

**BETWEEN HEAVEN
AND HELL**

**The Myth of Siberia
in Russian Culture**

Edited By
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- Park Service* (March 15, 1991), p. 31f. My thanks to John Tichotsky for sharing with me his encyclopedic knowledge of the Chukchi.
7. Vladimir Sangi, head of the Association of the Peoples of the North, has since 1961 collected, studied, and published the legends and myths of the Nivkh peoples (*Nivkhskie legendy* [Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Sakhalinskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1961] and *Legendy Ykh-Mifa* [Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossia, 1967]). In his novel *Zhenit'ba Kevongov* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1975) Sangi explores the historical genealogy of his people and their notions of what constitutes biography. Sangi has been among the most ardent defenders of the peoples of the north and has voiced his concern over their literary fate now that the All-Union Writers' Union no longer exists. See "Union of Soviet Writers Is Also Breaking Apart," *New York Times*, Sept. 14, 1991, p. 13.
 8. Yuri Rytkeu, *Magicheskie chisla* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1986), pp. 16-17.
 9. Waldemar Bogoraz, "Chukchee Mythology," in Franz Boaz, ed., *The Jesup North Pacific Expedition* (New York: AMS Press, 1975), vol. 8, pp. 138, 141.
 10. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
 11. Rytkeu, *Reborn to a Full Life*, pp. 16-18.
 12. Rytkeu's retelling of the whale legend appeared in "When Whales Leave," *Soviet Literature* 12 (1977): 3-73.
 13. See *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin*, March 8, 1988, p. 3. Rytkeu has also been coming under fire for his earlier portrayals of his people. See Boris Khazanov, "Proza poeta," *Grani* 137 (1985): 297-302. Khazanov describes a meeting between Lev Druskin and Rytkeu in Leningrad during which Rytkeu sat and narrated stories about his people that he had never published. Druskin was amazed at the wealth of oral material Rytkeu had collected and urged him to publish them. Rytkeu shook his head and answered "I know what kind of merchandise is needed" ("*Ia znaiu, kakoi tovar nuzhen*"; pp. 300-301).
 14. The growth of ethnic consciousness has manifested itself in the number of new journals and newspapers that are beginning to appear. In addition to *Dal' nii Vostok*, which is printed in Khabarovsk and has long been a bastion of conservatism, more liberal journals such as *Na severe dal' nem* out of Magadan are now appearing. There are also interesting new papers, such as *Dialog* from Petropavlovsk and *Ainu* and *Svobodnyi Sakhalin* from Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk. Efforts to support the culture of the indigenous peoples have resulted recently in trade and cultural agreements between Russia and the United States allowing the Chukchi and the Inuit easy access to one another and opportunities for joint cultural exhibits. See Clyde H. Farnsworth, "Reunion in Arctic for Cold War Foes," *New York Times*, Dec. 4, 1991, p. 13.
 15. For an analogous discussion on ethnic and dominant cultures, see, for example, Michael Castro, *Interpreting the Indian: Twentieth-Century Poets and the Native American* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983). Castro quotes Leslie Marmon Silko, who, for one, questions "the assumption that the white man, through some innate cultural or racial superiority, has the ability to master the essential beliefs, values, emotions of persons from Native American communities" (p. 161).

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Siberia Hot and Cold: Reconstructing the Image of Siberian Indigenous Peoples

Bruce Grant

Ever since the 1960s, when Soviet leaders began to announce that the formation of the Soviet nation had been achieved, Siberian indigenous peoples have been roundly praised for their heroic leap from primitive-communal society to socialism. In contrast to their more populous counterparts around the Soviet Union, Siberian peoples were considered to be less advanced along the Marxist scale of historical progress, and their induction into modernity meant the bypassing of the slaveholding, feudal, and capitalist modes of production. Numerous book titles herald this "stride across a thousand years" where the early days of social reconstruction were "equal to centuries," and it became customary to preface studies of Siberian native culture with passages such as the following: "The results of this gigantic undertaking [socialist construction] are readily visible: the liquidation of illiteracy, the creation of written languages, the rise of native literary, musical and dance ensembles, and finally, the very existence of native intelligentsias—all this permits us to conclude that the cultures of [northern] native peoples have ceased to be 'traditional' and have begun to be 'historic,' that is, developing."¹ Thus, through the cultural development of northern peoples, "a planned and directed process,"² the Soviet government drew the indigenous population out from timelessness and brought them into history. Such a passage from tradition to modernity was equally congruent with the Soviet nationality policy that was emergent in the 1920s. Maintaining that ethnic tension was class-based, the Bolsheviks held that the disappearance

of the class struggle under communism would in turn cause interethnic struggles (and perforce, ethnic identity) to atrophy. Free of oppression, Soviet peoples would flourish and come together as a new international ethnos.

On the other hand, to speak to anyone in Moscow, St. Petersburg, or Novosibirsk, to appreciate the almost negligible role that Siberian peoples have played in Russian popular consciousness, and to witness the history of state paternalism toward them, one could well contend that Siberian peoples have remained the children of nature that they were long presumed to be. Despite the focused efforts of government planners to integrate them into Soviet society, the *malye narody Severa*, Russia's "small peoples of the north," who numbered 184,000 in the 1989 census,³ have merged with the dominant perception of Siberia as a wild and untamed land.

We have then two dominant images of Siberian native peoples: one that heralds their transition into the modern world and another that consigns them to the timeless world of yesteryear. Each relies on the rhetoric of exoticism, either through its cultivation or its forgetting, and each speaks to the politics of representation. The changing fortunes of each of these ideal types at the policy level reverberated profoundly through the communities they described. My goal here is to examine the implications of these polarized ideal types in the Soviet period by tracing the experience of one Siberian indigenous group, the Nivkhi of Sakhalin Island.⁴ Contrary to images of pristine isolation, the Nivkh experience largely mirrors that of the Soviet state of which they were an interactive part. Innovative if dramatic early social policies and rapid modernization marked the onset of Soviet power, while under Stalin their extensive prerevolutionary ties with Japanese and Chinese traders made them especially susceptible to charges of collaboration with foreigners. Notably, the period that has the most trenchant hold on Nivkh historical memory concerns a sweeping resettlement plan begun in the 1960s when over two-thirds of the Sakhalin Nivkh population were relocated from prosperous, ancestral towns to "Potemkin show villages," in the words of the Nivkh writer Vladimir Sangi.

While the Nivkhi have not been without history, their purported leap across a thousand years has not entailed full acceptance by the surrounding Russian community either. Despite decades of efforts to make Nivkhi full members in the Soviet fold of nations, the result has been a sharp decline in traditional cultural symbols and belief systems alongside a level of discrimination and official disinterest that keeps the native population at arm's length. Perestroika has provided a forum for voicing discontent, but for the Nivkhi this process has borne a double irony: At the same time as they come

to gauge more fully the loss of their traditional culture, they are also marking the demise of the pan-Soviet symbols and ideals that they traded them in for. It is in the context of the Nivkhi themselves sorting through the remains of the Soviet ethos to which they once subscribed that I explore the reverberations of the dichotomous mythic constructions in which they have been cast.

The Nivkhi, or Giliaks, as they were known prior to the Bolshevik revolution, are one of the five far eastern Siberian native peoples referred to as Paleosiatians, largely for having a language that does not correspond to any other known linguistic group.⁵ For centuries they have lived along the banks of the Amur River and on adjacent Sakhalin, territories considered their ancestral homeland. Their population has generally fluctuated between 4,000 and 5,000, with two-thirds living on the Amur and one-third living on Sakhalin. Russians, with whom the Nivkhi have had contact since the seventeenth century, have been the main interpreters of Nivkh life, although Nivkhi had maintained perhaps more favorable trading relations since the twelfth century with the Chinese and, since the 1800s, with the Japanese. Despite numerous accounts of Nivkh life by travelers, explorers, ethnographers, and historians,⁶ it was not until the Russian ethnographer Lev Shternberg began his study of the Nivkhi while in exile on Sakhalin in the late 1800s that they attracted broader attention, including that of Friedrich Engels, who looked upon the Nivkh tradition of group marriage as a living example of primitive communal values.⁷ While Engels's attention increased the intellectual currency of the Nivkhi, they seem to have been more notorious among the Russian intelligentsia for their reputation as bounty hunters occasionally hired by the Sakhalin authorities to return fugitive prisoners.

If Siberia as a whole had come to be synonymous in the nineteenth century with the cold, dark expanse into which Russia could cast its sinners, Sakhalin ranked among the most dreaded of exile posts. Routinely referred to as "the dreary isle of punishment, the Hades of Russia," and "the end of the world,"⁸ it was held by more than one observer as "the final destination of the unshot, the unhanged, the convicts and exiles who by frequent escapes or repeated murders have graduated . . . from other prison stations."⁹ Indeed, despite the island being 593 miles in length, a fierce and rapid current surrounds it on all sides, making all but the most studied of passages difficult. However, when the Russian government opened the island to labor camps in 1861, it was also with a view to creating an agricultural penal colony. Through considerable convict and recruited colonist labor, the island managed to establish a level of self-sufficiency by 1905 that enabled it to feed its limited population,¹⁰ a notable achievement subsequently overshadowed when the

Russians ceded the most fertile half of the island to Japan after the Russo-Japanese war of 1905 (territory that was not recovered until World War II).

While Nivkhi had long had active trading relations with Chinese and Japanese fishermen, it was not until the influx of Russian settlers to the north half of the island after the war of 1905 that they had to contend with more enterprising neighbors. Soviet sources tend to emphasize the most positive aspects of Russian-Nivkh culture contact,¹¹ but there were clearly problems to cohabitation. The newcomers were naturally interested in the best locations for fishing, and as one historian observed, "the best indicators of a good source of fish were Giliak settlements."¹² This led to repeated encroachments, which in at least one case resulted in the burning of a prosperous Nivkh village to make way for what is today the central town of Ado-Tym.¹³ Nivkh dogs, which served as the main means of transport and traditionally foraged for themselves, gradually had to be penned and fed in order to prevent them from attacking Russian cows, thus further limiting the often precarious food supply.¹⁴

The Russian administration at the turn of the century had largely been concerning itself with the prison population. The military governor of the island extended food aid to the Nivkhi during a number of famine years,¹⁵ and formal records attest to the conversion of a small number of Giliak souls.¹⁶ But there seems to have been little effort to colonize the Nivkh culturally: The intractability of the island's physical environment seemed to be compounded only by the intractability of its native inhabitants. Whether observers had a positive or a negative view of the Nivkhi, the response was largely to leave them to their own devices.¹⁷ Over the years, Siberian peoples as a whole had graduated from *inozemtsy* (people of a different land) to *inorodtsy* (people of a different birth), and sometimes to *inovertsy* (people of a different faith), as Slezkine has shown.¹⁸ As the weight of indigenous alterity shifted in the eighteenth century, "It was now their overall cultural distinctiveness—or rather, the growing perception of their 'backwardness'—that made certain people alien."¹⁹ In 1913 one Sakhalin administrator noted the potential "favorable influence" that schooling could have on the Nivkh children, were it not for the "certain odor" that precluded their being exposed to the Russian children. As one early Soviet reformer put it, "Such was the dilemma: either shed the 'certain odor' or remain in darkness. The latter alternative wins by default, since the Giliak native—politically, economically and morally forgotten—has had no chance to attempt the former."²⁰

This spirited defense belies the diversity of the Nivkh community in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution. While the Nivkhi on Sakhalin's eastern coast were the least integrated into the emerging resource-based oil, timber,

and fish economy, Nivkh communities in the north-central and northwestern zones routinely purchased goods at local Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Russian stores, where Kolchak money²¹ and pelts were exchanged for grains and ornamental silks. Yet if the Sakhalin Nivkhi had been forgotten by civilization, the establishment of Soviet power on the north end of the island in May of 1925 meant that they were intended to be recovered in a determined way.

In contrast to their larger republican counterparts such as the Uzbeks or Georgians, the native peoples of the north were considered to be essentially "without culture," not a palimpsest but a tabula rasa onto which a new Soviet identity and way of life could be inscribed. To meet the task, the administration of the Siberian indigenous population was entrusted to the *Poliarnyi podotdel*, the polar political division of the People's Commissariat on Nationalities (*Narkomnats*) in 1922. With the dissolution of the *Narkomnats* in 1923, a more broadly based planning body was proposed, and in 1924 this came in the form of the Committee for the Assistance to Peoples of the Northern Borderlands, or Committee of the North.

With the founding of the committee in June of 1924, the Moscow-based working group set out three main priorities for northern native development: native self-government, economic reorganization, and social enlightenment. What the committee may have lacked in financial clout, it compensated for in energy and innovation. Immediately there were proposals for creating a network of northern correspondents, for starting a special fund for northern problems, for releasing native peoples from payment of direct taxes, and for recruiting students to work in the north. Given their ambitious program, what is striking about the committee's early work was the high regard for existing native channels as an avenue of reform.

One of the central means for achieving this compromise between the "traditional" and the "modern" became the establishment of *kul' tazy*, or "culture bases," all-purpose social service centers that would serve as the main avenue for information collection and program implementation. During the ten years that the committee was in existence, eighteen such bases were established. The idea was that they would serve nationalities rather than regions, and would look to the "furthest, darkest, least accessible and least studied"²² groups as their constituents. In 1929 the third of such bases was established in the town of Nogliki, on Sakhalin's northeastern shore. In principle, the bases were to include a supply store, a medical unit, a veterinary unit, a boarding school (*internat*), research facilities, trade workshops, a reading hut, a "House of the Native," and bath facilities. While there was much emphasis on political and cultural enlightenment, rapid modernization

with a sensitivity to local circumstances was the express objective. "Class work should not occupy too much time—not only because of an overload of unfamiliar, intellectual activity which may be discouraging to the natives, but because bookish questions are less of what they need. . . . The goal is to give practical knowledge and to apply modern culture and technology to local culture."²³ Correspondingly, hunting and fishing artels, small collective enterprises of up to twenty members, were formed among the Nivkhi through the *ku'ibazy*. Sakhalin's "Okhottovarishchestvo," a hunting union, was founded in 1925. Intended to eliminate exploitation in the fur trade, the union started with three hundred members, and like many early collective unions was a shareholding operation, originally under the organization of the Sakhalin Joint-Stock Company (*Aksionernoie Sakhalinskoe Obshchestvo*): Fishing artels were easier to establish, partly because many were already in existence before the revolution, and partly because Nivkh fishermen frequently worked in groups. "Sovetskii rybak" (Soviet Fisherman) was established in 1927 to lend credit to local fishing entrepreneurs.

While artels were established relatively quickly, the question of native self-government came about more awkwardly. The main difficulty was in defining the Nivkh community as a political unit: Nivkh clan structure had largely atrophied toward the end of the 1800s,²⁴ and there were few parts of the island where Nivkhi lived apart from the Russian community. By 1928 a network of eleven Nivkh village soviets, or *tuzsoveti*, was developed in tandem with two native regional councils (*tuzriki*)—one in Nogliki, on the eastern shore, and another in Viskovo, on the western shore. The regional councils met only twice a year while the village soviets oversaw the daily concerns of the local population. Initially the clan soviets were run as information posts rather than administrative organs, as the Russian ethnographer Erukhim Kreinovich, one of the Nivkhi's first political organizers, observed.

To speak of a high quality of work of the native councils in their first year of existence, given an almost complete absence of literacy, is not appropriate. But nevertheless in the protocols of the meetings, one can see that the majority of questions are directed at the cultural-economic organization of native lives . . . the development of private plots, the organization of fishing artels, schools and literacy units, as well as Houses of the Native, as has already been implemented in Chaivo.²⁵

The task facing the committee was to enable the Nivkhi to assert political and economic control over their territory. At the same time, newcomers from

European Russia were settling in increasing numbers as a move to stabilize the northern Soviet half of the island. Kreinovich, who had been among the most inspired of the committee's footsoldiers, combining ethnographic study with political commitment, noted the desire held by many Russian arrivals that the backward Nivkhi would quickly become extinct. With some regret he observed that "While it's clear that the Nivkhi aren't going anywhere, it is also clear that the problems of the Nivkhi are not going to stop the mining or agricultural colonization."²⁶

In a few short years the committee's mandate narrowed, largely due to the advance of other ministries eastward to assume the responsibility for the economic and political reforms. The main task became "cultural construction," and throughout the North, writing systems were created for thirteen Siberian indigenous groups. On Sakhalin, the Regional Committee on the New Alphabet (*Oblastnoi komitet novogo alfavita*), which produced the new scripts in Latin letters for the sake of internationalism, set about producing primers and newspapers for the island's Nivkh, Evenk, Orok, and Chinese populations. Here Kreinovich's mastery of the Nivkh language, a complex tongue with eight verb conjugations and twenty-six different systems of counting, was put to full use. Kreinovich authored the first Nivkh primer *Cuz Dif* (*New Word*), which appeared in 1932, and translated a second-grade reader, which appeared in 1933.

The new Nivkh textbooks introduced local vocabulary and the stuff of children's readers everywhere: "Boat. Horse. Fish . . . The little boy goes to school. The little girl goes to school. The children go to school!" But learning to read went hand in hand with learning about the nature of new social institutions. Throughout *Cuz Dif* and the companion reader, Nivkh children were versed in a panoply of social and political topics, including explanations of past exploitation of Nivkh fishermen by capitalists, the virtues of daily hygiene, the importance of agriculture over fishing and foraging, the idea of voting and socialist competitions, and the lingering threat posed by shamans.

In our village we have a reading hut. Every evening men and women visit the reading hut. They read books. They listen to the radio. We children also go to the reading hut to listen to the radio. Radio. Does your village have a reading hut?

Today in our village we had a meeting. Men and women gathered and said, "We don't want to catch fish the old way. It's hard to catch fish when you have a small net and you are on your own. Let's form a kolkhoz, and catch fish with a big net and a pier." Everyone agreed. We workers didn't admit shamans and kulaks into our kolkhoz.

What is a kulak? . . . A kulak is someone who lives off of someone else's labor. We have a kulak in our village. His name is Koinyt. Koinyt has a long net and lots of equipment. Koinyt lies to the poor and the hired hands [*bairaki*]. When fish come, he gathers the poor workers, and gives them his net to catch fish. When they are done, he takes fish for himself, his wife and his little children, but he doesn't give enough to the workers to feed their wives and children. Having enslaved and deceived the poor year after year, he became rich. A kulak gets rich by taking orphans, enslaving them, and selling the orphan girls. Do you have a kulak in your village?

The life of Nivkh women is hard. As soon as we are born, they sell us. . . . We aren't masters of our own lives. . . . Comrade women, what do you think, are we not people? Can we not live by our own minds? Are we to live by the minds of shamans, the rich and kulaks? Women, let's cast off the old laws, let's live in the Soviet way.²⁷

The new social forms and new tools of cultural transmission reflected the dramatic social changes that were rapidly transforming North Sakhalin. In less than ten years, most Nivkhi had made the shift from a family economy to artels, and from artels to kolkhozes. By the spring fish run of 1930, *Sovrybak* had become *Rybakolkhozsoiuz*, which set about creating thirteen kolkhozes from the forty-seven fishing artels that on the Soviet part of the island. In the east Sakhalin Nivkh district where Nivkhi had had the least contact with Russian settlers, adult literacy had risen to 28 percent.²⁸ In the more active trading area of Ado-Tym on central Sakhalin, four Nivkh fishing villages were incorporated into the agricultural collective "Chir-Unvd," or New Life, an operation that quickly achieved great success.

By most accounts, the process of collectivization went relatively smoothly, partly because of the attendant distractions of modernization. As one Nivkh fisherman from west Sakhalin recalled,

Representatives came from Nikolaevsk-on-the-Amur to organize meetings. They said, "We're going to gather it all up. You'll work as you did before. You'll fish as you did before." But everyone had to give their things in. Someone had a net, another a boat. We voted in a chairman of the village soviet, who was a little more literate than the rest of us. That's how it went and went and went.

We didn't catch any less fish than before. . . . We fished and gave it in to the kolkhoz. Generally people were happy. The main thing is that before we didn't have a store. They built a store, a club . . . they began to bring in films. The shamans, though, they would run away as soon as the Russians came. If the

shaman were in trance during a performance and someone shouted, "There's a Russian!" he would stop and go away.

After that it was all kolkhoz, kolkhoz, kolkhoz. It was all about potatoes and kolkhozy. About how to give your things in. People gave their horses, their plows. We began to plant potatoes. We learned everything: how to give in the horses, how much to plant and how much to give to the kolkhoz, how much fish to catch and how much to give to the kolkhoz. We processed the fish ourselves and then handed them over in barrels to the state.²⁹

The new order represented a break from the past that many Nivkhi embraced. But the official intent was more specific: What began as a series of profound changes became an express "war against the past," and as the 1930s advanced, it became more difficult to determine which changes were voluntary and which were coerced. For northern social planners, a war against the past called not only for the eradication of shamans, kulaks, and class enemies, but the aggressive jettisoning of all forms of traditional life in favor of a new Siberia in step with history. It marked a decisive turning point for Siberian people's great leap forward.

Kreinovich, returning to Leningrad in 1929 to teach at the Northern Division of the Institute of Eastern Languages (renamed in 1930 as the Institute of Northern Peoples), found an environment much changed. Class-based quotas had become the main criteria for selecting students and the curriculum had become increasingly politicized.³⁰ Across Siberia, the pressure to identify class enemies in what had effectively been stateless, classless societies required extensive revisions by ethnographers of the role of indigenous social organization.³¹ At departmental meetings, Kreinovich resisted claims that Nivkh social organization had been by nature exploitative; he was censured for his views. By August of 1936, the use of Nivkh language textbooks was abandoned, only four years after they had been introduced. The Cyrillic alphabet replaced the Latin transliteration of Nivkh script since the Latin script had been pronounced "too difficult to read," and later, "a bourgeois alphabet."³²

On Sakhalin, as in the rest of the country, the very cadres that had been trained for leadership positions were among the first that local officials offered up as shamans, kulaks, spies, traitors, and exploiters. What was striking about these initial purges among the Nivkhi was the speed of the turnaround. Native leaders who had been celebrated as model Soviets one year became enemies of the people the next. Aleksei Churka had been one of Kreinovich's first Nivkh guides on Sakhalin. He went on to study in Leningrad in 1926 and had been the chairman of the Nogliki regional council

since 1934. His wife recalled in 1990, "The first chairman had already disappeared and the second had been fired without reason, so we had an idea that Churka would be taken away too. One day we had gone for a long walk and then to the bathhouse. When we got back, the house had been searched and the militia were there. He just went and that was that."

When I asked people about the Stalinist period on Sakhalin's northwestern shore, it was exceptional to find someone who did not have relatives who disappeared in the 1930s.

All the good people, all of them, all of them, through to Rybnovsk. They put them in prison. All the brigadiers, all the people who would speak at the meetings, those were the kind of people they put away.

In 1937 they took a lot of good people. Men, women, and sometimes even children. The Tungusy [Evenks] especially. A lot of people were taken away. As if they were kulaks. Who was a kulak? There were some people that had more than others but there weren't any kulaks. There were families with seven or eight children and they took the fathers away. In one village not far from ours they took almost all the men away.

No one knows why they took my father away. We never saw him again. Sometimes it was enough that one wore Japanese glasses. This meant you were a collaborator. Or that you found a candy wrapper, with Japanese writing on it, that had been floating down the river. People would ask, "Where did you get that from?" Or they wouldn't ask at all, and the police would come all the same.

I was young, but I already understood. When the police would go around the yards, the NKVD, you knew what they were doing. They would look for that material—the shiny silk, it was Japanese or Chinese. They don't make it here anymore. A few people had the material in their homes, and as soon as the police found out about it they would immediately take them away. I remember once how my father got angry at his mother. She had some silk and wanted to bury it, but he wanted to burn it.

Whole villages! All the elders. All the supervisors. They came, they took people away, and that was it. My grandfather they took. And my brother, and my uncle. A lot of them were sent to work on that tunnel they tried to make across the Tatar Strait. That's where a lot of them died, during construction. . . . There were no good reasons. What reason could there be? The old men, they worked on the kolkhozes, they fished and they hunted. None at all . . . They would simply come in one of those big trucks, a five-ton truck, the kind they used on the kolkhoz for transporting the fishing nets. They would go up to a door and say, "Let's go. Get ready." They'd put you in the truck. Where to, they didn't ask.

The police never told us why. When they came to the door, they called our order to leave a *putevka*, a tourist pass. But we were hardly tourists. We spent four years moving from town to town on the mainland looking for work. It was the dead of winter the night we left and the baby was only seven months old. He fell ill on the trip and died. "An enemy of the people." What kind of enemy was I?

The sum result was a stunning level of repression. A 1948 Ministry of the Interior document concerning anti-Soviet activities in the Rybnovsk region of northwest Sakhalin asserts that from 1917 on and particularly during the Japanese occupation of north Sakhalin from 1920 to 1925, Japanese intelligence cultivated a network of counterrevolutionary agents among the Nivkhi and Evenki living in the district. In the village of Viskovo, the site of the native executive council founded in 1926, the ministry credits Japanese intelligence with the formation of an anti-Soviet Nivkh group known as "the Viskovo counterrevolutionary organization" headed by the Nivkh Mikhail Petrovich Kul'pin. Like his east Sakhalin counterpart Aleksei Churka before him, Kul'pin had worked for a number of years as the chairman of the native executive council for all of northwest Sakhalin. His main transgression, as a former resident of Viskovo recalled, was that he had a Japanese watch. Through NKVD operations, "the Viskovo counterrevolutionary organization, consisting of 11 members, most of them from the Nivkh population, was summarily (*operativno*) liquidated."³³ Likewise, an unspecified number of Nivkhi from the nearby village of Grigor'evka were arrested for anti-Soviet activity and collaboration with the Japanese in the same year. On the whole:

As a result of repressive measures undertaken against counterrevolutionary and rebel elements among peoples of the North in 1937-38, approximately 36 percent of the adult population was removed (*iz'iat*), composed mainly of Nivkhi and Evenki from forty to sixty years of age, while the remaining 64 percent expressed their understanding and support for the measures undertaken by the Soviet government. A persistent but insignificant anti-Soviet element continued their activity; although most came to support the Soviet government over the years, those remaining were arrested as necessary.³⁴

The NKVD report also asserts that Nivkhi were active supporters of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians (VSEKh), a "counterrevolutionary umbrella group" based in Leningrad with ninety-one registered members throughout the Rybnovsk area. A number of VSEKh members, who evidently had influence over the native population through public

chapels in the Rybnovsk region, were also liquidated over the course of 1937-38. Back in Leningrad, guilty by association, Kreinovich was arrested on grounds of plotting with the Japanese. He went on to spend ten years in prison and a further eight in Siberian exile—a stark reminder of how much had changed (and how much had remained the same) since his mentor Lev Shternberg had himself been exiled to Siberia and had gone on to lead ethnography in the brave new world.

While the native council in Viskovo was closed in 1936, the Culture Base in Nogliki managed to remain open. Throughout the 1930s and '40s, the Culture Base records present a stark series of dismissals, discharges, firings, removals, and early retirements among its sizable staff of forty. In 1934 the local newspaper, "Bolshevik Fish Run," pronounced the Nogliki base to be "a dead institution" and "a refuge for vagrants,"³⁵ but the Culture Base's 1934 director presented a simple defense: As he was the target of accusations and threats, local organizations had ceased to cooperate with him, and allotted funds from Moscow had not been forthcoming.³⁶ Part of the problem was undoubtedly the mounting policy struggles in the Committee of the North given the rapidly changing political climate. Of their three central goals, native self-government, economic reorganization, and cultural enlightenment, the first two had been largely undercut by the early 1930s. By 1935, Stalin sent a letter to the committee congratulating it for a job well done and formally dissolved it. The work of the committee was transferred to the Main Administration of the Northern Sea Route (*Glavsevmorput*), an organization that was eminently richer and eminently less interested. After three years it declined further involvement, so that from 1938 to 1957 there was no administrative body dealing expressly with indigenous peoples.

Despite the inestimable trauma and disruption of the period, what most people I worked with on Sakhalin harked back to was the prosperity that marked the years following the purges. The Chir-Unvd collective, having won a number of prizes at the 1939 Moscow Agricultural Fair for its agricultural and fishing efforts, increased its production annually. The Second World War had taken its toll, since the majority of Nivkh and Russian men were recruited to remobilize the fishing industry elsewhere in order to feed the troops. Significantly, the absence of men marshaled Nivkh women into the work force through the creation of all-female fishing brigades.

Hard work? You can't imagine! All the men were gone during the war. So we had to do all the jobs. We collected wood for ourselves and for the kolkhoz—that meant sawing down trees in the taiga and hauling them away by dogsled. Sometimes we had the horses. One year I delivered the mail between Langery

and Tengi on reindeer sled. There were two sleds and about seven or eight deer. The deer are a little faster than the dogs. We didn't have any days off either. That was hard. We normally worked from about eight in the morning to six at night, but when the fish were running, that was another matter.

I was ten when the war started. I had only been in school a year but our mother had no money, so I started working on the kolkhoz. There were other young girls, thirteen, fifteen, but I was eleven—I was the youngest. It didn't seem so strange at the time. My mother had already been working on *Five Year Plan* hauling fish, so I worked with her. Now it's all mechanized, but back then it was hellish work. We had to pull in the fish nets by hand. Most of the times we didn't have gloves, out on the ice, pulling in nets that had been underwater. It really hurt, but if you let go you only had to pull them in again. We cried, we ran around... anything to keep warm. But we were pretty good.

There were only fifteen of us in our brigade, but we worked hard. There was another brigade of men, sailors, who sometimes tried to help, but they had a terrible time! They couldn't work as well as us. When the war ended I was only nineteen. That's when I became a Stakhanovite.³⁷ They gave us the award on August 31st, on the beach. Vorob'ev came from the *raispolkom* [regional executive committee]. There were three of us from the women's brigade, and some men too. I still have the Stalin pin they gave me. I wear it on holidays.

The integration of women sped production as well as social reeducation, and the heady years after the war were marked by proclamations of economic triumph. On the fishing kolkhoz Freedom in Lupolovo, the net intake per fisherman almost doubled in the three-year period between 1954 and 1957; in 1957 the kolkhoz overfulfilled its plan by 235 percent.³⁸ Projections through to the early 1960s on all north Sakhalin fishing kolkhozes were comparably ambitious, and plans were approved to diversify into fish processing. Whether these striking figures had any basis in fact is open to question, but their importance here is the contribution they made to perceptions of social development. By the time the Nivkh ethnographer Chuner Taksami hailed the "renaissance of the Nivkh people," his work reflected the official position that the great stride into history had been made. Nivkh living standards had been increased by such an extent since the 1930s, he contended, that "they differed little from those of the Russians."³⁹ Moreover, the new way of life had brought about fundamental changes in Nivkh consciousness.

New psychological characteristics developed which were typical of socialist societies—political awareness, a socialist attitude to labor, Soviet patriotism,

trust and respect for other peoples and the feeling of civil obligation toward the socialist homeland.⁴⁰

The spirit of change was the order of the day, but there was still sufficient ambiguity in the implementation of the Soviet nationality policy for the Nivkhi to maintain some fundamental aspects of an otherwise familiar life-style: extensive fishing rights, a seasonal work cycle, and perhaps most important, residence in favorable territories.

In 1957 the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Soviet Council of Ministers adopted Decree No. 300, "On Measures for the Further Economic and Cultural Development of Peoples of the North." The initiative was intended to redress what had been twenty years of policy vacuum since the Northern Sea Route administration had abdicated its involvement. But in practice the decree was overshadowed by a seemingly unrelated resolution introduced by Khrushchev on the strengthening of collective and state farms. The idea was that fewer settlements would mean fewer problems of coordination and distribution.

On North Sakhalin there had already been a series of village closings and kolkhoz relocations following World War II after Japan relinquished South Sakhalin and the Soviets looked to lay claim to the new territory as quickly as possible. The scourge of the resettlements in the 1960s, however, was that in almost every case when one kolkhoz had to be selected from among many for expansion, the least profitable enterprises on the least profitable sites were chosen. Indeed, the only criteria for selecting which communities to expand and which to close appear to have been proximity to existing regional centers and the consequent ease of administration. But there was a further dimension congruent with the larger goal of reducing the difference among cultural identities across the country.

The creation of concentrated villages in northern native areas goes hand in hand with the raising of their social and cultural potential, the creation of new forms of housing and the mastery of nontraditional types of work: all this leads to a change in their ethnic self-consciousness. For these national minorities, life in multiethnic, multilingual villages and labor collectives is connected with the need for preserving their "ethnic identity," their roots and their cultural self-respect. In other words, the accelerated development of an international way of life and the transformation of traditional cultures into socialist ones sharpens rather than weakens the need for recognizing the diversity of national cultures.⁴¹

For the Nivkhi, these latest moves and village closings were the most visible and sobering indication of how much and how quickly their lives had

changed. On Sakhalin's northwest and northeast coasts, the number of villages lining the shore between 1905 and 1975 dropped by more than 75 percent.

The burden on local government was to legitimize the resettlement in a manner consistent with the policy prescribed by Moscow. In 1963, on Sakhalin's eastern shore, the collectives *Red Sakhalin* in Pil'tun and *East* in Chaivo were shut down and transferred to the regional center of Nogliki. The Nogliki party committee reasoned that the economic and cultural standards of the towns had become unworkable: Salaries at the two kolkhozes had fallen to 920 and 600 rubles a month respectively, workloads had been decreasing, and the town's locations—forty-seven and ninety-three miles from Nogliki—made it increasingly difficult to provide proper food supplies, communications, educational and medical services. They pointed out that sending children to the boarding school in Nogliki imposed financial obligations on parents, and that "after lengthy absences from their parents to attend school, children want to return to their villages for the summer, avoiding pioneer camp, and thereby weakening the process of collective upbringing."⁴²

In contrast to the 1963 explanation, which listed the average salaries of *kolkhozniki* in *Red Sakhalin* and *East* as a disparaging 920 and 600 rubles a month, a 1962 kolkhoz report lists much higher figures of 1,567 and 1,033 rubles a month, which were in fact a profitable increase of 9 percent from five years earlier. Moreover, Chaivo's *East* had been the only regional kolkhoz to successfully meet its yearly plan in 1962, and the Nivkh brigadiers of both *Red Sakhalin* and *East* were favorably singled out for their production. In 1990 one of the same brigadiers described the meeting where the village closure was announced:

None of us could believe the news when we first heard it. The town had grown to about 700 people, about 300 of us, Nivkhi. The government had spent so many years building us up! There was a school, a laboratory, two clubs, a kolkhoz... they had only just finished a whole new set of houses and a two-story hospital on the edge of the village. A new rail line too. I had been a party organizer [*partorg*] there before and I didn't know a thing.

They called a meeting of the whole village. The *rainspolkom* explained that small settlements were no longer profitable for the country, that they were too broadly spread out and maybe even dangerous. Then they tried to tell us that the town was badly situated, that there was a danger of flooding. There's never been a flood there ever!

On the northwest coast, where the fishing kolkhozes *Freedom* and *21st Party Congress* were closed down and amalgamated with the failing *Red Dawn*, the experiences were similar.

Across Sakhalin, the resettlement procedure was one of incremental withdrawal. The younger generations were usually the first to accede to the offers of better housing elsewhere, while among the older generations and the hesitant, party members would be obligated to relocate. The school would be moved, thereby forcing parents with children to follow, and then the hospital, then the village soviet, then the post office, then the store, and then the electricity.

Of course, people didn't want to leave. Here there isn't the same kind of fish. There you'll find everything. Those that didn't want to go stayed behind. But how can you stay behind if there is no kolkhoz any longer? No school? No store? So you move.

The same story is repeated again and again.

The 1960s were a turning point for us, when they began the closings. They closed the Shirokopadskii plant. There were five villages in that area and all five were closed. That's five villages that automatically lost their reason for existence. The Khoenskii kombinat was closed, that was another six villages.

Here in the northwest we had the villages of Tuzrik, Viski, Astrakhanovka, Nevel'skala, Uspenovka, Liugi, Kefi, Naumovka, Grigor'evka, Kalinovka, Valuska, Third Station, Fourth Station, Romanovka, Lupolovo, Ten'gi, Pogibi... and all the rest around there... all gone!

And yet to cast the moves in a roundly negative light would not be accurate. For most of those involved, only in retrospect has the resettlement program come to be so rued. At the time the plan met with few incidents of overt resistance. Most people interpreted the decision as official policy and assumed that it would be for the best. As one Nogliki resident remarked to me in 1990, "The tragedy is that nothing happened. The empty houses in Nogliki were all ready. The kolkhoz had already been built. Most people just got up and moved. That's the tragedy—that there was no tragedy."

Indeed, what sets the 1960s resettlements apart from those that immediately followed World War II was the absence of economic virtue. By 1968 Nogliki's reconstituted *East* was palpably failing: Debt was increasing, plans were not being fulfilled, and the kolkhoz recommended more expeditions farther afield, namely back to Pil'tun and Chaivo.⁴³ At both *East* and *Red Dawn*, the average fish catches were four times lower than the average

for the *oblast'*, while the average kolkhoz salaries were two and a half times lower.⁴⁴ In 1969, when residents of the defunct town of Venskoe complained in a letter to the Sakhalin Regional Executive Committee (*oblispolkom*) that they had been moved involuntarily, the *oblispolkom* claimed otherwise. "People wanted to move to Nogliki immediately," they argued; there was little interest in traditional life, and the authors of the letter, "the majority of whom were elderly and illiterate," did not fully understand its contents. Chuner Taksami, the Leningrad ethnographer and initiator of the Venskoe letter, was chided for his "incorrect, subjective approach . . . which, advocating the preservation of 'northern peoples as children of nature,' was only representing obsolete customs, morals and way of life."⁴⁵ The committee's response coincided with the recasting of the broader Soviet nationality policy at that time, whereby Nivkhi were to have bloomed (*rastsveli*), drawn closer to Russian culture (*sblizilis'*) and finally merged with it (*slilis'*).⁴⁶ But the persistence of expressly Nivkh cultural forms (language, dress, and diet) plied at the contradictions of the official position: Traditional life was at once to be lauded (as a marker of the freedom of peoples) and suppressed (as a lingering resistance to abstract notions of Soviet homogeneity).

The resettlements, rather than representing a merger of collective interests, reduced the Nivkhi to second-class status. In the shuffle of kolkhoz reorganizations, Russians supplanted Nivkhi in the vast majority of skilled and administrative positions. In 1968, despite *East's* status as a Nivkh kolkhoz, only 19 percent of Nivkhi in the collective worked in skilled positions, and few were being trained for promotion.⁴⁷ Figures show that overall kolkhoz membership dropped sharply with the moves while there was a marked increase in unemployment and underemployment for the Nivkh community. Many who were unable to find work in the towns to which they relocated lost their pensions and state benefits. Despite the proposals set forth in Decree No. 300, the new *East* was in disarray. The medical clinic was not being funded, bath facilities were not functioning, and there was no work being done to address growing rates of alcoholism and illiteracy.⁴⁸ Of particular consequence was the introduction of regulations governing the amount of salmon to which Nivkhi were entitled to catch each year. Through the 1950s, the Nivkh diet was still heavily based on salmon: On the average individuals consumed more than 2,000 pounds each year (much of it in dried form), an amount far beyond that that they could afford in local stores. In 1962 an annual limit of 200 kilograms was imposed, and in 1969, with concern for ever-weakening kolkhoz production, the limit was further reduced to 60 kilograms. If Nivkhi had joined the Soviet family of nations, it was reasoned, there was no cause for them to be treated exceptionally. In

1963, when the Russian Ministry of Education sent a letter to the Sakhalin *oblispolkom* requesting that they outline their needs for native language education, Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk responded that native languages in the region were not studied due to lack of interest.⁴⁹

What made the 1960s resettlements so compelling was not only the attendant drop in quality of living for the indigenous community but the way in which they visually transformed the Sakhalin landscape. Coastlines that were once lined with villages every five miles became littered with ghost towns. Between 1962 and 1986, the approximately 1,000 settlements on all of Sakhalin were reduced to 329.⁵⁰ Rather than strengthening and internationalizing, the resettlements produced a spirit of absence felt on economic, social, and personal levels. Rather than moving forward, they generated a retrospective force that pulled many back. The brigadier from Chaivo remained behind when all of *East* was transferred to Nogliki. By 1970 he was the only one of 700 remaining, and to this day he visits Nogliki only a few months each year. Remaining behind in empty towns that no longer officially existed, he and others like him became icons of a "traditional" way of life which had become reified and reinforced by a policy expressly designed to diminish it. In creating a spatial dichotomy between past and present, the resettlements divided allegiances by obliging people to choose (and in most cases making the choice for them).

The fortunes of both *Red Dawn* and *East* continued to decline, with the worsening ecological situation and growing bureaucratic regulations causing a drop in fish catches. Both kolkhozes have "national" status, meaning they receive special incentives and allowances as largely indigenous enterprises, but by 1982 Nivkhi comprised only 120 out of the 336 members of *East* and only 127 out of 400 members of *Red Dawn*.⁵¹ In 1980 a further decree, "On Measures for the Further Economic and Social Development of the Peoples of the North," was enacted by the Soviet Council of Ministers. The government spent an enormous amount of money in the implementation of the decree—31.2 billion rubles by 1990, or 169,125 rubles for every indigenous representative in Siberia,⁵² over a period when monthly salaries averaged 500 rubles. However, the Nivkh writer Vladimir Sangi, who helped draft the decree, noted ruefully that the funds intended for the cultural and economic development of the Nivkhi were spent by local authorities to purchase oil pipes, automobiles, thousands of pairs of plastic skis, typewriters, calculators, and compact toilets.⁵³

By the late 1980s the retrospective assessment for Siberian peoples as a whole had little to say for the virtues of internationalization.

The results of sixty years' worth of development are not very comforting: from highly qualified reindeer herders, hunters and fishermen, native northerners have been transformed into auxiliary workers, loaders, watchmen and janitors.⁵⁴

This process of lumpenization of small peoples is looked upon by some "optimistic" experts as a "new progressive phenomenon—growth of the working class," while the profound social alienation, passivity and pessimism engendered by this situation are regarded as "relics of the primitive patriarchal past."⁵⁵

Public health statistics from recent years indicate the extent to which decades of required self-congratulation occluded considerable problems. The life expectancy for Siberian indigenous peoples is eighteen years lower than that of the USSR as a whole—forty-five years for men and fifty-five years for women. Social problems such as alcoholism and suicide are four to five times as high as in the rest of the country, and few native communities have acquired the trappings of modern living: The housing base has changed little since the 1950s; only 3 percent of native homes have access to gas mains; 0.4 percent have running water; and only 0.1 percent are connected to district heating systems.⁵⁶ The venting of frustration over this state of affairs perhaps reached its formal climax at the All-Union Congress of Northern Peoples held in Moscow in March of 1990, when speaker after speaker mounted the podium to lash out at government mismanagement. Nikolai Solov'ev, one of the Sakhalin delegates, joined in the litany of lament by bemoaning decades of "shameless historians . . . discrimination and loss . . . government fictions . . . ecological disasters . . ." and "hypnotic blinders."⁵⁷

While the spirit of disillusionment is now pervasive, it is nonetheless critical to bear in mind that Nivkh experience over the last seventy years does not render them passive, tragic figures. The Sakhalin Nivkhi with whom I worked were no more or less patriotic or resistant to Soviet ideology than the Russians, Ukrainians, and Tatars around them. Indeed, in his research among the Evenki of the Podkamennáia Tunguska River Basin in central Siberia, Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov has contended that Evenki in that area were even more patriotic than either the administrative staff of the local settlements or the Russian newcomers.

. . . Evenks tend to value administrative honors more than the Russians—medals and diplomas for "the achievements in the building of socialism" are kept in the forest among other precious things. . . . The most distinguished reindeer herders in the region, the restless and sincere defenders of the "socialist values" of *sovkhov* organization, those who are usually invited to the regional administrative gatherings

as tokens of "the progress of the Soviet minor nationalities," come from the families that suffered most during collectivisation.⁵⁸

In the 1920s, as the Committee of the North sought to formulate a development strategy that reverberated between both of the dominant perceptions of Siberian peoples—protecting their cultural integrity while preparing them for radical transformation—Nivkhi who look back on the period recall little hesitation about the new state of affairs.

Before the revolution, when the Russians first appeared here, they started immediately to distribute rations . . . rice, sugar, and flour. We had never seen these things before and we were delighted. It had been a hungry year: There had been few fish that season and people were starving. The food meant a lot to us. When my younger sister was born in 1916, my parents called her *Paek* [ration]. That's her Nivkh name!

But the prerevolutionary government wasn't interested in us the same way the Soviets were. When the Soviets came, the children started to study in schools. We got a hospital. Of course it was better than before. The first time I gave birth it was in a tent by myself, in keeping with Nivkh tradition. It was a frightening experience. Sometimes other women were with us but not always. One woman I knew gave birth alone in the winter and her legs became frostbitten. The Japanese doctor had to amputate.

The nascent educational system in particular was recalled again and again.

We studied in Nivkh for two grades only, and then the readers ran out or something. We were pretty poor. For the first two years we had lessons from our primer and in mathematics. All in Nivkh. What a shame there aren't any of the textbooks left. It was so easy to read the Latin letters. We missed our parents but it was fun to be with the other kids. We were all of different ages and we were pretty wild.

Those likeliest to have resisted the cultural program were the Nivkh shamans, but since Soviet power was not established on Sakhalin until 1925, there was little or no lag time between the point when shamans might have realized their potential threat to Soviet construction and the point when they began to be the subjects of concerted persecution toward the end of the decade. For the Nivkhi, the Stalinist period was undoubtedly the most turbulent of the last century, combining a reign of terror with the lure of modernity. Hence it was not uncommon to conduct long conversations about

the loss of relatives during the Stalinist purges, and then to hear, as one Nivkh woman commented,

People blame Stalin for everything now, but there was an entire system at work, not just one man. I liked Stalin. I supported him then and I support him now.

Their own role in Soviet cultural construction leaves many Nivkhi sorting through the past for moments of redeeming value. Given the current weight of disorder and uncertainty, it is easier to see that the Stalinist period is remembered by many Nivkhi for the seeming prosperity that followed in the wake of the purges. As one of the former Nivkh chairmen of *Freedom* remarked,

It was a completely different atmosphere then. You had to get going, you had to work, but the mood was good. That was the important thing. That was the same time when there was no limit to the amount of fish that we could catch. You fulfilled the plan or you didn't. But you could fish as much as you liked. The work ethic was much stronger. People drank but they knew how to drink and work at the same time. They had it down. If you needed to fix your hangover the next morning (*pokhmeli' sia*), the store was right there. Everything you needed!

Indeed, after the mobilization of the female work force during World War II, almost the entire Nivkh population had been effectively integrated into the state economy.

It was with the controversial resettlements of the late 1960s that the two dominant perceptions of Siberian peoples within Soviet policy were at their point of greatest tension. Traditional culture was unique and to be respected, but the celebration of Nivkh tradition could be achieved only in dialectical relation to Soviet modernity. The relocations were justified by this cultural dialectic, since, as noted above, "the accelerated development of an international way of life and the transformation of traditional cultures into socialist ones sharpens rather than weakens the need for recognizing the diversity of national cultures."⁵⁹ The resettlements may be roundly regretted today, but not all Nivkhi, by any means, had to be coaxed into the new agrocenters.

My parents wanted to stay behind, but I didn't. Here we have running water and gas. It's the way they handled it afterward that started to cause problems.

Sure I wanted to go. We got an apartment immediately, with a bathroom and a kitchen. I got a good job too. Today I would choose an old village over anything, but I didn't think twice about it then.

The nostalgic process of remembrance that now reconfigures Nivkh experience may say as much about dissatisfaction with the present as it may about the past. The disintegration of the Soviet Union has been attended by widespread disillusionment, but for the Nivkhi, this process has borne a double irony: As they come to more fully gauge the loss of their traditional culture, they also mark the loss of the pan-Soviet culture they traded theirs in for. In effect, this is the disintegration of *both* of the mythic paradigms by which they have been cast. With a language largely forgotten,⁶⁰ a population dislocated, and an environment ecologically in ruins, few claims can be made for a romantic image of natives living out of time. But so too, with all aspects of the Soviet past under revisionist siege, it is no longer clear to Nivkh proletarians that their ambitious stride was worth the effort.

In the wake of these ideological reshuffles, Russian scholars have called for a development strategy for Siberian indigenous peoples based on "neo-traditionalism."⁶¹ The idea is a broad one, calling for a revival of the principles of native autonomy explored in the 1920s, an emphasis on traditional land use and economic development through smaller scale, local initiatives.⁶² The approach may be salutary, but on North Sakhalin, it begs a broader ontological question: After nearly seventy years of Soviet administration on North Sakhalin, what constitutes tradition?

Neither of the myths explored here correspond well to the Siberian indigenous peoples that they popularly invoke. However, the tension between the two myths was not alien to the broader social setting that invented them. Where popular imagery construed the Nivkhi along continua between history and ahistory, culture and nature, and hot and cold, we can see homologous tensions in a nationalities policy that counterposed Soviet and Nivkh, international and national, and collective and individual. When idealized versions of traditional life were invoked, as we saw at the outset of the Soviet period and now reascendant through perestroika, the resulting social policies were oriented to self-government and the creation of new hybrid social forms. When idealized visions of radical transformation were hegemonic from the Stalinist period through to Brezhnev, the policy of Soviet cultural construction hinged on a willed negation of the past. The myth of childlike purity also fed into the charge for change under Stalin, but the political consequences in this event were just as detrimental: If Nivkhi were children of nature, their past need be forgotten; if they were on the road to building socialism, their past again need be forgotten; if they were part of the natural landscape, they did not require attention; if they were part of the cultural landscape, they were already attended to. With a future predeter-

mined and the past redetermined, the stride across a thousand years heeded everything but the present.

The tenacity of romantic imagery that marks the mythologies of pristine isolation and the great leap forward calls into question the appeal of exotism. Lévi-Strauss has noted that

... behind each mythic system there loom others which were the dominant factors in determining it ... [myths] should be seen rather as constituting local and temporary answers to the problems raised by ... insoluble contradictions that they are endeavouring to legitimize or conceal. The content with which myth endows itself is not anterior, but posterior, to this initial impulse: far from deriving from some content or other, the myth moves towards a particular content through the attraction of its specific gravity.⁶³

The contradiction in this case is that despite the rhetoric of development that has enveloped Siberia from the 1600s onward, it was and has remained essentially a resource-based colony of Russia. Its native peoples, despite the Speranskii reforms of 1822 and the more considerable efforts made by the Soviets, find themselves situated simultaneously in a land of modern progress and a zone of timeless tradition.

In her work on the rhetoric of indigenism in Brazil, Alcida Ramos has played on the notion that natives are "good to think": "... indigenous peoples provide a convenient reflector for self-contemplation by the whites as superior humans ... 'otherness' serves the purpose of defining the contours of a positive identity for the dominant populations."⁶⁴ If the dominant Russian population finds the Nivkhi "good to think"—as a contrast to their own civility—it should also be said that Nivkhi are "good to advance" (*vospityvat'*). The notion that Siberian indigenous peoples were making a stride across a thousand years was not only a rhetorical device for including them in a program of rapid modernization, it projected an aura of success for the cultural agenda of a country that had been by definition experimental. If Siberian peoples were considered to be a blank slate on which to inscribe a new Soviet identity, their experience perforce would be one of the most lucid markers of the new culture. In their gradual progress from people of a different land, to people of a different birth, to people of a different faith, to natives, to small peoples, and to peoples of the North,⁶⁵ the representation of Siberian native peoples has been predicated on distance. Both of the dominant mythical constructions that defined them over the last seventy years have been obstacles to a discourse that fosters a self-definition consistent with the specificity of their lived experience. In the meantime, the Nivkhi

of Sakhalin Island remain northerners who do not actually live in the north, Paleoasiatics who do not think of themselves as Asian, and Soviets who no longer have a country.

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2. Ibid.
3. The *malye narody* are composed of twenty-six nationalities including (in descending order by population) the Nentsy (pop. 34,665), Evenki, Khanty, Bveny, Chukchi, Nanaisy, Koriaki, Mansi, Dolgany, Nivkhi, Sel'kupy, Ul'chi, Ite'l'meny, Udegeitsy, Saami, Eskimosy, Chuvantsy, Nganasany, Iukagiry, Kety, Orochi, Tofalary, Aleuty, Negidal'tsy, Entsy, and Oroki (pop. 190).
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 19. Ibid.
 20. TsGADV, f. R-3158, o. 1, d. 48, l. 30 (1925).
 21. Provisional currency coupons had been issued in the name of Aleksandr Vasil'evich Kolchak (1874-1920), the Russian admiral and explorer who became war minister in the anti-Bolshevik government that formed in Siberia after the Bolshevik revolution.
 22. *Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii i sotsialisticheskogo stroitel'stva SSSR* [hereafter TsGAOR], f. 3977, o. 1, *Istoricheskaia spravka*, l. 4.
 23. TsGAOR, f. 3977, o. 1, d. 940, l. 7.
 24. Lev Shternberg, *Giliaki, Orochi, Gol'di, Negidal'tsy, Ainy* (Khabarovsk: Dal'nevostochnoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1933), p. 2; TsGAOR, f. 3977, o. 1, d. 432.
 25. TsGAOR, f. 3977, o. 1, d. 432.
 26. Ibid.

27. E. A. Kreinovich, *Cuz Dif [Novoe Slovo]* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe uchebno-pedagogicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1932), pp. 30, 44, 55, 63.
28. V. I. Mishchenko, "Proshloe nikhov do oktiabria" (1957) in *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sakhalinskoii oblasti* [hereafter GASO], fond Ryzhkova, l. 67.
29. All field quotations are taken from interviews I conducted in the North Sakhalin villages of Nogliki, Chir-Unvd, Okha, Moskal'vo, Nekrasovka, Rybnoe, Rybnovsk, and Romanovka between April and November of 1990.
30. TsGAOR, f. 3977, o. 1, d. 850, ll. 14-17.
31. I. S. Gurchik and Ch. M. Taksami, "Vklad sovetskikh etnografov v ushchestvlenie leninskoii natsional'noi politiki na Severe" in Iu. V. Bromlei and R. F. Its, eds., *Leninizm i problemy etnografii* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1987), p. 187. See also Yuri Slezkine, "The Fall of Soviet Ethnography, 1928-38," *Current Anthropology* 32, no. 4 (1991): 476-484 for a broader treatment of the ideological turbulence in Soviet ethnography at the time.
32. GASO, f. 509, o. 1, d. 34, l. 26; cf. also Isabelle Kreindler, "The Changing Status of Russian in the Soviet Union," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 33 (1982): 5-135.
33. Medvedev, "Politiko-ekonomicheskaiia kharakteristika Rybnovskogo raiona sakhalinskoii oblasti," ll. 4-o, 5-o (GASO).
34. Ibid., l. 6. The figures are comparable with those from Chukotka in Aleksandr Pika, "Malye narody severa: iz pervobytnogo kommunizma v real'nyi sotsializm," in *Perestroika, Glasnost, Demokratiiia, Sotsializm: V chelovecheskom izmerenii* (Moscow: Progress, 1989), p. 320.
35. TsGAOR, f. 3977, o. 1, d. 1139.
36. Ibid., ll. 2-8.
37. Stakhanovites were members of a movement that began in 1935 to raise labor productivity.
38. Chuner Mikhailovich Taksami, *Vozrozhdenie nivkhskoii natsional'nosti* (Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Sakhalinskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1959), p. 47.
39. Ibid., p. 51.
40. Ibid., p. 60.
41. Derevianko and Boiko, "Puti kul'turnogo razvitiia," p. 11.
42. TsGAOR, f. 53, o. 25, d. 2612, l. 53.
43. GASO, f. 53, o. 25, d. 3897a, ll. 101-104.
44. Ibid., l. 30.
45. GASO, f. 53, o. 25, d. 3897, ll. 4-6.
46. For a discussion of this three-step process, see Yaroslav Bilinsky, "The Concept of the Soviet People and Its Implications for Soviet Nationality Policy," *Annals of the Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Science in the United States*, no. 37-38 (1980): 87-133; Gail Lapidus, "Ethnonationalism and Political Stability: The Soviet Case," *World Politics* 36, no. 4 (1984): 355-380; and *Rastsvet i sblizhenie natsii v SSSR* (Moscow: Mysl', 1981). Lapidus is right to point out that by the "time of stagnation" most Soviets had long given up the idea of ethnic merger. What interests me here are the contradictions of a policy that continued to be advocated long after it lost its salience.

47. GASO, f. 53, o. 25, d. 3897a, l. 73.
48. Ibid., ll. 72-78.
49. GASO, f. 53, o. 25, d. 3584, l. 44.
50. A. I. Gladyshev, ed. *Administrativno-territorial'noe delenie Sakhalinskoii oblasti* (Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Dal'nevostochnoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1986), pp. 79-106, 125.
51. I. Krupnik and A. V. Smoliak, *Sovremennoe polozhenie korennoogo naseleniia severa sakhalinskoii oblasti* (Moscow: Institute of Ethnography, 1982), p. 7.
52. Z. P. Sokolova, "Narody severa SSSR: proshloe, nastoiashchee i budushchee," *Sovetskaia etnografiia*, no. 6 (1990): 19.
53. A. I. Pika and B. B. Prokhorov, "Bol'shie problemy malykh narodov," *Kommunist*, no. 16 (November 1988): 81.
54. Pika, "Malye narody severa," 306.
55. Pika and Prokhorov, "Bol'shie problemy," p. 80.
56. Ibid.
57. Nikolai I. Solov'ev, Presentation to Congress of Northern Peoples, Moscow, March 1990.
58. Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, "Historiia and Ulo: A Critique of Sociological Reasoning with a Siberian Evenk Epistemology." Master's thesis, Department of Anthropology, Stanford University, July 1991, p. 30.
59. Derevianko and Boiko, "Puti kul'turnogo razvitiia," p. 11.
60. See Mikhail Vysokov, "Sovremennaia iazykovaia situatsiia v raionakh prozhivaniia sakhalinskikh nivkhov," in Valerii Shubin, ed., *Etnograficheskoe issledovanie sakhalinskogo oblastnogo kraevedcheskogo muzeia* (Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Iuzhno-Sakhalinskoe Khizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1985), and Tjeerd de Graaf, "The Small Languages of Sakhalin," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 94 (1992): 185-200.
61. B. B. Prokhorov, A. I. Pika, et al., *Metodicheskie osnovy kontseptsii gosudarstvennoi politiki optimizatsii uslovii zhiznedatel'nosti malochislennykh narodov severa* (Moscow: Institut problem zaniatosti ANRF i Mintruda RF, 1992).
62. This is when, finally, the differences between Siberian indigenous peoples must be recognized. For the Nivkhi, recovering the virtues of a traditional past is a qualitatively different project from that facing the neighboring Sakhalin Oroki, a seminomadic herding group whose inherently more separate life-style has meant a much higher transmission of Oroki language and values.
63. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Naked Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 628-629.
64. Alcida Ramos, "A Hall of Mirrors: The Rhetoric of Indigenism in Brazil," *Critique of Anthropology* 11, no. 2 (1991): 155-169.
65. The Russian terminology went as follows: *inozemtsy, inorodtsy, inovertsy, tuzemtsy, malye narody, malochislennye narody, narody Severa*. For a discussion of the ideological shifts that marked the transition between the first three terms, see Slezkine, "Russia's Small Peoples," p. 87.