Processes in Soviet Social Science*. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31(3):425-438.

Bychkov, Oleg; Dumond, Don; Wixman, Ronald

1992 A people dwindling under centralized rule. *Cultural Survival Quarterly* (Winter):57-60.

Czaplicka, Marie. A.

1914 *Aboriginal Siberia: a study in social anthropology*. The Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Dampilon, Zhargal and Plumley, Daniel

2003 Calling for a voice: an Evenki youth leadership organization’s effort to advance territories of traditional nature use. *Cultural Survival Quarterly* (Spring):39-40.

Donahoe, Brian

2003 The troubled taiga: survival on the move for the last nomadic reindeer herders of south Siberia, Mongolia, and China. *Cultural Survival Quarterly* (Spring):12-18.

Ermolova, N. V.

2003 Evenki reindeer herding: a history. *Cultural Survival Quarterly* (Spring):23-24.

Fondahl, Gail

1994 Evenki. *In Encyclopedia of World Cultures Vol. VI*, pp. 120-124, eds. Paul Friedrich and Norma Diamond. G.K. Hall & Co., Boston.

1998 *Gaining Ground? Evenkis, Land and Reform in Southeastern Siberia*. Allyn & Bacon, Boston and London.

2003 Nature preserves threaten land rights. *Cultural Survival Quarterly* (Spring):29.

Forsyth, James

1992 *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia’s North Asian Colony 1581-1990*. Cambridge University Press, New York.

Golovnev, Andrei V.

2000 Wars and chiefs among the Samoyeds and Ugrians of western Siberia. *In Hunters and Gatherers in the Modern World: Conflict, Resistance, and Self-Determination*, eds. Peter P. Schweitzer, pp. 125-149. Megan Biesele and Robert K. Hitchcock. Berghahn Books, New York.

Humphrey, Caroline

1980 Introduction. In *Nomads of South: the Pastoral Economies of Tuva*, by Seryan Vainshtein, edited and with an introduction by Caroline Humphrey, translated from Russian by M. Colenso, pp. 1-36. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

King, Alexander

2002 Reindeer Herders' Culturescapes in the Koryak Autonomous Okrug. In *People and the Land: Pathways to Reform in Post-Soviet Siberia*, ed. Erick Kasten, pp. 63-80. Dietrich Reimer Verlag, Berlin.

Matveeva, Anna, Neil Melvin, and Suzanne Pattle

1997 The commonwealth of independent states. In *World Directory of Minorities*, ed. minority rights group, pp. 260-327. Minority rights group international, London.

McIntosh, Lan S.

2003 Seeking the Shaman. *Cultural Survival Quarterly* (Spring):5-6.

Mote, Victor L.

1998 *Siberia: Worlds Apart*. Westview Press, Boulder.

Nentwig, Ingo

2003 Reminiscences about the reindeer herders of China. *Cultural Survival Quarterly* (Spring):36-39.

Poelzer, Greg and Fondahl, Gail

1997 Indigenous Peoples of the Russian North. *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 21(3):30-33.

Reid, Anna

2002 *The Shaman's Coat: a Native History of Siberia*. Walker & Company, New York.

Shanin, Teodor

1986 Soviet Theories of Ethnicity: The Case of a Missing Term. *New Left Review* 158(July-August):113-122.

1989 Ethnicity in the Soviet Union: Analytical Perceptions and Political Strategies. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31(3):409-424.

Shirokogoroff, Sergei Mikhailovich

1933 *Social Organization of the Northern Tungus*. The Commercial Press, Shanghai.

Shnirelman, Victor A.

1999 Introduction: North Eurasia. In *the Cambridge Encyclopedia of Hunters and Gatherers*, eds. Richard. B. Lee and Richard Daly, pp. 119-125. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Sirina, Anna A.

2005 Clan Communities Among the Northern Indigenous Peoples of the Sakha (Yakutia) Republic: A Step to Self-determination? *In* *Rebuilding Identities: Pathways to Reform in Post-Soviet Siberia*, ed. Erich Kasten, pp. 197-216. Dietrich Reimer Verlag, Berlin.

Slezkine, Yuri

1994 The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism. *Slavic Review* 53(2):414-452.

Sokolovski, Sergei

2003 The "Indigenous Peoples" Category in Russian Legislation. *Anthropological News* 44(9):6-7.

Vainshtein, Sevyan

1980 *Nomads of South: The Pastoral Economies of Tuva*. C. Humphrey, ed. M. Colenso, trans. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Wood, Alan

1991 Introduction: Siberia's Role in Russian History. *In* *The History of Siberia: from Russian Conquest to Revolution*, ed. Alan Wood, pp. 1-16. Routledge, London and New York.