PART ONE

Colonization, Industrialization and Cultural Renewal
Most of this study is based on the presentation of a vast data base of interview material or its analysis thereof. However, in order to provide a framework for a survey which touches on the traditional livelihood of many different peoples scattered over a huge area of the world's largest country, in effect, to provide a context for the responses, it is necessary to outline the history of these peoples, especially their contacts with their Russian conquerors that began some four hundred years ago and continues to this day. It is this history of events of the period since about 1590 that situates the position of these peoples today.

To that end, it is fortunate that, in the period since perestroika began in 1985, there have been several comprehensive studies on the long history of colonization that the indigenous peoples of the North have lived under. Some have recounted the political mobilization of these peoples in the post-Soviet period but, by necessity, these might often have been overtaken by recent political events. Several of these have been studies by sympathetic Soviet/Russian academics such as Nikolai Vakhlin and Igor Krupnik.1 These were originally written in Russian and then translated into English. Academic gatherings sponsored by the School of Slavonic and East European Studies of the University of London, produced two excellent volumes of essays that illuminated themes germane to providing a framework for this study. A conference in 1991 focussed on the history of Siberia during the Imperial Russian period up to the beginning of World War I.2 The publication of the proceedings of the conference that examined essentially the Soviet period actually had taken place two years earlier.3

Several excellent comprehensive overview studies of the lengthy period of this region's history have been written by Western scholars, or Russian academics based outside Russia. Two such notable histories that this study has referred to already in Chapter One and will be continually referring to, especially in Chapters Two and Three, are *Arctic Mirrors* by Yuri Slezkine (1994), and *A History of the Peoples of Siberia* by James Forsyth (1992). Other overview studies consulted include histories by W. Bruce Lincoln (1994), Benson Bobrick (1992) and an excellent piece of political journalism by Anna Reid (2002).4

Studies related to political events involving the indigenous peoples of Northern Russia in the post-Soviet period are of a more sketchy nature. Some relate to the public debate that began after 1985 and carried over into the post-Soviet period, such as the political tract written by Aleksandr Pika and Boris Prokhorov in 1988.5 There have been numerous studies by Russian and non-Russian academics on the traditional activities that continue to survive among these peoples.6 There have been overview articles that attempt to take a legal perspective on these peoples. Most importantly, there are a number of monographs and articles on the political mobilization of the indigenous minorities at a regional, pan-Russian federal and international levels that will be referred to.7 Finally, the Russian Federation has in recent years enacted several pieces of comprehensive legislation that attempts to address some of the main concerns of these aboriginal peoples with respect to their ability to continue to derive a livelihood from lands they have occupied since time immemorial.8

Endnotes


7 Early stages of this political mobilization were cited in Slezkine (1994; 371-385) and Forsyth (1992). Others have been monographs by international non-governmental organizations interested in the welfare of indigenous peoples throughout the world, such as IWGIA (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs), based in Switzerland. As it became established, RAISON has published overview descriptions of the peoples that make up its organization. It is also to have a context for how Russia has participated in the international environmental fora that have been active since the latter part of the 20th century, such as, Jonathan D. Oldfold, Anna Kouzmine and Denis J.B. Shaw (2003), "Russia's Involvement in the International Environmental Process: A Research Report," Eurasian Geography and Economics, 2003, 44:2, 157-168; and Monica Ternberg (1998), The Arctic Council. A Study In Governmentality, Rowman.

CHAPTER 2
CONQUEST, COLONIZATION AND ALIEN CULTURES

"(T)here seems to be no doubt that among the Siberian peoples in their original state a certain harmony with nature existed, if only as a reflection of the unavoidable conditions in which they lived. These conditions embraced the realities of survival in an often hostile environment, and the mysteries of birth and death. Living meant constant activity to obtain food, shelter and clothing, and the way of life was an integrated one in which work was not distinguished from leisure, and every activity contributed towards the survival of the individual and the community. While they were at the mercy of erratic weather or changes in the migration routes of reindeer, so that they might suffer famine from time to time, they were generally well fed, more or less comfortably adapted to their environment, and enjoyed a surplus of resources sufficient to allow expenditure of time on the decoration of clothing and utensils, on storytelling and dancing. Their weapons were simple, but not crude, and their clothing was meticulously formed and finished... Their lives, in short, were not spent in misery before the Russians came among them."

- J. Forsyth in Alan Wood 1991; 77-78 (emphasis is mine).

Siberia, for four hundred years, has been a fully integrated part first of the state of Muscovy, which then became the Imperial Russian Empire, and was transformed into the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic during the Soviet era, and, since 1991, the Russian Federation. Unlike other regions of Russia, the population of Siberia is overwhelmingly Russian in its ethnicity, language and cultural tradition. However, there have also been significant pockets of indigenous peoples who have, since the late 1980s, begun to assert their rights and the legitimacy of their livelihood, language and culture.

This chapter will examine the situation of these peoples during the period beginning with the initial conquests by the state of Muscovy until the collapse of the Imperial Russian Empire during the events of World War I. It will examine the early years of conquest by outsiders and the requirement to pay a form of tribute (yasak) to the central authorities. The second section will examine the situation of Russia’s alien peoples to demonstrate that most of these remote peoples had, in fact, a viable social system based on clans, shamanism and numerous other elementary aspects of a social system; and how they had survived for centuries in what outsiders considered a hostile environment. Contact with Russian outsiders meant huge adjustments on the part of most peoples; failure to make the adjustments expected by the invaders led to military confrontation and even genocide. Eventually, the Russian Empire initiated some administrative and legal reforms for its alien subjects, notably in 1822, and a number of ethnographers and Christian missionaries began to study these peoples more closely; these will be outlined in section 2.3 below. The fourth section will summarize the colonization of Siberia for agricultural purposes, necessitating many Northern peoples migrating to other regions in order to continue their traditional way of life.

2.1 Conquest and Alien Tribute

Scholars on Russia, in evaluating the inclusion of Siberia and the Far East regions to the state of Muscovy in the period 1581 to 1700, have characterized this period as one of conquest, colonization and eventual annexation, the primary result of which was to establish this Slavic state into a major European power. It brought under Moscow’s control an enormous territory of some 10 million square kilometres, rich in natural resources and inhabited by many different indigenous tribes who had derived a livelihood
from these same lands. "It...transformed the relatively poor and weak East European, Orthodox, Slavic, Muscovite state into the powerful, resourceful, multinational, multi-ethnic and multicultural Empire of Russia."\textsuperscript{3}

Muscovy's expansion from the Urals to the Pacific in the seventeenth century has been characterized as "the territorial and colonial complement to the institutional consolidation of the political power of the Russian autocratic state."\textsuperscript{4} Muscovy from about 1580 to 1650 had been racked by a series of civil rebellions, peasant wars, religious turmoil and military mutiny as well as threats from abroad from Lithuania, Sweden and the Baltic Germans. Yet it was during this period that the foundations for the political, social and economic structures of the tsarist imperial system came to be established. One feature of this process was the dynastic consolidation of regal authority in the Romanov family, beginning in 1613 with the ascension of Mikhail Romanov for a 32-year reign—a dynasty that was to last until 1917. Other features included the entrenchment of autocratic absolutism, the social ascendancy of the land-owning nobility (dvoryanstvo); the promulgation of a comprehensive Legal Code (Sobornoe Ulozhenie of 1649); the development of a civil bureaucracy; the dependence on military prowess; and the subjugation of the Russian peasantry into institutionalized serfdom. "It was precisely at the same times as these processes, policies and institutions were being consolidated that the embryonic imperial regime found territorial expression for its increasing power in the colonial administration and economic exploitation of Siberia."\textsuperscript{5}

This empire was established by a number of overland explorers (zemleprokhozy) who navigated the river systems of Asia all the way to the Arctic and later to the Pacific Ocean. Major expeditions in the 17th century carried Russian hegemony beyond to North America, even to the coast of what is now California. This initial annexation was completed by 1650. The abundance and exploitation of fur-bearing animals, in particular, the highly prized sable, provided the early economic foundation for the growth of the political power of the Muscovy government.\textsuperscript{6} This first period of expansion and opening up of Siberia, based primarily on the fur trade, has been compared to gold fever in other parts of the world. In the period from 1585 to 1680, the total number of sables and other valuable skins obtained in Siberia amounted to tens of thousands a year—comprising some 10 per cent of the total income of the state. Russia was unrivalled in supplying furs to European and Asian markets; not even the furs obtained from North America by France and Britain could challenge Russia’s pre-eminence.\textsuperscript{7} The problem was that any newly discovered hunting grounds for sable came to be quickly exhausted by the Russians, who would then move on inexorably to the next region. This eventually led to the virtual extinction of the sable in its wildlife habitat forcing Russian administrators by 1700 to consider alternatives. Yet it had been the initial presence of the sable for export that had enabled the state of Muscovy to develop into a significant European power.\textsuperscript{8}

There was no master plan to the Russian conquest of this area but, rather "a convulsive process propelled by many pressures and forces that varied in purpose, skill, intensity and duration."\textsuperscript{9} While every action was taken in the name of the Tsar, the control and exploitation of Siberia was administered by two intertwined bureaucracies—one centred in Moscow, the other dispersed throughout the colony. In Moscow, the administration of the Siberian colony was gradually co-ordinated under the Sibirskii prikas (Siberian Department) whose officials, based both in Moscow and in the regions, made all major decisions concerning the exploitation and administration of the region. As the rapid conquest of Siberia proceeded, the enormous riches of Siberia attracted applicants for these positions. Officials in Moscow would plan permanent settlements, the exploitation of natural and human resources, and the establishing of quotas for yesak from the natives and tribute from the Russian entrepreneurs operating in the region. The military played a key ongoing role in all decision-making. Clergy from the Orthodox Church began to take part in decisions. The Siberian Department also had a foreign policy role in that it advised on how the Russian administration in Siberia dealt with competing powers that might challenge Russian hegemony.\textsuperscript{10}
As travel and small-scale settlement began to take hold, a wide variety of Russians travelled to this region in the period 1580 to 1700.9 (1) Russian promyshlenniks (entrepreneurs), who hunted and trapped fur-bearing animals, and who procured furs from Siberian natives, through trade, extortion, theft, tribute and other means; (2) State employees (shchuschei or sluzhilie lyudi, i.e., servants) - administrative officials and military personnel, including streltsy and cossacks, sent by the central authorities to protect Russia's vital interests; (3) prisoners of war (Poles, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Swedes, Baltic Germans, and other Europeans) known as Litva; (4) political and religious dissenters, often used by local authorities to perform various assignments; (5) state peasants,10 craftsmen, priests, monks and nuns who assisted colonial administrators; (6) merchants seeking their fortune; (7) Gulyashchye lyudi (runaway serfs and other outcasts) seeking refuge in the new colony and prepared to join in new assignments; and (8) individual natives, and often whole native tribes, who served voluntarily as guides and interpreters, or who joined the Russians in their conquest to secure their own protection and other advantages. Two different religious groups also settled in these regions in ever increasing numbers: (a) Orthodox clergy, approved by government, established parishes and later churches to tend to the spiritual needs of settlers. Church and state officials were generally cooperative but at times they clashed. (b) Old Believers (Schismatics) trying to escape persecution in Russia would establish communities of their own that tended generally to be remote from other settlements. These would prove to be still active until 1917 and beyond, retaining most of their 17th century ways.11

Each expedition of explorers and entrepreneurs heading east received a mandate with instructions from the court in Moscow but, as they travelled overland to their destinations, they quickly learned to rely on their own instincts. Initially, these early Russian invaders penetrated along the river routes extending across the continent and built fortifications at the confluences and portages that linked one river system to another. This led to permanent settlements at strategic locations that served as centres of control and conquest: Tyumen in 1586; Tobolsk (1587); Mangazy (1601); Tomsk (1604); Yeisisk (1620); Yakutsk (1632); Okhotsk (1649); and Irkutsk (1652). Over this same time, Russians built some fifty permanent fortified settlements known as ostrogi, numerous other semi-permanent units known as ostrohzhki (fortified outposts) and zimovya (small winter outposts). The actual number of Russians scattered across Siberia responsible for securing this region for the Empire was very small. “Muscovite settlements were, in fact, little islands in a vast ocean of forests, tundra and steppe, linked by fragile transport routes.”12

All Russian administrative personnel residing throughout Siberia during this period lived in the large and small fortified outposts (ostrogi or ostrohzhki), that were strategically located and well built. “The principal function of these Russian colonial outposts was not commercial. They were established to perform three critical functions: to gain physical control of the region; to exploit the region’s resources and inhabitants; and to make the conquered region an integral part of Russia. Russian authorities neither articulated nor spelled out these goals at any length. They simply evolved out of practical experience and existing conditions and opportunities.”13

The military conquest of the Russian North had followed certain patterns. A small group of Russian military would invade a given territory. If natives offered no resistance, the invaders would seize some tribal leaders or their relatives as hostages. Fellow tribesmen were then required to ransom these hostages through the payment of yasak or by taking an oath of allegiance (shurt) to become loyal yasak paying subjects of the tsar forever. In cases where indigenous inhabitants did resist the invaders, the Russians would use their superior knowledge and technology to overwhelm the opposition, killing most of the men, seizing the women, appropriating their food supplies, and forcing on the survivors an oath of eternal loyalty and an annual payment of yasak. All native men of Siberia and northern Asia (except converts to Russian Orthodox Christianity) were required to pay yasak and pominiuki in prime sable furs.14 The amount of payment varied from region to region depending on availability. Later as stocks of sables depleted from over-hunting, other furs would be substituted.
Colonial officials also forced many natives to supply food to them and to perform every kind of work including fishing, gathering berries, providing firewood, cutting logs for buildings, cultivating land and even to act as beasts of burden. Central authorities in Moscow were often unaware of the hardships being imposed on natives. Sometimes officials would travel from Moscow for the purpose of investigating abuses but on other occasions additional military personnel would be sent to secure a region. Indigenous women and their offspring also played a role in colonial administration, as guides and interpreters and as informers on native discontent.\textsuperscript{15}

In marching across northern Asia, Russians came across a wide variety of native peoples. Technologically, all of these people were primitive in comparison to the Russians; many were hostile to each other, which Russian invaders often were able to exploit to their advantage. Most were nomadic. Their tools were simple and their main weapon was the bow and arrow. Most lived on game and fish and roots and berries. Sixteenth century Russians enjoyed an enormous military advantage over these indigenous people they encountered by having guns. The small nations of Siberia, living as they did in dispersed clan communities or on nomadic lands, resisted the Russian conquerors wherever they could. "They had no complex political, economic, or social institutions. Some groups were numerically so small that they were actually large family units or clans, rather than tribes. It goes without saying that these factors and the dissimilarities among the natives allowed the Muscovites to conquer, exploit and rule them with relative ease."\textsuperscript{16}

The most ruthless campaigns against northern people who refused to submit took place in the Northeast. The Even of the Otkotks region fought hard to preserve their freedom, while in Kamchatka, the Itelmens, whose conquest did not begin until the 18th century, were subject to genocidal slaughter by troops using the most up-to-date military weapons of that time. The most determined resistance was by the Koryaks and Chukchis of the northeast who faced a fierce and explicitly genocidal Russian campaign up to the 1750's. Eventually this policy was abandoned as unprofitable and from then until the early 20th century, the Chukchi had the distinction of being recognized as "not completely subdued" and were largely left to their own devices.\textsuperscript{17}

The reign of Peter the Great (1682-1725) brought a greater element of state intervention in harnessing the material and human resources of Siberia, particularly in the exploration and scientific investigation of the natural and economic resources of this region. This meant providing logistical support at state expense to various expeditions for the scientific exploration and study of Siberia. The most famous of his initiatives, one that actually commenced sometime after Peter’s death, was the Second Kamchatka or 'Great Northern' expedition, led by the Danish seaman, Vitus Bering. While this was the grandest voyage of discovery supported by Muscovy, many other scientific expeditions took place in the 18th century, some of which stretched far out beyond Siberia to the Aleutian and Kuril Islands and Russia America.\textsuperscript{18}

The abolition of the Siberian Department (Sibirskii prikaz) in 1763 demonstrated that the central government had begun to regard Siberia as an integral part of Russia as a whole, rather than as a mere colonial appendage. By the beginning of the 19th century, Siberia was divided up into the three governorships (guberniya) of Tobolsk, Tomsk and Irkutsk, each of them further subdivided into region (oblasti) and districts (uezdy). Despite this formal integration into the established administrative structure of the empire, the very particularity of the region continued to be apparent in a number of ways leading regionalist historians and thinkers to regard Siberia as a distinct entity with its own unique characteristics, needs and requirements.

The pace of Russian colonization east of the Urals increased considerably in the 19th century. Whereas Russian migration had consisted exclusively to the fortresses and small communities established by the military along these river routes and had numbered in the hundreds or low thousands, this began to
change, beginning in 1763, when a dry land road began to be built through the clearing of a wide swath of forest and the setting of a surface road strong enough to enable the passage of wheeled vehicles or sledges. The construction of the ‘Great Moscow trakt’, driven from west to east across the southern fringe of the taiga, would open up Siberia to Russian penetration on a large scale through a continuous land route from the Urals to Irkutsk and beyond. This dry land road would supersede the use of river routes with their seasonal hazards and high costs in maintaining boats and barges. Caravans of carts and sledges transported goods between European Russia and Siberia. The trakt also opened up new lands for peasant settlers and greatly stimulated the growth of towns which lay on or near its course, such as Tomsk, Yeniseisk and Irkutsk. The Siberian trakt became the highway by which multitudes of immigrants from European Russia left for Siberia.¹⁹

Russian colonization became an intricate web of mutual dependency between the state and private individuals, among the military, hunters, peasants, craftsmen and merchants. Many peasants, at first, had been forcibly settled in areas of Siberia by government directives. Others were attracted by opportunities for free land. “Peasants tended to move onwards in short stages, so their progression across Siberia was not sudden. It was more a trickle than a flood, for peaceful homesteads could be successfully built only where there was relative security, and where there were known to be agriculturally suitable regions. Peasants were dependent on government for protection; the garrisons could not survive without foodstuffs produced by the peasants.”²⁰ With the construction of the trakt, more and more peasants decided to seek opportunities in these new regions.

The next sections will examine the situation of the various aboriginal people residing east of the Urals as they encountered the invading Russians, efforts at reform that tried to address the situation of these peoples within the Empire, and how the Russian colonization of Siberia and the Far East became a mass movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

2.2 Russia’s Alien Peoples

As noted in Chapter One, while the terminology of recent international conventions refer to these numerically small peoples of Northern Russia as “indigenous peoples,” they had been known for centuries within the legal system of the Imperial Russian Empire, as “aliens”—that is, as nations alien to the Russian (Slavonic origin) rulers. Much of the material presented in this subsection has been summarized from the writings of James Forsyth, notably, his A History of the Peoples of Siberia (cited as Forsyth 1992), and his succinct summary paper for the proceedings edited by Alan Wood 1991 (Forsyth 1991). Arctic Mirrors by Yuri Slezkine (Slezkine 1994) is also frequently cited.

The area inhabited by these peoples is divided into two principal eco-zones, the Arctic tundra and the sub-arctic taiga. The tundra runs along the Arctic Ocean and is characterized by a sparse ground cover of shrubs, lichens, and mosses and a low animal population density. The taiga consists of coniferous boreal forest dominated by pine, larch and spruce. The tree line serves as an ecological and cultural divide between the two. Permafrost would be continuous in the tundra but sporadic in the taiga. Permafrost retards the growth of vegetation and prevents the drainage of melt water leading to the breeding of enormous quantities of mosquitoes every summer.

The most traditional economic activity in the Arctic has always centred on reindeer, whether domesticated or wild. At the time of the first Russian outsiders, the native tundra population tended to combine hunting and reindeer pastoralism. The reindeer would winter at the edge of the forest or in protected river valleys before heading for the seashore in summer to escape the mosquitoes; herders would follow their animals. Other native groups would hunt wild herds by trying to intercept them at certain points. As herds declined in the 18th century, pastoralism became more prevalent on the tundra, notably for a majority of the Nenets, tundra Chukchi, Even and tundra Koryaks. The main economic unit
for many nomadic peoples was the camp which usually consisted of several nuclear families, their dependents and assistants; all animals were privately owned.21

Natives in many coastal communities along the sea hunted seal, whale and walrus. The Eskimos and the settled Chukchi lived almost exclusively off marine hunting. The baidaraks (boat groups) consisted of kinship units that varied in size according to season and prey: seal-hunting was by individual hunters while whaling expeditions required the labour of a large number of people. Along the Pacific coast, the settled Koryaks combined sea mammal hunting with fishing, while the Itel’men relied almost exclusively on annual salmon runs. Most peoples along the Pacific coast, including those of the Amur, used dogs for transportation. Peoples of the taiga zone (Ob’ Ugrians, Forest Samoyed, Ket, Evenk, Tofalar and Amur peoples) were engaged in combinations of hunting and fishing. During summers, most lived in temporary settlements along lakes and rivers; in the winter, small groups or solitary hunters pursued bear, moose, wild reindeer and other fur-bearing animals. None of the native northerners could be categorized as ‘settled’ in the Russian (agricultural) sense of the term. The nature of their subsistence activities required periodic movement. Even sea-mammal hunters and salmon fishermen had different summer and winter quarters. Economic associations were relatively unstable, fluctuating in size and composition according to the season and the availability of resources.22

Table One. Peoples of Siberia In the Seventeenth Century (approximate numbers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tatars</td>
<td>14,265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teleuts and other Altai-Sayan Turks</td>
<td>11,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khanty and Mansi</td>
<td>16,260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoyeds, including Nenets, Tavgi and Selkups</td>
<td>15,285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kets</td>
<td>5,630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tungus: Evenki and Even</td>
<td>36,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yakuts</td>
<td>28,470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mongols, including Buryats</td>
<td>37,175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yukaghirses</td>
<td>4,775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eskimos</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chukchi</td>
<td>8,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koryaks</td>
<td>11,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itel’men</td>
<td>23,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ainu</td>
<td>3,540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nankai and Ulchi</td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nivkh</td>
<td>4,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>227,235</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Forsyth 1991; 71. The figures cited above are based on B.O. Dolgikh’s 1960 study, based upon official contemporary records of tribute-exaction, of the clan and tribal composition of the peoples of Siberia in the 17th century. By aggregating Dolgikh’s data, it was possible to arrive at the approximate number for the peoples of Siberia in the 17th century.

A number of writers have emphatically stated how viable human cultures had existed across Siberia for centuries before the arrival of the Russians, notably James Forsyth (1991) in the opening quotation to this chapter. Forsyth went on to argue as to how the vast area of northern Asia acquired by the Muscovy was not an empty land in the 16th century, that from the mountainous south, through the vast taiga forests and the treeless tundra, human communities had established themselves over several millennia, with a way of life that was nomadic or semi-nomadic. The economy of most of these peoples was largely based upon the use of the reindeer—whether by hunting wild herds during seasonal migrations or later, by domesticating them. The material culture of the peoples of the forest and tundra
centred on reindeer skins for their clothing and shelter, and securing food by hunting game with spears, and bows and arrows, by fishing, and by gathering nuts, berries and roots. Many Siberian people had been influenced by contacts with China and Persia long before the sudden Russian conquest and occupation. Forsyth listed a number of genital characteristics of the social structures of the many Siberian peoples: 24

Oral Tradition: While most Siberian peoples lacked a written form of their language, every native community valued recitation and oral traditions, especially stories related to their own history, and that these were highly developed.

Traditional Knowledge and Customs: Siberian native peoples enjoyed a wealth of practical knowledge about the forest and its fauna, the tundra, the rivers and the seas, wherever they inhabited. They were skilled in crafts and hunting techniques. One notable social norm of all hunting peoples was sharing of the spoils of the hunt among all members of the community (nimat), even among those who had not participated.

Clan Structure: Most of the Siberian native peoples had developed a sophisticated social structure based on clans, each of which traced descent from a common ancestor, and that marriage within this kinship group was forbidden. Marriages involved bride price, dowry, working for the bride’s family for a specified period and possible blood vengeance. Awareness of belonging to a clan was an important fact of life for all Siberian peoples except those of the extreme northeast: the Koryaks, Chukchi and Eskimos.

Shamanism: Functioning as a priest, healer and teacher, shamanism was almost a universal religion among Siberian native peoples. They became the targets of persecution first by the Orthodox Church and, in the 20th century, by the Communist Party.

Blood Sacrifice: The ritual sacrifice of animals was a primary religious rite of all Siberian peoples. Most would sacrifice a reindeer. Those peoples who used dogs for transport would sacrifice and eat a dog; others, a horse. The most prominent would be that of a bear which traditionally would be the centre of a communal celebration, ritual blood sacrifice and religious activity.

Forsyth 25 also listed specific regional characteristics of a number of peoples:

Many peoples on the lower reaches of the Amur River in the Far East region, such as the Nanai, Ulchi and Nivkh, as well as the Itelmen and Aino of Kamchatka, lived in the forest, moving between winter and summer villages, making use of dugout or plank-built boats, and feeding themselves largely on fish. Their homes ranged from the large subterranean winter lodges of the Nivkh to light summer huts of branches and bark. All of these Far Eastern peoples used dog-teams to pull their sledges.

Dog transport was also the norm among the settled coastal Koryaks, Chukchi and Eskimos of the arctic regions of the far northeast, whose main source of food was walrus, seals and whales. These were hunted by venturing out on the arctic waters in boats of walrus hide. The Chukchi and Koryaks inhabiting the interior, however, led a very different way of life, roaming the tundra with their reindeer herds. Their homes consisted of large tents (yurangs) heated by seal-oil lamps.

The people known as the Tungus (Evenki and Even) were the classic forest hunters of Siberia, whose family bands moved from place to place, camping in conical, deerskin-covered tents, the most common type of nomadic dwelling in the north (popularly known as a cham). Like most peoples of the forest and tundra, the Tungus depended for their livelihood upon herds of domesticated reindeer, their use of which had several specific features. They did not harness the deer to sleds but rather transported goods on their backs and even rode them; the does were milked. 26
The fishing and hunting economy of the Mansi, Khanty, Selkup and Ket peoples located west of the Yenisei, were largely based upon the use of dugout or plank boats, which they navigated over the rivers, lakes and marshes of the Ob Basin. Their winter homes consisted of log cabins; in summer, they inhabited conical tents or birch bark huts. The main transport animal in the Ob and Yenisei regions had originally been the dog, but it was not as extensively used as in other regions of Russia. Game meats were made from the skins of deer, fish or birds, but also from cloth.

The way of life of the northern Samoyeds of western Siberia (Nenets and Enets) also centred on reindeer husbandry. The design of their various sledges and their use of deer teams to draw them, was very sophisticated. Their reindeer were never ridden or milked.

Among the Samoyed people of the Taimyr Peninsula (Nganasan and Yukaghir), each family had a few reindeer for harnessing to sleds but no herds. Their livelihood depended almost entirely on hunting wild deer which they pursued on their seasonal migrations. They also hunted birds for food and fish.

The general trend for the indigenous population of the Russian colony of Siberia from the 17th to the 19th century was that some individuals, mainly the chiefs and traders, adapted to the ways of their conquerors and became successful according to the standards of Russian society, while the mass of their compatriots, exploited by the Russian system and lacking any means of redress, fell increasingly into poverty and degradation. This economic destitution, along with the commonplaces of fashionable racial theory, convinced most educated Russians at the beginning of the 19th century that practically all of these small Northern peoples were irrevocably doomed to extinction.

The burden of yasak undermined the indigenous way of life since it diverted native men from the essential hunting pursuits that provided food, clothing and other necessities, to the comparatively trivial (with respect to their basic livelihood) occupation of hunting and trapping sable, arctic fox, squirrels and other fur bearing animals. These were demanded relentlessly by the Russian government and by traders because of their commercial value, but they contributed nothing to the actual economy of the natives. Eventually this distortion of the native way of life led to their dependence upon Russian provisions: grain, bread, sugar, tea and tobacco and, most tragically, alcohol.

Before the Russians came, there had been no landownership in Siberia although rights to the use of hunting grounds, fishing locations and pastures were respected by tradition or asserted by force. Under Russian rule, many native communities were deprived of such rights by sheer seizure of land or by forfeiting territory through unscrupulous contracts. Another direct result of conquest by force of arms was the development of slavery, often through the implementation of usury type contracts which was widespread up to the beginning of the 19th century. Native slaves owned by Russians of all social classes were either prisoners of war or women and children captured after the men of a native community had been killed. The taking of native wives voluntarily or by force was common, as well as prostitution. Diseases (especially small pox and measles) also had a devastating impact on many native communities because these were unknown in northern Asia. These led to the deaths of some 50 per cent of Kets in western Siberia; 80 per cent of the northern Tungus and Yukuts east of the Yenisei in the 1650's; and almost 50 % of Yukaghirs in 1690's. Much of the remote population among the Nganasan and Dolgans of the Taimyr suffered from these imported diseases in the 1830's; the Chukchi and Koryaks of the far Northeast were to suffer in the 1880s. These drastic reductions in population through disease must have been restored quickly as overall numbers continued to grow.

Gradually, individuals in St. Petersburg and throughout Siberia began to advocate for legal reforms to address some of the problems facing these Northern peoples.
2.3 Political Impact of Statute of 1822

Historically, colonization has always given scope to adventurers from the metropolis to enjoy virtually absolute power over local native peoples, whether as administrators, police officials, soldiers, traders, or settlers. Along with this power went a contemptuous attitude towards the natives as an inferior race. However, as the administration of this vast territory evolved from conquest and fur trade to colonization by an agricultural class, other long-term administrative issues came to the fore. Inevitably, clashes occurred among local native populations and incoming Russians—notably over infringements by Russian settlers of native hunting territories and their settlement on pastures essential to the yearly migrations of reindeer herds. Peasants would come into conflict with indigenous inhabitants by hunting mammals, as well as birds and fish, often destroying the very dwindling stocks of fur-bearing animals that the native peoples depended on to pay yasak. Historians of this period have written of the cruelty displayed by administrators in their dealings with the native population:

“One particular characteristic which blighted the administration of Siberia throughout the period of Russian domination was the legendary rapaciousness, venality, corruption and brutality of many of even the region’s most senior officials. Since the early seventeenth century, despite the central government’s efforts to attenuate, curb or eliminate the worst abuses... the tsar’s ‘Siberian satraps’ enjoyed almost plenipotentiary powers in what they regarded as their own fiefdom, which they exercised with all the arbitrary and unbridled ruthlessness of a military dictatorship and the methods of a police state.”

By the nineteenth century, Tsar Alexander I and his officials who dealt with Siberia had determined that a new policy and legal framework was needed for this colony, that too great a reliance continued to be placed on floggings, banishment to remote Arctic villages, and penal servitude in the mines as the main instruments of public policy utilized by administrators. While such practices by local administrators might have been excusable in earlier years, it increasingly came to be recognized that a more rational legal regime was required. To that end, in 1820, Alexander appointed Mikhail Speranskii as Governor General of Siberia, giving him greater authority than any Tsar had allowed a Siberian governor before.

During his three years as governor-general, Speranskii examined Siberia’s diversity and came to appreciate its vast opportunities in ways that other administrators never had been able to appreciate. The huge economic post-fur trade opportunities that were available, such as in mining and trade. He spent almost two years travelling through Siberia. From his own personal observations and discussions with a wide range of individuals he met from these travels, Speranskii determined that, in the long run, Siberia could only benefit if the rule of law would prevail, that a system of legal checks and balances had to be instituted that would prevent officials from acting in the completely arbitrary ways that they had always done. The net effect of the Statute of Alien Administration in Siberia that became law in 1822 was to divide the lands east of the Urals into more manageable units, establish a hierarchical system of government, and limit the authority of governors and governors-general. Siberia would cease to be a colony and, rather, be governed like the rest of the empire of which it was a part.

The Statute of Alien Administration divided the entire population of Russia into Slavonic peoples (Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians) and formally classified all Siberian aborigines as “aliens” (inostrtsy). These Aliens were divided into three categories according to their education and situation in life: (1) Those who had settled and lived in towns and settlements; settled aliens were legally counted with Russians of the same estate (mostly merchants and state peasants) and were to have the same rights and obligations, except they could not be drafted into the army. (2) Nomads who occupied definite places depending on the season; nomads would carry on as before with separate clans exploiting legally defined territories from which Russians were barred and would continue to pay for tribute as well as
local taxes. (3) Wonderers or foragers (brodichi i livsny) who moved from one place to another, wandering aliens were exempt from all obligations except yasak, kept their lands en bloc (without subdividing), and had a right of unrestricted movement from one district or province to another. The Statute also singled out the Chukchi as aliens "not fully dependent" who paid tribute "as they say fit, with respect to both quality and quantity."36

This statute did not include precise guidelines for distinguishing among the categories aside from a few examples, the decision came to be left to local officials. The underlying premise to this legislation was to leave the matter of alien classes open-ended and flexible whereby it was expected that wanderers would eventually become nomadic and that nomads would at some point settle down.37 Local administrators had the responsibility of determining each of these stages, although the statute cautioned against haste in the transfer of aliens from one category to another.38 However, as guidelines were vague, it placed difficulty on officials in deciding which native group belonged under which category. Moreover, many aliens expressed reluctance to move up in the hierarchy as this meant greater responsibilities including higher taxes. A Commission had to be established to enumerate the aliens, clarify their status, and establish revised rates of tribute—all of these taking place in the spirit of Speranskii's statute. This generally meant that, for the foreseeable future, most of the small peoples of the north, except for a few Evenk groups, were classified as wandering aliens and exempt from tax.39

Constitutional experts in today's Russia have seen the Statute on Alien Administration of Siberia, enacted during the Tsarist period, as "a quite expanded legislative reinforcement" of the right of native peoples to lands in Russia.40 However, as legal experts have noted, the aforementioned points with respect to guaranteed land title by these Alien peoples, "unfortunately, were not adequately implemented or enforced."41 This Statute was "the only comprehensive official statement of its kind," a statute that codified some existing practices and would fix the status of native Siberians for the next one hundred years.42 Moreover, many of the ideas contained in this 1822 Statute would serve the test of time as reformers have continually returned to it. Many of its ideas would serve as the basis for reforms considered by the Duma early in the 20th century and again at times during the Soviet period, such as the Committee of the North period of activities during the 1920s and again in the perestroika period in the late 1980s.43

2.4 Colonization to 1914

While successful as a highway for migration, the Siberian trakt had a detrimental effect on the wild life of the forest and on nomadic hunting peoples. This initial intrusion by European technology marked the beginning of the process of exploitation and irreversible alteration of the natural environment of northern Asia which by the second half of the 20th century, would accelerate to breakneck speed. Russians and other Slavonic settlers from west of the Urals mainly settled along a zone approximately 400 to 700 kilometres wide along this trakt, particularly near the Urals between Omsk and Krasnoyarsk. Finding themselves at best disregarded, but frequently exploited and abused by Russian incomers to their territory, native Siberians living to the north of the trakt could only seek escape from the destruction of their way of life by retreating in one general direction—northward.44 Many Mansi and Khanty moved away from their homes, the Mansi crossing the Ob into the middle part of its basin, while some Selkups who had lived on the Ob, as well as the Kets on the Yenisei, moved north. In their northward migration toward the tundra, these peoples encountered the Nenet Samoyeds and adopted many features of their reindeer herding way of life, so that a northern Khanty, Selkup and Ket culture developed.

The Samoyeds themselves moved partly to the northeast, where beyond the estuary of the Yenisei, the separate entities people became established. At this same time, the southern groups of Samoyeds and Kets in the upper Yenisei and Sayan regions disappeared, having been generally assimilated by the Turrians, Tungus, Buryats or Turkic peoples.45 East of Lake Baikal, several Evenki clans who had herded reindeer
converted to riding horses and were partly assimilated by the Buryats, especially in the context of native Cossack units. Northwest of Lake Baikal, the Evenki advanced westward to the Yenisei River and beyond, absorbing many of the Ket people in the process. Other Evenki clans, seeking to avoid subjection by the Russians, moved north of the Angara and some of these crossed the Yenisei into Nenets territory. In the Taimyr, it was the influx of Evenki and Yakuts into lands inhabited by the Tungus-Samoieds that led to complex ethnic mixing and even the emergence of a new nationality, known as Dolgans. This name came from one of the Evenki clans but their language was a dialect of Yakut. These intrusions forced the Nganasans farther north into the tundra, creating an enmity with the Dolgans.

Far from being crushed as a people by the Russian conquest, the Yakut nation succeeded in adapting to the ways of their conquerors. This was to lead to their influence being extended over their Tungus and Yukaghir neighbours as well as over the Russians themselves. The Yakuts moved into a vast territory of north-eastern Siberia which, until the 17th century had been the homeland of the Yukaghirs; this latter population shrank into a small minority, while the Yakuts and their language came to dominate. Similarly, the Yakuts also moved westward into the basin of the Vilui River, driving out or assimilating many of the Evenki who had occupied this territory. In the northwest, the Yakuts pushed far into the Olenyok and Anabar basins, lands formerly occupied by the Evenki, until the Yakuts occupied the northern part of the forest and reached the edge of the tundra. Within this subarctic forest region, there was much intermarriage between Yakuts and Evenki and a culture developed which combined elements of both peoples. By the 19th century, a national region for the Yakuts came to be extended over 1,600 square kilometres from the Vilui River to the Lolyma and nearby as far from the middle of the Lena River to the shores of the Arctic Ocean.46

The Chukchi proved to be another self-assertive people of eastern Siberia who, despite major Russian military campaigns during the 18th century, advanced far beyond their original homeland in the farthest corner of the Northeast, into the territory of the Yukaghirs whom they mainly absorbed. The Yukaghirs almost disappeared as a people, partly through assimilation to their stronger neighbours, but partly also because of so many of their men folk being recruited as native auxiliaries in Russian military campaigns against other native peoples, such as the Even along the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk. Other native peoples that virtually disappeared from existence as a result of Russian colonialism were the Itelmen of Kamchatka and, eventually their southern neighbours, the Ainu. The Aleuts were largely annihilated by the Russians during the trans-Pacific adventure pursued by the Russians in pursuit of sea otter fur.47

Siberia has for centuries also existed as a penal colony for forced labour or penal servitude (katorga) and as a location for implementing several different types of political banishment (syilka) that could range from residency in a Siberian town while under police surveillance to condemning criminals to live among Siberia's natives and endure their primitive way of life. Starting with the First Northern War in the 1650's and continuing until the end of the Soviet Union, Siberia has served as a destination for foreign prisoners of war, religious dissidents, statesmen, courtiers, generals, princes who had fallen out of favour, and hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens.48 During the period of the Russian Empire, many banished people, depending on their offence, would often be given posts in the administration because of a shortage of educated people. However, for those men and women condemned to hard labour, they could expect to spend years at Siberian outposts. Many did not survive. Starting in the early 1700's, when Peter the Great began to send criminals to the recently opened silver mines around Nerchinsk, these prisoners began to supply the human power needed to work a network of mines that eventually stretched from Siberia's Altai foothills to the north-eastern wastes of the Kolyma valley. Later, Russian prison labour helped build the Great Siberian trakt and laid sections of the Trans-Siberian Railroad through the rough and remote lands east of Lake Baikal.

While this sort of banishment was common in the Russian period, it turned into a flood when the Bolsheviks seized power and began to designate huge numbers of its citizens as "enemies of the people."
These political prisoners were fed and housed wretchedly in Soviet slave labour camps. During the Soviet era, they built factories, hydroelectric dams, and cities. Those condemned under Stalin's vast Gulag system cut timber and mined coal, iron ore, copper, and a dozen other nonferrous metals above the Arctic Circle to help take up the slack in economic development that plagued the capital-poor Soviet regime. Forced labour thus became a vital link in the historical chain that connected Siberia's past with its future.49

Construction began in 1891 on the Trans-Siberian railroad which was to have an enormous impact for transporting large numbers of emigrants from European Russia into the farthest reaches of Siberia. By 1900, the line extended to Irkutsk where it stopped at Lake Baikal. The period up to 1914 saw the completion of the Trans-Siberian railway all the way to Khabarovsk and Vladivostok which opened up the Far East for further settlement. This had a major influence on internal migration within Russia. From 1861 to 1914, approximately 3,800,000 people migrated and settled in Siberia and the Far East. The rate and size of the movement was spread unevenly over the period depending on a number of social and economic factors. Between 1861 and 1885, around 300,000 settlers crossed the Urals, about 12,000 a year. With the abolition of serfdom in 1861, many peasants were driven by a desire for land and by the oppression of their landlords to migrate to the southern Ukraine, the Caucasus, Central Asia and Siberia. Legislation in 1889 provided grants and loans for those migrating to enable them to establish farmsteads. From 1886 to 1895, there were 611,000 immigrants to Siberia, that is, more than 62,000 a year. The building of the Trans-Siberian Railway, beginning in 1896, facilitated the movement of settlers into Siberia. It also promoted the export of agricultural and other goods from Siberia to European Russia. Between 1896 and 1912, almost 1.8 million Russians left for Asiatic Russia, along with almost two million Ukrainians and a half million Byelorussians.

By the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, Siberia had become Russia's principal region for colonization.49 In settling this new land, the migrants laid new roads, built new villages, cleared the forests for agriculture and cultivated crops. The major role in the economic development of Siberia from the mid 19th to early 20th century came to be played by peasants, workers and artisans. New territories came to be opened up with the development of agriculture, animal husbandry and associated cottage industries. Whereas those migrating to Siberia initially came primarily from the category of middle peasants, by the beginning of the 20th century, the vast majority of migrants were poor peasants seeking opportunities for prosperity in Siberia that had never been available to them in European Russia. Native peoples again had to adjust as vast new number of outsiders competed for the use of their traditional lands, waters and forests.

Summary: Although the Imperial Russian Empire came to an end in 1917, it still set the framework as to how many indigenous peoples view their culture today and how they wish to re-establish it. Anthropologists have demonstrated how vibrant indigenous culture had existed in a hostile environment for centuries and flourished. Unlike the Soviet period, a number of independent studies by ethnographers, linguists and cultural historians took place and much of this material is still germane for consideration in today's efforts to restore many of these national cultures.

Endnotes

1 Dmytryshyn In A. Wood (ed.) 1991; 17.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 5.
5 Raymond H. Fisher (1943), The Russian Fur Trade 1550-1700; Berkley; 109-19.
CHAPTER 2: Conquest, Colonization and Alien Cultures

The proposition "had there been no Siberian sable, there would have been no Muscovite empire" is somewhat fanciful, but there is no gainsaying Russia's early economic dependence on the resources of her Siberian possessions." Alan Wood 1991: 5.

Dmytryshyn 1991; 17. Yavlinsky (1929) characterized this conquest of north Asia as being "accomplished more by a process of infiltration than by military action but nevertheless the whole process had great impact on the life and fate of the indigenous population."


Although not an integral part of the colonial administrative apparatus, Russian peasants played a vital role. Most were state peasants whom government settled near various fortified outposts (ostrogi) to grow food for the garrison and to form the nuclei of permanent Russian settlements in the colony. Many were killed in attacks on these fortifications by non-Russians as they lived outside the armed buildings. —Ibid.; 29.


Ibid.


Whereas yasak was for tribute payable to the Tsar (or central authorities in Moscow), pominihi was tribute payable to the local governor or his entourage. Payment of either tribute could prove difficult.


A. Wood 1991; J.W. Black, ibid., provides a summary analysis of this internal exploration within Russia.

Forsyth (1982, 190-91) elaborates: "An event of great importance for the opening up of Siberia to Russian penetration...The Great Moscovoy Trek was an enormous achievement, little sung in Russian history..."

Collins 1991: 40.

Iuri Stekline 1994: 4. Much of this initial summary is from the opening chapter to his book.

Ibid.

Ibid.; 70.

Ibid.; 76-77.

Forsyth 1991: 84-86.

Gail A. Fundahl (1998) in her in-depth study described Evenki nomadism through the Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet period. She furthermore examined possibilities for many Evenki to return to that way of life in light of legislation that was being considered by the Russian Duma during the 1990s, legislation ultimately enacted.

Forsyth 1991: 81-82.

Ibid.; 83.

Ibid.; 81-82.

"Almost every Russian official in Siberia and in northern Asia, including cossacks and even priests, had native mistresses. Actually, they were personal slaves and they were frequently bartered among masters."—Dmytryshyn 1991: 29.


Collins 1991: 43.


Lincoln 1994: 159.


The term "alen" was not legally defined; rather, the statute applied to all "alien tribes who had been identified as yasak people, including those who were not required to pay yasak anymore—as cited in Stekline 1994: 95. Stekline went on to add how the circumpolar hunters, gatherers, and reindeer herders were all indisputably 'alien' and belonged to either the nomadic or the wandering category. They were administered indirectly with little interference from the Russian authorities. Every encampment or
settlement of 15 or more families had a permanent name with as little Russian interference as possible. Among wandering Allen, one man would often be appointed as liaison with authorities and gathering of yasak. Every effort was made in this legislation to keep contact between Russian officials and native nomads to a minimum with less harassing and arbitrary decisions over payments.

36 Slezkine 1994, 84-5.
37 Ibid., 86-89.
38 V.A. Kryazhkov 1996; 86-87.
39 Ibid., 87.
40 Slezkine 1994; 83.
41 Kryazhkov 1996; 86-87.
43 Forsyth 1991; 87.
44 Ibid. 174-180.

43 In Chapter 23 on the Yukaghir people in Part III, our interviewer came across a number of older respondents who remembered inmates they had known at the Dalstroy prison camp.

CHAPTER 3
ESTABLISHING SOVIET HEGEMONY

Pika and Prokhorov (1988) pointed out how some indigenous peoples continued to inhabit settlements that had been liquidated by the authorities and long considered abandoned. They wrote on how huge industrial development projects had caused destruction to the lands and ecology that Northern peoples depended on for hunting and reindeer husbandry; how fishing resources in many internal waterways of the North were close to exhaustion. The authors asked, rhetorically, how the interests of the Northern population were being defended, only to reply abruptly: depressingly badly.


The Bolshevik seizure of power of the central government in Russia in October 1917 under the leadership of V.I. Lenin ushered in a period of immense change throughout the vast territories of the Russian Empire; these changes transformed Northern Russia by incorporating the region, its resources and peoples ever more tightly into the national polity. These changes included a period of initial reforms recognizing the indigenous peoples of Siberia with special rights, reforms that would eventually give way to their collectivization, to massive projects of industrialization in their homeland regions, and to their almost total assimilation. The Bolshevik government first proclaimed what was to become known as the Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia in November 1917, an all-embracing political pronouncement that proclaimed an inalienable right for the free development of ethnic minorities and ethnographic groups living within the territory of Russia. A 1918 Constitution guaranteed “equal rights to all citizens, irrespective of their racial or ethnic affiliation.” By 1923, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) had been proclaimed, with the Russian Soviet Federalist Socialist Republic (RSFSR) as its largest and most dominant region. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was designated as the supreme political entity. During the Civil War of 1918-23, the Communist Party consolidated its power throughout the North; much of the population living in this region were peasants by occupation, therefore in conflict with the new political order. The initial goal of the Soviet regime in the North was to collectivize agriculture and to destroy the power of the kulaks—the large land holding class. The interests and livelihood of the traditional native economy initially remained on the sidelines. In establishing its dominance over the North, the Soviet regime abrogated most of the administrative structures and legislation of the Tsarist administration that had applied to the native peoples.

This chapter will first examine the initial reforms of the Communist regime based on a tradition of humanism, reforms that soon gave way to an ideology of collectivism and egalitarianism as espoused by the leadership of the CPSU. The second section will outline the massive industrial development projects that began in Northern Russia in the 1930s, projects combined with a large-scale influx of new migrant labour, much of it based on prison labour. A third section will examine the impact on the Northern peoples of even greater economic and social amalgamations, industrial development and policies designed by central authorities to assimilate these Northern peoples and cultures into the Soviet mainstream. This chapter will identify pockets of resistance to this assimilation and the determination—indeed, sheer tenacity—of many of these peoples to maintain their respective national identities.

3.1 Reform and Collectivization

The most innovative reform directed at the Northern peoples in the post-Revolutionary period was the establishment, on 20 June 1924, by a decree of the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive
Committee, of the Committee for Assisting the Peoples of the Far North—known as the Committee of the North. Its objectives were to develop measures necessary for the administrative-economic betterment of the North; to collect data on the life and needs of the peoples of the North, including studies on their history, culture and way of life; and the development of principles of an administrative and legal system for people of the North. This Committee consisted of high-ranking government officials and prominent academics. In its early years, the Committee attracted the support of numerous scholars who had studied these peoples for many years and advocated reforms to improve their overall socio-economic situation.

The Committee of the North initially advocated a humanitarian attitude on the part of authorities toward the peoples of the North and their culture and way of life that would result in their gradual inclusion into the economy and into society as a whole. Members prepared a plan that recommended certain lands be set aside for the use of these peoples, restrictions on private trade, a ban on alcohol sales, and the development of education programs more closely linked to the traditional ways of life of these peoples, including the recruitment and training of teachers from among indigenous Northerners. The Committee urged special attention to the cultural situation of these Northern peoples and measures to prevent their exploitation.

An opposing faction, known as “progressives” and allied with the dominant Communist party, favored class above nationality and the merging of all ethnic groups into one Soviet people. These ideologists believed that the minority Northern population would only progress socially in the same way as the rest of the country, by the elimination of class distinctions and the collectivization of all peoples toward common goals. This became the underlying belief of the Communist Party. The priority for a Northern policy had to be the discovery and exploitation of the natural resources of the vast region: timber, gold and, later, oil and gas. The aboriginal population was seen as a means to this end; many young administrators regarded the aboriginal peoples as backward and culturally inferior to Russians.

The Soviet authorities, in re-organizing the administrative structure of Northern Russia, took initial steps to give greater public recognition to many of these territories as homelands for a number of Northern peoples. During the 1920s and early 1930s, there had been a recognition of national autonomy in the formal sense with the establishment of autonomous republics for the Buryats, Altaians and Yakuts in 1922-23. Other smaller ethnic communities were also recognized with national districts (rayons) being designated for the Nanai, Ulechi, Eskimos, Tofalars and Aleuts, while larger autonomous regions (okrugs) were created for the Kamchats, (one west of the Urals and one in the Yamal peninsula for the Nenets, and one in the Taimyr for the Dolgans and Nganasans), for the Khanty-Mansi, the Selkups, the Eveni Tungus (ten separate districts as well as a region), the Even, the Chukchi and the Koryaks.

The most notable initiative attempted by the Committee of the North was to introduce a reform in elementary education for Northern native children that would enable them to receive their primary education in their native language, as well as in Russian. Textbooks were to be created in sixteen native languages in order to provide native teachers with resources. A standard alphabet, based on Latin, not Cyrillic, was introduced as a means for writing each of the languages of the North. School books and periodicals were produced in seven languages—Nenets, Mansi, Evenki, Even, Chukchi, Eskimo and Nanai. Work on written languages for the Khanty, Selkup, Koryak and Nivkh peoples only produced some primers. Little or no work could be accomplished on a number of groups because of widely differing dialects or a very small number of speakers; this latter situation included the Ulghj, Sámi, Ket, Udege, Dolgan, Nganasan and Yukaghir.

Many of these remained, in practice, unwritten languages, the speakers of which used Russian as the language of education and culture.

By 1930, the administrative structures in Siberia had become increasingly subordinated to political direction from Moscow: the imposition of five-year plans for industrializing urban and rural life replacing the more relaxed economic and cultural conditions that had prevailed in many regions during
the immediate aftermath of the Revolution; the ascendancy of Stalin's leadership in the Communist Party; and the development of class and Soviet nationalism over ethnic minority considerations. For a time, the Committee promoted a gradualist approach in those regions where Communist power was weak and such an approach would be tolerated. However, as the Communist Party consolidated its position throughout the country with an aggressive program of collectivization, the proponents of gradualism retreated and themselves accepted the stated necessity of industrial development in the North and the outside labour that came with it. The stated objective was to bring the native peoples of Siberia into the 20th century; this would be accomplished by converting them from their traditional livelihood on the land into one of full participation within the Soviet state.  

The main objective of the social policies of the Communist Party by the early 1930s was collectivization. This was imposed on the native peoples of Siberia with the same determination as for the farmers and peasants living in the same areas. For native communities, collectivization involved breaking down their existing social structure to ensure the integration of poorer natives into the new social order. The Soviet authorities developed a number of inter-related strategies in its collectivization of the traditional livelihood of its Northern peoples:

**Native Languages:** None of the languages of the mainly nomadic communities of Siberia in 1930 existed in written form. The Committee of the North had proposed that all primary education should be conducted in the vernacular with textbooks created in native languages and the establishment of a network of schools and teacher-training colleges. However, this was abandoned as Soviet authorities mandated that Russian be the language of instruction. While more schools became available for native children to attend, the emphasis was on instruction in Russian and, to a great extent, the abandonment of their native languages within the school system. Larger groups, such as the Buryats and Yakuts, were able to develop an intelligentsia in their own native language, but for many smaller groups even their national literature came to be published in the Russian language.

**Native Women:** One of the most effective means employed by Soviet authorities for undermining the traditional social structure of Siberian peoples was to emancipate native women from the roles they had always held. Beginning in the early 1930s, the Communist Party insisted that women were fully equal in Soviet society, including all native women. This sovietization of native societies set native women on the path to “equality rights” and created among native women in Siberia an important body of support for the Soviet system through their active participation in political life.  

**Outliving of Shamanism:** Many native shamans questioned how schools for native peoples were structured and the type of medical services provided. In response, Soviet authorities actively attacked the influence of the shaman within native societies, branding them as “charlatans” who deceived their fellow men in order to live at their expense. The practice of shamanism disappeared altogether over the years or existed only on the fringes of indigenous society. Although evidence indicated that most shamans lived poorly and received only small gifts as payment for their services, they were popular figures for Soviet authorities to demonize in their sovietization of native societies.

**Sharing Spoils of the Hunt:** The Soviet regime also condemned the principle of *nimai* that had been long practiced by hunters in Siberia, whereby the spoils of the hunt would be shared out equally among all members of the community, even those in neighbouring camps. This was not seen as a form of “primitive communism” but rather a disguised form of exploitation and social parasitism. Many of the leading native hunters under this sharing of the spoils of the hunt system were deemed to be a kind of “kulak,” the same term used to denote land-holding peasants. The authorities carried out a prolonged campaign for the abolition of equal shares in favour of a money economy under collectivization and payment by results. Other manifestations of a hunting society, such as mutual aid, communal grazing, fishing and hunting, adoption of orphans and care for the aged, were similarly attacked as vestiges of a patriarchal society.
Clan System: While much of the old tribal organization had already been broken down under Tsarist rule, the Communist authorities remained aware of existing clan loyalties as they established collectives among native peoples. The Soviets were able to overcome such opposition through manipulating the poor vs. rich within newly established local soviets, and the later abolition of clan soviets in favour of territorial ones.

Resistance of Reindeer Herders: The reindeer herders of the taiga and tundra were able to provide the longest period of resistance to the Soviet authorities, mainly because their nomadic way of life preserved them, at least temporarily, from direct interference by the state and who, in any case, had little to offer the Russian economy. Families collaborated in continuing a seasonal cycle of moving with the herd under long established customary practices. However, as collectivization became increasingly established, most herders were required to join; many of the more independent herders tended to slaughter all of their own animals rather than to have them confiscated.

Collectivization became the main means for having the nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples of Siberia and the Far East give up their mobile way of life. The headquarters of the collective farm provided a fixed centre around which people could settle. Soviet objectives were ostensibly philanthropic: to integrate indigenous people as fully as possible into Soviet life; to educate them; to provide them with jobs and homes that would raise their standard of living in the same way as for all Soviet citizens; to enable them to participate fully in the economic development of a region. Collective farms became centres for providing credits for hunters and fishermen, firearms, ammunition, traps, and other forms of equipment and supplies that made life on the taiga or tundra more tolerable. The net result was the elimination of a core of efficient and prosperous community leaders and the collectivization of the rest into large farms. However, the collectivization of the various native peoples of Siberia functioned at a more protracted pace than for Russian peasants; it could vary according to the location of a given community in relation to centres of Soviet control, according to its way of life as determined by the environment and the relative importance of its economic activities to the interests of the Russian state. The passivity and submissiveness which had developed among many native communities during the long subjection to Russia made it relatively easy for local Communist Party workers to attain compliance with their orders. Collectivization progressed quickly in the settled fishing communities of the lower Ob River, the Pacific coast and Amur regions, where the Soviet state had been able to convert a co-operative commercial network that had already been established before the Revolution into full-scale fisheries based on the collective model. However, for those brought up on a nomadic life, the transition to a settled life was much more difficult. Many, in fact, found village life restrictive and lacking purpose; some would later seek opportunities to return to nomadism. Most of the Northern peoples had been collectivized by the end of the 1930s. However, small pockets of nomadism would continue in some isolated regions well after World War II and even into the 1970s. Many of these would be reindeer herders moving their own herds about on the tundra or small groups of hunters in isolated regions of the taiga. This can be partly attributed to the determination and resiliency of the nomads themselves but, also to the fact that their isolated region did not fulfill a national economic need that would have brought it to the attention of outside authorities.

3.2 Soviet Industrialization of Siberia

The 1930's brought the beginning of the large-scale exploitation of natural resources in north-eastern Siberia by the Soviet regime that were to have a devastating long-term impact over the years on the delicate Arctic environment as well as causing huge changes in the livelihood of the native people living in the affected regions. During the 1930s, the Soviet Union began to develop state mining enterprises. One of its priorities was the gold deposits in the upper reaches of the Kolyma River in North-eastern Siberia. To co-ordinate all of the planning and control, the Kolyma Trust was established (State Trust for
the Development of Industry and Roads in the Upper Kolyma Region) in 1931, the administration of this vast region was subordinated directly to the Communist Party. The operation of these mines, almost from the start, relied on prison labour that arrived by the thousands. The city of Magadan, founded in 1933, served as the administrative centre of the Kolyma Trust. Later renamed the Chief Administration for the Development of the Far North, known best by its Russian name, Dalstroi, it was placed under the exclusive control of the Communist Party and the NKVD.

The territory of the Kolyma Trust lay within the northern half of the Okhotsk Even National District. The interests of the Even and other native peoples came to be entirely subordinated to those of the Soviet state. The influx of thousands of new inhabitants (mostly prisoners and political exiles) created a need for food and transport which the Even were ordered to supply. Many Even tried to resist by moving their reindeer herds away from these new settlements but eventually they were compelled, through collectivization, to provide food and transport for newcomers. Many Even children acquired an education at one or more of the new schools created to benefit the Even, staffed by native teachers trained at the Magadan College of Education. This pattern of subordinating the interests of Siberia’s indigenous peoples to those of the ever-expanding needs of the Soviet state were repeated over and over again throughout Northern Russia in the following decades.12

The huge industrial development projects initiated during the 1930s as part of the Communist Party’s five-year plans under Stalin’s dictatorship also enabled Siberia to acquire its greatest notoriety as the prime destination for forced labour, exile, and a series of concentration camps. Millions of Russians judged to be “enemies of the people” were sentenced to years of forced labour and mass suffering under the GULag (Main Prison Camp Administration) system. These people were transported to the camps, factories, mines, construction sites and what were termed the “forbidden zones” of the GULag administrative apparatus to work and eventually die as slave labour.13 Many new industrial complexes located in Siberia, in particular Magnitogorsk and the huge Ural-Kuznetsk iron and coal combine in West Siberia, and the mineral-extracting enterprises at Norilsk and Lolyma in the Far North, lay at the very heart of the industrialization of the Soviet economy overall. While an exile system in Siberia had been developed under the tsars, the GULag prison camp administration and its sister organization, Dalstroi, functioned on a massively different scale with its prisoners numbering in the millions.14

The events of the Great Patriotic War (1941-45) had a considerable impact on Siberia. Because so many major cities in European Russia were under military threat, much of the industrial production of the Soviet Union was relocated to the North which again severely imposed on the native way of life. Whole enterprises and hundreds of factories with their attendant work-forces were uprooted from European Russia and replanted in Siberia, thereby guaranteeing continuing production of vital armaments, weapons, aircraft and ammunition. Thousands of newcomers and vast quantities of equipment also moved to Siberia. Russian industrial development in Siberia included additional mining of gold in order to buy equipment, the development of lead, tin and other metals, as well as coal. Siberia made a massive contribution to the nation’s war effort through the production and supply of military materials and as a safe destination for the relocation of industry from western battlefronts and occupied zones.

During the war, thousands of native peoples across Siberia were conscripted into all-ethnic Soviet military units, participating on the front in the same way as all other nationalities of the Soviet Union. Military service placed an enormous burden on the rural economy where much of the work of farming, fishing and hunting had to be done by women, children and the elderly, who had to cope under harsh conditions. Almost all of the food production went to the front. Reindeer herds were severely depleted for their meat. Overall, the events of World War II confirmed even further that Siberia was an integral part of Russia and how the situation of the native peoples had become subordinate to the paramount needs of the metropolis.15 One result of the war was the expansion of the Soviet Union in the Far East where, in 1945, it was to acquire all of Sakhalin Island from Japan, as well as the Kuril Islands.16
After the war, the Soviet Union decided to exploit its large river systems with huge hydro-electric projects although this was accomplished on the whole using more acceptable means for recruiting labour. With the death of Stalin in 1953, the GULag system in Siberia was dismantled and thousands of survivors returned home. After this, large-scale industrialization came to be based on legitimate economic labour recruitment that brought large numbers of Russians, Ukrainians and other Soviet citizens into Siberia and the Far East. Many of these settled more or less permanently in Siberia. Other newcomers would only work at these industrial jobs for a few years before leaving the North to return to their home region. The native population became an ever smaller minority within their homelands. The once sparsely populated, native regions of Siberia were gradually being pushed back at the edges, cut across by new roads and railways, eaten into by seaports and river ports, so that the ethnic map showed ever-shrinking islands of ‘unassimilated’ native Siberia.

Massive hydro-electric dams were built on a number of Siberian rivers between 1955 and 1974 that resulted in the flooding of huge areas of the Angara valley upstream from Irkutsk Bratsk and Ust-Ilimsk. Other dams created lakes of considerable size on the Zeya River in the Amur Region and the Vituli River in western Yakutia. The largest new mineral deposits were the oil fields in the middle Olek River basin of the Khanty-Mansi National Region, and the huge deposits of natural gas lying to the north of this in the Yamal-Nenets National Region. In the face of formidable natural obstacles, the swamps, forests and tundra of western and north-western Siberia were transformed into the centre of the Soviet Union’s most lucrative industrial development, with oil and natural gas exports accounting for over 50 per cent of the country’s hard currency earnings. New explorations and drillings in the Far North, the construction of extensive pipelines delivering their revenue raising payload into the heart of Europe, the expansion of old and the building of new urban centres to accommodate the surging population, the laying of an extended transport and communications infrastructure in the inhospitable terrain of the oil and gas fields all continued to guarantee Siberian development a high priority on the Soviet Union’s economic agenda.

This industrial development involved large scale tree felling and earth removal that devastated considerable areas of West Siberian forest and tundra. The discovery of large iron ore deposits on the upper Lena River, and coal, copper and nickel farther to the east, led to the construction of a second Trans-Siberian railway, around the northern end of Lake Baikal, cutting across northern Buryat and southern Yakutia territory to Komsomolsk-on-Amur. Work on this Baikal-Amur Mainline (popularly known as BAM) began in 1974 and was completed in 1984. Where the BAM Railroad line had once been regarded as the project of the century, its economic usefulness never became apparent, leading many in the post-Brezhnev era to label it a ‘white elephant.’

Traditional livelihood still had a presence during the 1930s. One result of the economic development of Siberia was that the Soviet state continued to encourage its Native peoples to hunt and trap for fur-bearing animals. Animal skins were worth millions to the state, particularly in foreign trade. Little regard was given to the protection of wildlife in this process. It was estimated that 14 to 16 million squirrels were killed each year during the 1930s; some 2,000 ermines could still be trapped in some areas. Some collective farms established a fur farm component that specialized in more expensive fur skins, such as silver fox. Much of this came to an end with the war. While regulations restricting the hunting of certain animals were introduced by the Soviet government from the 1920s onwards, these were widely disregarded both by hunters and law enforcement officers.

Keeping to his long-term historical perspective of characterizing Siberia as a colony, Forsyth observed how it was only in the second half of the 20th century that the clash between the traditional way of life of the native people and the aims of the authorities in Moscow, had reached “truly annihilatory proportions.” Twentieth century technology had made it relatively easy to access and exploit natural resources in even the most remote parts of Siberia. The “whole colony” was subordinated to the
industrial aims of Moscow and its resources utilized as part of the 'national economy.' Any consideration for the traditional way of life of the native peoples or the natural environment carried little weight with the central planning priorities or with the military and political interests of the state. While the RSFSR was a firmly Russian land, it was Forsyth's contention that, within the RSFSR, Siberia was even more definitely Russian than European Russia was. "Despite all its racial variety, Siberia is, in fact, the part of the Soviet Union most completely integrated from the ethnic point of view with the central Russian lands around Moscow." Only geographical remoteness, forbidding climate and the lack of communications and readily exploitable resources could restrict this integration.

3.3 Tenacity of Native Cultures and the Onset of Perestroika

Throughout the Soviet era, it was the expressed belief of the Communist Party that it was only through the fruits of the Bolshevik Revolution that the Siberian native, once oppressed, had been given the opportunities to move forward and ultimately to enjoy as good a life as all other citizens. The Party actively recruited native representatives to promote this line. The Chukchi writer, Yu. Rytkeu, was quoted in a 1981 article as follows: "I shall never tire of repeating the truth, now self-evident, that the peoples of the North were saved by the Great October Socialist Revolution." Since the 1930's, all nationalities, no matter how different, had been deemed to be 'socialist in context,' sharing the same interests and aspirations, committed to the onward march of industrialization, except that some northern peoples had further to march. The stated objective of the 'affirmative action' applied by the Communist Party had been to overcome the temporary 'cultural backwardness' of the northerner, not to preserve his inherent cultural distinctiveness. Half a century later, most northern scholars and a good many Soviets had come to regard these assumptions as unacceptable. Emphasising class identity and universal brotherhood at the expense of ethnic diversity and individual uniqueness was regarded as both politically unrealistic and morally perverse.

However, before reaching this point of re-examination in the late 1980s, much of the post-World War II period in Siberia had seen increasing efforts at assimilation by the Soviet authorities. On 16 March 1957, the Central Committee of the CPSU and the USSR Council of Ministers adopted a decree entitled: "On Measures for the Further Development of the Economy and Culture of Nationalities in the North." A program of reforms was inaugurated to raise the living standards of reindeer herders, hunters and fishermen, and to improve the medical and educational facilities available to them. Many activities associated with a traditional livelihood were subsidized. A more comprehensive package of services was adapted that included veterinary services, wages, and the use of aircraft to transport herders to outlying reindeer pastures or to their hunting sites. Yet, despite these proclaimed good intentions, the people who were to benefit from this decree fell further behind economically with the rest of the country while much of the funds directed at implementing these policies were often directed at other regional priorities.

One provision of this 1957 decree called on local and regional authorities to look closely at some of the urgent problems facing these Northern peoples and to adopt procedures that would simplify the administrative structure and improve the operation of government programs directed at these peoples. This was part of a Soviet program to "level differences and create a more homogenous Soviet people." A second wave of amalgamations began in the mid-1950s, reducing the many collective farms (kolkhozy) that had first been established in the 1930s and transforming them into larger units, known as state farms (sovkhozy). In Siberia, this policy was combined with a continuation of the campaign against nomadism. Not only were the scattered hunting and reindeer-herding communities of the North induced to abandon their teats for Russian huts, but many of the settlements that had been created for them in the 1930s were arbitrarily closed; the people were moved from their sites and concentrated together either at the centres for these newly created state farms or at larger urban centres, where it was possible to provide these peoples with health, housing and education more readily. These planning
decisions led to a depopulation of many remote areas where native peoples had traditionally lived. Many of those interviewed for this survey from many different regions of Northern Russia would recall how their small indigenous communities had been forcibly uprooted, causing often traumatic dislocations in their lives. In 1980, the RSFSR enacted the Law on Autonomous Regions (okrugs) which succeeded in replacing all of the existing national okrugs and abolishing all remaining national rayons. It was clear that, in this period, it was the objective of the Soviet Union to eliminate all ethnic differences in the North and to move toward the creation of one Soviet people. The native peoples of Siberia had no choice but to survive as they could in the economic, political and cultural context created in Siberia by the Soviet authorities.

Another long-range consequence of such amalgamations of collective farms was to exacerbate tensions among young natives, who had been educated at boarding schools, as to whether they wanted to return to the arduous traditional livelihood of a reindeer herder, hunter or fisherman. The contempt many of them acquired for rural pursuits based on many years at these schools was reinforced by the Communist Party. The undermining of the clan structure by the Communist authorities had continued in the post-World War II period as well as banning of other existing indigenous customs, such as mutual aid, nimai (sharing of the spoils of the hunt), and shamanism. However, all of this eventually led to other forms of self-identification on the part of Northern peoples. While clans among the Evenki, for example, died out, there did emerge a greater awareness of belonging to a wider nationality, such as an Evenki people. Communist officials began to encourage native groups to celebrate certain traditional rituals so long as these were not affiliated to shamanism—in other words, communist ideology replaced shamanistic beliefs. This would include dancing and singing so long as these activities ultimately celebrated communism.

Traditional culture evolving in new directions supported by the Communist authorities allowed for a national intelligentsia to develop within many of these Northern peoples which in turn sought to develop interest and pride in their genuine cultural traditions, including a renewed respect for their material culture. However, just as this assimilation of indigenous cultures into mainstream Soviet society seemed to have reached its height, the very essence of the Soviet state started to change from within. The policy of glasnost launched by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in the mid-1980s, allowed for discussion and even criticism as a useful way of achieving a better Soviet society.

Perestroika and glasnost brought the discussion of indigenous affairs in the Soviet Union into intense national focus. Until then, sources on the history of the Siberian peoples within the Soviet Union had been considered unsatisfactory, especially by scholars outside Russia, and subject in Soviet publications to the propaganda and censorship of the Communist Party. With glasnost, the northern intelligentsia became free to articulate their long held frustrations. Ethnographers were free for the first time to associate themselves with the welfare of the people they were studying in support of the newly emerging indigenous intelligentsia and, possibly for the first time, even in opposition to the interests of the state. Modern methodologies could be applied to examine the effectiveness of the programs of the established political order. The mass media also became interested in these issues that suddenly seemed to be materializing as possible issues for national debate and assigned reporters to cover them. "A silence-shattering article" by A.I. Pika and B.B. Prokhorov, published in 1988 in Kommunist, the leading journal of the CPSU, painted a vivid picture of the enormous problems facing Northern peoples and how this had evolved over the decades. Since this article came to have such a major impact on the debate in the then Soviet Union, it is useful to summarize some of its key points.

Pika & Prokhorov wrote that rather than the indigenous peoples having achieved "unprecedented progress" over the decades under communism: "...today the northern environment and its closely integrated indigenous inhabitants have almost reached a danger zone beyond which their further existence cannot be guaranteed. Many things could change irreversibly and disappear. The authors went
to describe how the standards of living of indigenous Northerners were “significantly worse” than for those of newly arrived inhabitants to the North. They wrote of a marked deficit in housing quality standards, with a lack of clean water and sewage facilities; the lack of social infrastructure in the settlements; the meagre amount of food products available. They pointed out how some indigenous peoples continued to inhabit settlements that had been liquidated by the authorities and long considered abandoned. They pointed out how huge industrial development projects had caused destruction to the lands and ecology that Northern peoples depended on for hunting and reindeer husbandry; how fishing resources in many internal waterways of the North were close to exhaustion. The authors asked, rhetorically, how the interests of the Northern population were being defended, only to reply abruptly: depressingly badly. They pointed out how these peoples had never been consulted in the search for mineral deposits in the taiga and tundra, nor during the extraction of oil and gas, and the construction of gigantic pipelines on their pastures and hunting grounds. The authors cited example after example and concluded this part of the essay with: There is no end to the list of crimes against nature and therefore, against the indigenous population itself.

After cataloguing these many grievances, Pika & Prokhorov (1988) went on to insist on a holistic approach to this situation, one that would involve the direct participation of the “true northern natives.” They felt that any attempt to put into practice measures from above, whether from Moscow or some regional capital, were destined to failure. What was required was not simply equal rights implying equal opportunities that always left those who knew the game at an advantage, but rather an administrative restructuring that recognized that northern peoples living on native lands had, as a result of more than four hundred years of encounter, been left in a position of extreme disadvantage.

The only possible means and way for their survival is through independent development, because if the burdens of social passiveness and alienation cannot be overcome by indigenous peoples themselves, they will find no support from the outside. The necessary participation of northerners in all regional and local programs of development at all stages—from ideas and discussion to realization—must be considered as the premier political principle. It seems to us that the foundations of 'new thinking' in this area are held in these two ideas.

The authors called on the state to accept these indigenous Northerners as real partners that would work together to establish “living social institutions to be at work permanently on current problems.” There was a need for compensation for past economic exploitation of resources. Programs were needed for better housing, health care facilities, transport systems, recreation, schools. Most importantly, the traditional economy needed to be restored to a proper balance with overall development and living throughout the North. Indigenous inhabitants must again consider themselves responsible masters of the taiga and its rivers, tundra pastures and reindeer herds... Only economic self-government and the potential for again becoming independent masters of co-operative property in northern communities can bring a personal and social sense of purpose back to the local people.

The publication of The Big Problems of the Small Peoples in such a prominent CPSU periodical set off what one writer has described as “an avalanche of responses,” including many by Native leaders such as Yeremey Alpin, V. Sagi, A. Nemptushkin and Yu. Rystchev.

The public soon learned that the indigenous economy as a whole was a mess, that resettlement had been a disaster, that the elimination of nomadism had been a sham, and reindeer husbandry had long been in a steady decline. Audits determined that most sovkhozy in the Arctic were “permanently and hopelessly in debt”—especially as it cost far more to produce skins than was the fixed state price for same. While indigenous peoples had continued to be identified as having special rights or “privileges” with respect to being able to avail themselves of the benefits of a traditional livelihood, in fact, this form of livelihood had become increasingly controlled by the authorities. Regulations on fishing restricted the number of
fish that could be caught for personal/family consumption; regulated the species that could be caught; restricted the number of days in a season for fishing and on locations. Similar sorts of legal restrictions were applied for hunting. Moreover, all of these traditional activities had come to depend on the economic support of the state farm or other local enterprise, such as the provision of ammunition for guns, fishing rods and nets, clothing, transportation to distant hunting grounds or fuel for operating boats. As respondents for our survey also pointed out, local natives had come to depend on the state farm to provide them with salt so they could preserve their meat and fish through winter, and sugar to preserve berries gathered so they could reach market. This did not address problems involved with the destruction of huge areas of forest, the unchecked pollution of the water system by nearby industries, and the depletion of reindeer herds throughout the North.35

Some perestroika reforms aimed at rationalizing the economy, caused even greater hardship for northerners. One such took place 1988 when the Council of Ministers of the USSR announced the abolition of centralized consumer goods deliveries and proclaimed a new era of market-based agreements among regions and enterprises. This meant the end of the so-called Special Conditions for the Shipment of Goods to the Areas of the Far North, which had forced trading organizations to undertake unprofitable deliveries to the Arctic territories where prices were artificially low and transportation losses unusually high. The newly liberated trading organizations promptly discontinued their services to the northern districts, leaving them isolated from the national economy that had subsidized them for generations, with no fall back plan.36

With perestroika, the large-scale environmental damage in every part of Russia caused by one grandiose scheme after another had been exposed. The worst features of these grandiose industrial projects in Siberia was that they proceeded without regard for the local people, whose whole livelihood could be destroyed by them. Not only had the Khanty and Nenets of Western Siberia, for instance, been ousted from their devastated homeland by the oil and gas industry but they received no compensatory benefits from this ‘development.’37 The testimony accumulated during the last years of the Soviet era and published in national periodicals was overwhelming in its comprehensiveness and depressing in its description of the present.

3.4 Summary: Perestroika and “Backwards to the Future”

A survey on the legal history of the Northern peoples demonstrated that, during the early Soviet period (1920s and 1930s), there had been attempts to have the rights of the native peoples to lands reflected in legislation. The RSFSR Interim Regulations of 1926 recognized the rights and interests of the aboriginal peoples and the need for determining the boundaries of the regions used by them. Organs of local self-government were allowed to control the activity of economic organizations and enterprises located in the territory of a particular native association. Aboriginal peoples could use pasture lands, fishing, hunting and other activities related to their use of the land. Some native peoples acquired national territorial autonomy in the form of national okruys and rayons. However, the special status of the aboriginal peoples with respect to land rights were to disappear during the course of the 1930s as their way of life was eroded, the national rayons were abolished, and the national (autonomous) okruys were transformed, in essence, into ordinary administrative-territorial units where the interests of the native peoples gradually became of secondary concern to local authorities. “The rights of these peoples to lands and self-government were replaced by a state policy of complete paternalism.”38

Perestroika was a far-ranging and comprehensive attempt by the CPSU, headed by Mikhail Gorbachev, to carry out a massive restructuring of the administrative apparatus of the Soviet Union while maintaining the continued primacy of the Party. Siberia proved to be a key region for measuring the effectiveness of perestroika since, because of it many natural resources, it was situated at the economic forefront of the Soviet Union. However, as Alexandr Pika and others described in great detail,
tensions existed everywhere in Siberia caused by an inadequate provision of basic amenities, poor housing, a lack of job satisfaction, food shortages and a mismanagement of the local economy. Centrally planned industrial development programmes encroached on and often destroyed native homelands and their natural environments. Siberia and the different approaches toward managing its peoples and resources was one of primary sources of aggravated debate in the political struggle between Soviet President Gorbachev and the elected President of the RSFSR, Boris Yeltsin. With the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991, this rivalry was resolved in Yeltsin’s favour.

The Soviet Union broke up into some fifteen independent republics at the end of 1991. The Russian Federation, in which all of these Northern peoples were located, became their new political and civic entity. Moreover, this same Russian Federation transformed almost overnight from a controlled to a market economy. Yet much of the impetus for the reforms associated with perestroika continued to exist despite this huge and sudden transformation. Reform elements acting on behalf of these Northern peoples were determined that the reforms initiated in the latter stages of the Soviet era, be transferred to a totally new administrative regime based on a market economy; that is, if such a transformation could take place at all.

The historian, Yuri Slezkin, questioned if the optimum path to the future for many Northern peoples could only be found in a return to the past, and an often distant past dating back to some period in the Imperial Russian Empire. Many indigenous and sympathetic Russian intelligentsia advocated taking northern peoples back to their origins, to their traditional way of life and occupations, to teach a people of its history, language, culture and economic traditions, and to advocate these traditions for others. This meant that throughout the north there would be a great and continuous need for museums, books, clubs, colleges, teachers, textbooks, and publishing houses; that a centralized Institute of the Peoples of the North for the training of a native elite might have to be reopened. Most importantly, it was likely that large boarding schools would have to be replaced by small, perhaps “semi-nomadic” or half-time schools where indigenous children would be taught the skills needed in a traditional economy. In other words, most northern reformers expected the state to contribute significantly to the protection and revival of the aboriginal peoples—partly for financial reasons, partly because the aboriginal peoples were regarded as incapable of defending themselves. “(G)oing back, just like marching forward, would require a lot of effort.”

Endnotes

1 Cited in Velklin 1998; 82. Obrazovaniye SSSR. Sbornik dokumentov (Education in the USSR. Collection of Documents), Moscow, 1998; 57.
2 Ibid; 62.
3 The idea of lands being set aside for these indigenous peoples as “reservations,” as widely perceived to be the case in the United States and Canada, was apparently much discussed by members of the Committee of the North at this time. Interestingly enough, the idea of such Indian reservations was raised again as a possibility by natives and academics as a possible reform in the late 1980s and 1990s (Slezkin 1994; 382-3). Thus, the point of the reservation was to provide a place where the native northerners would be allowed and encouraged to “be themselves.” live in traditional settlements, engage in traditional economic activities, eat traditional food, wear traditional clothes, practice traditional values and speak the language of their forefathers (Slezkin 1994, 339). An obvious problem was that thousands of young Northerners were said to have lost their ethnic identity along with their mother tongue and traditional skills. The idea of “reservations” was also raised by respondents in our survey as seen in Part III.
4 Velklin (1998; 82-85) described in considerable detail this ongoing debate between the efforts of the pro-Communist “progressives” and the more gradualist humanists that were known as “conservatives.”
5 Fcshy 1992; 284-4.
6 Fcshy 1992; 284-86.
AWAKENING SIBERIA. From Marginalization to Self-Determination: The Small Indigenous Nations of Northern Russia on the Eve of the Millennium

7 Vakhlin, 1993; 11. In footnote # 39 to his MGSC study, Nikolai Vakhlin related how “the Stalinist purges of the 1930-1950’s had been absolutely devastating for research on the North.” He even listed the names of a number of prominent researchers on these issues who were murdered at this time. Others were to have their work suppressed for decades.

8 Much of the following has been summarized from Forsyth 1992, 283-320; Chapter 13: “Soviet Siberia In the 1930s.”


11 Ibid; 345-46.


14 The Russian writer, Alexandre Solzenitsyn termed this system of concentration camps, The Gulag Archipelago, which was the title of his epic three volume eye-witness report based on his own experiences within this system. Wood (1991; 182) described how among the so-called ‘enemies of the people’ were old Bolsheviks, veterans of the revolutionary struggle against tsarism, enterprising peasants who had made an economic success of the NEP, writers, intellectuals and scientists, prominent government officials, hundreds of foreign communists fleeing from fascism in Europe, distinguished military officers and many other ‘guilty’ categories of ordinary Soviet citizens. The economic successes of the Soviet industrialization drive and its Five-Year Plans came to be achieved at the cost of millions of shattered human lives.

15 Forsyth 1992; 347.

16 In southern Sakhalin, native peoples had numbered about 1,300 Ainu in 1941; Orokta (Uleta) about 300. In 1947, about half of the Ainu, including a few hundred on the Kuril islands, emigrated to Hokkaido, as did many Orokta (Forsyth 1992; 355). Also, Walter Kolarz (1954; 87), The Peoples of the Soviet Far East.

17 Ibid., 361.

18 The impact of hydro-electric dam and other industrial development across Siberia are described, with accompanying maps, in Forsyth 1992, 382-392; Chapter 16: The Native Peoples of Siberia after 1945.


20 Forsyth, 1992; 360.

21 Ibid., 394.

22 Levin & Putugov (editors), in their Soviet are ethnographical study, The Peoples of Siberia (1984), featured many leading Siberian representatives who were hailed as examples of the Soviet model, including Yu. Rytkheu and the Nivkh ethnographer, Ch.M. Taksanti.


27 Vakhlin 1996, 86-88. Vakhlin characterized this “levelling of differences” as an extremely depressing and one-sided process designed to eradicate the last vestiges of cultural presence of these Northern peoples.

28 The noted Soviet ethnologist, Z.P. Sokolova, asserted that “for over twenty years northern schools have been producing people who are not prepared for any form of productive work.” She went on to describe how native children grew up in boarding schools at full government expense; native college students received free round-trip tickets to their places of study in addition to free room, board, clothing. The result was that many adult natives who had gone through this system would continue as eternal wards of the state. Writings of Zoya P. Sokolova as cited in Slezkine, 374.


30 Slezkine 1994; 372-374.

31 Gall A. Fondahl 1998; 82.


33 Fondahl 1998; 82. Yeremenko Alpin wrote of a growing number of native groups moving from place to place, “running from oil rigs, pipelines, winter barracks and highways.”

34 Slezkine 1994, 372.
CHAPTER 3: Establishing Soviet Hegemony


Slezkin, 1994, 384. Slezkin (385) summarized this public discussion at the period of transition from the Soviet era: "Different authors tackled these problems differently, but the great majority of them shared the same general assumptions. Whatever the outcome, therefore, the war against backwardness and ethnic diversity 'in content' was definitely over. The future of the circumpolar peoples seemed to lie in the past."
CHAPTER 4
POST-SOVET TRANSFORMATION AND CULTURAL RENEWAL

"We, the indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East of the Russian Federation, believe that: ...The river of time is but a reflection of the past, present, and future and that how our ancestors lived in the past is how we now live and how our offspring will live in the future."


As the reformist influences of perestroika took hold in the latter years of the Soviet Union and then in the formative years of the newly re-emerged Russian Federation, the indigenous numerically small peoples of Northern Russia faced an entirely new playing field. Unlike other and larger minority peoples within Russia, a key step for their political mobilization has been to establish alliances at the international level that have then enabled them to develop new working relationships with local, regional and national authorities in the new pluralist society of post-Soviet Russia. This chapter will first examine a number of events whereby the Soviet policies of perestroika initiated a new perspective on Siberia by the central government and invited co-operation with other countries in the Arctic region. In a parallel manner, this chapter will then outline how the subject Northern peoples began to mobilize politically, at first assisted directly by the Soviet authorities, but ultimately succeeding the political regime that created it to establish itself as an internationally recognized non-governmental organization. Moreover, during the first decade of the post-Soviet era, the President and the Duma of the newly created Russian Federation launched a number of decrees and legislative initiatives intended to address the historic claims of these indigenous peoples for deriving a traditional livelihood on lands they have occupied for centuries. Much of this legislative framework was still in the process of being enacted at the time of the survey. A final section will outline the political situation within the Arctic region, Northern Russia and among the Northern peoples themselves in and around the time of the survey and its immediate aftermath.

4.1 Perestroika, Murmansk and Pan-Arctic Co-operation

Perhaps no region better symbolized Cold War confrontation during the 1970s and 1980s than the Kola Peninsula–North Atlantic area which had become the most nuclear-centric region in the world. It was in Murmansk, on October 1, 1987, that the President of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, made what has come to be known as his "Murmansk speech"1 containing a number of civilian and military proposals for a newly restructured Arctic region, encapsulated in the slogan: "Let the North of the globe, the Arctic, become a zone of peace." President Gorbachev outlined a number of proposals for reducing military activity in the Arctic. He suggested peaceful co-operation in resource development through partnerships with other countries. He reiterated how the Soviet Union had attached considerable importance to scientific exploration in the Arctic and proposed a conference of circumpolar nations that might be held in the USSR to discuss such co-operation. Gorbachev proposed the drafting of a comprehensive environmental protection treaty for the Arctic region, including provisions for monitoring. He also proposed the opening of the Northern Sea Route to foreign ships. The initial reaction to the Murmansk speech was lukewarm to negative from the United States, Canada and the Nordic countries, except for a very positive response from Finland. However, seen from a perspective of two decades, Gorbachev’s initiative proved to the key initial step towards stimulating pluralism in the European North. New regional organs, such as the Northern Forum2 and the Barents Euro-Arctic Regional Council3 were created in the early 1990s that served to bring a number of new actors onto regional scenes and shifted issues away from a continuance of the long-held USSR–NATO dichotomy.
Finland became an active proponent of multilateral co-operation in 1989, when its Finnish Initiative, launched at the height of the Cold War, sought to have governments of all countries bordering the Arctic Ocean participate in joint efforts to protect the fragile environment of the region. In September 1989, officials of eight Arctic states met to discuss a Finnish proposal on pan-Arctic environmental cooperation at the inter-governmental level. Whereas east-west confrontations had always been a stumbling block to any attempt at co-operation on common affairs in the Arctic region, Gorbachev's Murmansk speech had become a useful opening. Subsequent preparatory meetings among the parties brought in the concerns and direct participation of indigenous peoples. This initiative ultimately led to the governments of Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Canada, the United States and Russia (then still the Soviet Union) signing the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) on 14 June 1991—popularly known as the “Rovaniemi Process” for the northern Finnish city where it was signed.

The Declaration on the Protection of the Arctic Environment committed the Arctic countries to adopt the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) as a joint action plan to preserve the integrity of the Arctic ecosystem and to identify principles to guide their implementation. It also emphasized the importance of recognizing the special relationship of the indigenous peoples and local populations of the Arctic and their unique contribution to the protection of the Arctic environment. What was particularly notable about the AEPS was that, for the first time anywhere in the world, three aboriginal organizations signed such an inter-governmental treaty as observers—the Sámi Council, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) and the Association of the Northern Peoples of the USSR. These indigenous non-governmental organizations (NGO's) had been closely involved in the discussions leading up to the adoption of the Strategy, which contains numerous references to “traditional knowledge” and the need to involve indigenous residents of the Arctic at all levels of the decision-making process. In 1993, the environmental ministers of the eight Arctic countries, convening in Nuuk, Greenland, agreed to establish and fund an Indigenous Peoples Secretariat based in Copenhagen that would enable the observer organizations to co-ordinate their participation in a more comprehensive and effective manner.

Intergovernmental co-operation continued to expand in the Arctic region after the AEPS accord on an even wider range of issues. After several years of negotiations, the Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council was signed on 19 September 1996 by the eight afore-mentioned Arctic countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Canada, the United States and, since 1992, the Russian Federation) in Ottawa, Canada. The inter-governmental Arctic Council process assimilated the environmental protection objectives of the AEPS and established possibilities for Arctic co-operation in a number of additional areas, notably a sustainable development program, and a greater emphasis on the dissemination of information, education, and the promoting of interest in Arctic-related issues. Article 1 of the Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council states: “...provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination, and interaction among the Arctic states, with the involvement of the Arctic indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular, issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic.”

The three aboriginal organizations listed above had been very much a part of this new process; the Charter recognized their role as “permanent participants”—a significant step forward from their previous position as observers. As Permanent Participants, these Arctic indigenous representatives are consulted and can fully participate in all of the proceedings of the Arctic Council. In 1998, the Aleut International Association (AIA), representing some 13,000 Aleuts in the United States (Alaska) and Russia (Kamchatka) was welcomed as the fourth Permanent Participant. At the October 2000 Ministerial meeting held in Barrow, Alaska, the Gwich’in Council International and the Arctic Athabaskan Council joined, bringing the total number of Permanent Participants to six.
Finland continued to promote co-operation in the Arctic region. In September 1997, Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen announced the Finnish government's determination to develop a "Northern Dimension" within the foreign policy framework of the European Union. Northern Dimension attempts to define the political parameters of a region and underlines the importance of developing concrete policies that address the specific concerns of that region. While the specifics contained in the Prime Minister's speech were stated in the most general terms, it underlined the importance of this region both to Finland and to the European Union as a whole. In many ways, Northern Dimension can be seen as a challenge for adopting new—and effective—initiatives. A key sentence in the Prime Minister's speech was the categorical statement that the aboriginal residents of the Arctic must be partners in any new policies and administrative programs that will be developed. The Finnish government's determination to develop a "Northern Dimension" was adopted within the foreign policy framework of the European Union in November 1999 during the Finnish Presidency of the EU.

Prime Minister Lipponen expanded on the EU's Northern Dimension efforts at a speech he gave to the Fourth Conference of Arctic Parliamentarians held in Rovaniemi in 1999, just before Finland undertook the Chair of the Arctic Council, noting also on how separate arrangements between the EU and the United States and Canada had also been completed. While the EU adopted an Action Plan on the Northern Dimension in June 2000, the European Commission has been reluctant to play a direct role with the Arctic Council, even as an observer. There seems to be somewhat less interest in trying to develop more direct ties between the Arctic Council and the EU Commission since the Council Chair rotated to Iceland (2003-04), Russia (2005-06) and Norway (2007-), none of which are EU members.

4.2 Political Mobilization of Russia's Northern Nations

Many of the new spokesmen who stepped forward to speak on behalf of the interests of the northern peoples (Russian ethnographers and native intellectuals) in the late 1980s proposed a variety of new solutions of which the most compelling was the "restoration of sovereignty" (that had been usurped by the party/state) to its legitimate source, the People. Most early pro-perestroika intellectuals agreed that ethnic differences were primary and, indeed, sacred; it was presumed that each sovereign nationality would be entitled to their own governments. Encouraged to express their cultural identity publicly led many ethnic groups to mobilize politically by establishing representative regional and national associations that would assert their concerns and demands, separate from that of the authorities of the Communist state. Such national societies as the Association of Kola Sami People of the Murmansk Region, the Society of Ket Culture and the "Yamal for Future Generations" Association of Indigenous Peoples of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Region were formed by local intelligentsia to promote traditional culture, the study of native languages, and environmental protection. These quickly won the support of the ethnologists and anthropologists who had long studied them.

In March 1990, an all-Union congress of circumpolar peoples, organized by the Northern Section of the RSFSR Council of Ministers with the encouragement of the Communist party leadership, was held in the Kremlin in Moscow. The Association established at this Congress was originally named the Association of the Northern Peoples of the USSR and united the twenty-six indigenous peoples of the North stipulated by the Communist Party in its Temporary Regulations of 1926, in addition to representatives of several other peoples. Delegates to this Conference adopted a number of proposals to improve their situation, including the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in the Russian North; some form of claims to land; the creation of ecological reserves with priority for resource exploitation by aboriginal peoples; the establishment of new national regions within the Russian North; and a more effective and meaningful role for aboriginal peoples at all levels of political decision-making. The independent delegates at this meeting elected the Nivkh writer, Vladimir Sungi as its first President, defeating the candidate supported by the Congress sponsors, Ch. M. Taksami, the Nivkh ethnographer. Today's Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East, better known by its acronym, RAIPON, traces it origins to this 1990 Congress.
Vladimir Sangi, RAIPON’s first President (1990-93), was an individual of considerable personal stature. A Nivkh writer and academic, he had established himself within the Soviet system, as a long-time critic of many of the policies being pursued by the Communist authorities, even while remaining viable within the system itself. Possibly his most important accomplishment on behalf of aboriginal peoples in Russia was to catch the tide of co-operation taking place among the Arctic countries following Gorbachev’s Murmansk speech and the then on-going negotiations on environmental protection in the Arctic region initiated by Finland. During his presidency, Sangi travelled to Canada, Alaska and the Nordic countries, establishing a Russian aboriginal presence at these multilateral discussions on pan-Arctic co-operation. Along with the leaders of the Sámi Council and the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, Vladimir Sangi was an official observer at the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy signing ceremony in Rovaniemi in 1991. This was possibly the first time in history that any aboriginal organization had ever enjoyed an official observer status in a multilateral inter-governmental treaty. Despite its weak position within Russia, the Association of the Northern Peoples of the Soviet Union, in alliance with its more experienced Sámi and Inuit allies, had established itself on the international scene.

The week following the adoption of the AEPS in Rovaniemi, representatives of these three Arctic aboriginal organizations held the first Arctic Indigenous Leaders Summit in Høstholm, Denmark, which adopted a Declaration that called on governments to: “recognize and accommodate the rights of aboriginal peoples to self-government, lands, renewable and non-renewable resources, and to recognize their cultural, social and economic rights.” A second such conference was held in Tromsø, Norway, 25-27 1995, hosted by the Sámi Council. Among the issues discussed were the environment, the right to be able to derive a traditional livelihood, and common health issues in the Arctic. A third (and what was to prove a final) such Summit was held in Moscow, 14-16 September 1999; in addition to the three organizations already mentioned, this one was also attended by the newly established Aleut International Association. The fact that the various indigenous groups would meet on a regular basis through AEPS and Arctic Council processes, as well as through co-operation at the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues of the United Nations, mitigated the need for such Summits. The 1991 Summit, however, had been a decisive moment for RAIPON as its participation followed shortly after its appearance at the AEPS founding ceremony.

The inevitability of RAIPON was not, in its early years, apparent. In 1993, two Canadian consultants conducted numerous interviews with various stakeholders in Russia, evaluating their strengths and weaknesses, in order to determine whether some sort of partnership arrangement could be created between an indigenous NGO in Canada and one in the new Russia. What the authors noted was that none of the potential Russian partner NGOs had any kind of obvious claim to represent the interests of these numerically small northern peoples. While establishing credibility at the international level, domestically Sangi faced major logistical problems in re-establishing an Association that had been created very much at the tail end of the Soviet era within the new Russia Federation. Simply put, while the Soviet authorities had promised to fund the Association at the time of its establishment in March 1990, no such funding had come through. By 1993, Sangi had changed the mailing address of the Association five times since being elected President; he often had to operate the Association out of his home. His influence over many of the member regional associations of which he was nominally their national President was problematic at best.

RAIPON could have been challenged by two other indigenous organizations established in the 1990-93 period. One was the Assembly of People’s Deputies Representing the Small Peoples of the North which held its founding meeting in Moscow in 26 May 1991. The main objective of this Deputy’s Assembly was to strengthen the cause of the indigenous peoples throughout the political system of the Soviet Union by having elected peoples deputies at various regional and local levels meet and offer advice to the central authorities. Since its membership base was so closely tied to the electoral system of the Soviet Union, the influence of this Congress became problematic with the breakdown of the Soviet
Union itself. Many activists in this Deputy’s Assembly, however, people like Yeremy Alipin (Khanty) and Andrei Kryvoshapkin (Even), were prominent leaders of Northern peoples and continued to be viable players on these issues. Another potential rival was the International League of Small Peoples and Ethnic Groups that had been founded in Moscow in 1991 with great attendance and fanfare. The driving force behind this was the Nanai ethnographer, Yevdoki Gaer, who was also a Peoples’ Deputy to the Supreme Soviet. When the Russian Federation decided to establish a State Committee of the North (Goskomsever) in 1992, Ms. Gaer was appointed Deputy Head. The League claimed to represent some forty Northern peoples, including many larger indigenous peoples that were not part of the 26, as well as a number of minorities that were located outside the Arctic Region.

Where the founding Congress had taken place in the halls of the Kremlin, the Second Congress of the Association of the Northern Peoples took place at a hotel on the outskirts of Moscow in November 1993, where an intense rivalry took place between two Moscow-based indigenous groups for executive positions. The Congress was not able to agree on an action plan nor were regional delegates able to have many of their needs discussed. In the end, a majority of the delegates elected as President, Yeremy Alipin, a Khanty writer and a delegate to the Duma of the Russian Federation, over Vladimir Sangi. After several months of hesitation, Sangi reluctantly surrendered the Presidency of the organization he had personified and kept in existence since 1990.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the need to re-establish itself under a new legal regime, the Association was registered on 24 November 1993 as a political movement “Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East of the Russian Federation.” In July 1999, it was re-registered at the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation as an All-Russia public organization. Under Alipin’s term as President (1993-97), the Association found a permanent home for its office in Moscow, in the same building that housed Goskomsever.22 Alipin continued Sangi’s efforts at the international level and signed the Arctic Council Charter in Ottawa in October 1996, whereby the Sámi Council, ICC and RAIPON were accorded the status of “Permanent Participants”—a significant upgrade from their position as “observers” under the AEPS process.

The third Congress, held in 1997, elected Sergey Nikolayevich Kharuchi, a Nenets, as RAIPON’s third President, defeating Yeremy Alipin for the position. As was the situation for the previous two congresses, the political situation was extremely fluid. Despite his oratorical skills and his achievement in having RAIPON recognized as a permanent participant within an eight-nation international organization, Alipin’s political base within the organization proved weak. Kharuchi was elected on the first ballot, defeating Alipin and an Udege leader, Pavel Sulyendziga.

After his election, President Kharuchi began to develop a wide-based leadership coalition, inviting many of those who had opposed his candidacy to serve with him.23 Moreover, a number of other countries began to provide funding to RAIPON through different forms of arrangements with non-governmental organizations. This enabled RAIPON to staff its offices in Moscow with professionals and native leaders from across Russia. RAIPON has emerged as a coalition of some thirty organizations of indigenous peoples that have been established throughout Northern Russia. RAIPON has been built on a territorial and a territory-ethnic principle whereby regional associations (branches) form the basis of the national organization; these associations are organizationally independent entities with their own financing.24 There are two types of organizations affiliated with RAIPON: (a) Regional organizations that unite several numerically small peoples inhabiting the same territory within the Russian Federation (referred to as subjekty in the Constitution); 25 one example would be the Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North of the Khabarovsky Region which unites the Evenk, Even, Negidal, Nanai, Ulchi, Oroch, Udze and Nivkh peoples residing in that region; and (b) Ethnic organizations that represent only one ethnic group or people, such as the Association of Kola Sámi or the “Auskaro” Association of the Aleut People of the Kamchatka Region. A Congress of all RAIPON regional and affiliated organizations is
held every four years where delegates elect a President by secret ballot. A Co-ordinating Council or Presidium, consisting of the President, the First Vice President and other vice-presidents, administers activities between Congresses. The head of each regional association who are themselves elected by the membership in their respective regions, serve as members on the Co-ordinating Council. Sergei Kharuchi and his leadership team were re-elected at the IV Congress held in March 2001 and again at the V Congress held in April 2005.

One of the most important actions taken by Sergei Kharuchi’s leadership team was to draft and present a Charter at the IV Congress held in Moscow in April 2001, which was adopted by said Congress. This charter underlined the fundamental principles on which RAIPON was established and enunciated its political action plan:

We, the indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East of the Russian Federation,

believe that:
• The Air, the Land and Water are blessed,
• Nature is the source of life,
• Man is but a drop in the whirlpool of life,
• The river of time is but a reflection of the past, present, and future and that how our ancestors lived in the past is how we now live and how our offspring will live in the future;

know that:
Man is a part of nature and bears responsibility for protecting the diversity of the environment;
Our home is the tundra, the taiga, the steppes and the mountains bequeathed to us by our ancestors, these are great, powerful, harsh, kind and generous manifestations but defenceless in the face of technical progress;
Use of knowledge can bring not only perfection and happiness but can cause pain and inflict injury;
Thoughtless work of human hands is capable of polluting and poisoning the air, the land, and the water, of destroying the living and of killing both large and small;
Economic growth, expanding wealth and assets for the few do not always improve life and prosperity for the majority;
Social, economic, and environmental policies of those now in power:
• do not eliminate need and injustice,
• do not protect the health of man and so the tree of life, of our kinfolk and our fellow countrymen, is rapidly withering away,
• do not renew the disrupted natural processes that forms our historical development,
• do not return the land of our ancestors, the lands of our traditional use;
Our way of life, based on time-honoured experience of communal, social organization, has been created from the original cultures and beliefs of our ancestors and is the one, true way of maintaining life and sustainable development;
No one, neither society nor civilization, will ever solve our problems and only we, and the good will of the government, are capable of accomplishing this task;

desire that:
our unique cultures, our ancestral homelands and way of life be protected by the government;
our legal rights be observed and that we can participate, as equal partners, in the planning strategies for the sustainable development of the North of our country;
our experience, knowledge, interests and traditional approaches to the use of the environment be accounted for when decisions are made on how the lands of our ancestors shall be used.
CHAPTER 4: Post-Soviet Transformation and Cultural Renewal

Everything that we believe, everything that we know and all that we desire must serve as the basis for advancing our traditional way of life.

We speak of development and not simply of "preservation" or "government protection," emphasizing our desire to take part ourselves in the process of sustainably developing the North, our government and the world in general, using and improving on the accumulated wisdom of our ancestors.

Only in harmony with nature will humanity find a way out of its current crisis. We, the indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia, and Far East of the Russian Federation, know this path!

The adoption of its own charter and statement of objectives coincided with features of the ethnic revival among many territorial minorities that had been taking place across Europe since the early 1960s, that is, that the minority groups themselves eventually came around to assert how they wished to be viewed by outsiders. The various indigenous minorities of Northern Russia, within a decade of being established as a collection of widely scattered peoples, had come together as a collective political entity with its own world view to espouse. Such a collective ideology enables RAIPON and its associates to develop their identity as an aboriginal minority and to assist them in the shaping of a dialogue with national and local authorities on issues germane to their culture and livelihood.26

4.3 Legal Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Beginning with perestroika and extending into the Russian Federation of the early 1990s, a number of major legal reforms that dealt with the rights of the indigenous northern peoples were debated at the national and regional levels. Much of this debate was influenced by international conventions and how other jurisdictions dealt with their aboriginal minorities. This section will first provide an overview of how legislation in Russia (both actual and proposed) deals with the rights of minorities. This section will then examine three major legislative reforms enacted by the Duma of the Russian Federation that specifically address the needs of numerically small indigenous peoples. Finally, this section will provide a brief summary to put current Russian legislation into some kind of Arctic regional context.

4.3.1 Overview

In his overview, one of Russia's leading constitutional experts, V.A. Kryazhkov (1996) emphasized the importance of preserving the rights of even the smallest minorities in Russia. He pointed out the importance of the great reform of 1822 and the efforts of the CPSU to create a special position for these small indigenous minorities with their Interim Regulations in 1926. In the late 1980s, under the influence of perestroika and glasnost’, the Soviet Union undertook measures to support a restoration of the rights of the native peoples. The All-Union Law on General Principles of Local Self-Government and Local Economy of the USSR proclaimed self-governance at the primary territorial level, and the rights of communities to natural resources and control over the activity of the enterprises functioning in their territory. The USSR law, “On the Free National Development of USSR Citizens, Residing Beyond the Borders of their Nation States or Those not Possessing them in the Territory of the USSR,” dated 26 April 1990, gave natives the right to organize such national administrative-territorial units as national rayons, national settlements, and national rural soviets in places of compact (concentrated) residence of national groups. This law proposed that drafts of legislative acts relating to the interests of these entities should first be sent for discussion to the corresponding soviets for their input prior to the adaptation of final resolutions. A number of other measures had been under consideration by Soviet authorities at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the transition to the Russian Federation.27 When the Soviet Union formally ceased to exist at the end of 1991, it became incumbent on the Russian Federation to draft new legislation to address many of these issues. To that end, Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed an edict on April 22, 1992, that called upon the Duma to enact legislation concerning the rights of the "indigenous numerically small peoples." This edict also provided for the possibility of legislation on obshchina lands and other forms of nature preserves.28
Definitions of indigenous peoples found in ILO Convention 169, *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention*, played a pivotal role in the development of legal terminology for the Russian Federation in this transitional period, calling on governments to guarantee the integrity of indigenous rights and to work with indigenous peoples to promote respect for their social and cultural identity, customs, traditions and institutions. The Convention calls on states to recognize systems of ownership and tenancy that may differ from those prevailing for the rest of a state’s population. Moreover, where development and conservation programs are being proposed, ratifying states are obligated to balance the interests of society at large with the particular needs of vulnerable indigenous and tribal groups. This Convention accepted the principle of ethnic pluralism and recognized that indigenous minorities had a role to play in determining their destiny within the social system of a nation. While the Convention has ten parts, a primary concern for legislators and administrators considering its ratification would be Part II (Articles 13-15) and its provisions dealing with indigenous land rights, particularly those indigenous peoples that live off the land, since these are very far-reaching. All countries with interests in the Arctic region took part in the negotiations leading up to the adoption of this Convention by the ILO in 1989. A number of indigenous groups played active roles within the delegations of their respective states, including the Nordic Sámi, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference and Canada’s Assembly of First Nations. The Soviet Union took part in the ILO proceedings that led to the adoption of this Convention by the ILO and had begun to take steps to determine if it should be ratified.

Also significant was that the term “indigenous numerically small peoples” came to be included in Article 69 of the new Constitution of the Russian Federation: “The Russian Federation guarantees the rights of indigenous numerically small peoples in accordance with universally recognized principles and standards of international law and international agreements of the Russian Federation.” Vladimir Sany and leaders from other aboriginal organizations in Russia played an active role in lobbying for this provision in the drafting stages for this Constitution of the Russian Federation which was eventually ratified by national plebiscite on 12 December 1993.

### 4.3.2 Post-Soviet Legislative Reforms

With the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia undertook to develop new legislation to address the situation of its numerically small indigenous peoples.

#### (a) Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The long-anticipated law entitled: “On Guarantees of the Rights of Indigenous Numerically Small Peoples of the Russian Federation,” adopted by the State Duma on 16 April 1999 and signed into law on 30 April 1999 by President Boris Yeltsin, is the first Russian federal legislation to establish a legal basis for the rights of aboriginal people in Russia. The primary objective of this legislation is to guarantee the unique social, economic and cultural development of these peoples, the protection of their historical habitat, life, traditional way of life, economies and crafts.” Article 1(1) stipulates: “Indigenous small peoples of the Russian Federation...are peoples who live on territories of traditional residence of their ancestors, who maintain their traditional way of life, economies and crafts, whose numbers in the Russian Federation is less than 50 thousand men and who identify themselves in independent ethnic communities.” This law guaranteed that aboriginal peoples would have equal rights and opportunities with all other Russian citizens to develop their cultures. The legislation was intended to serve as a framework for guaranteeing such rights; it also anticipated the enactment of additional legislation that would address specific issues related to the implementation of these rights.

Under this legislation, the federal and regional governments are responsible for defending the rights of aboriginal peoples to pursue distinct forms of socioeconomic and cultural development and for protecting their lands and traditional ways of life. The law authorized federal and regional governments to adopt laws and programs to these ends. The law calls for innovative approaches on how the subject
indigenous peoples would best be able to pursue a traditional livelihood and how certain lands could be made available to them for these purposes—that is, the selection and organization of commune lands and the ability to continue practicing a traditional way of life within the boundaries of a nature reserve. These indigenous inhabitants would also have the right to financial support from different levels of government to pursue their traditional way of life and protect their environment and the right to participate in the decision-making processes at all levels of government that can have an impact on their lands and way of life. The legislation also provided for the right to compensation for losses caused by damage to the environment on their traditional lands. These were rights that would be enjoyed collectively and individually.

Native individuals enjoy free social services, free medical care, and free travel for annual checkups. Those persons involved in traditional activities may substitute alternative civil service for otherwise mandatory armed forces service. The law recognizes the rights of aboriginal peoples to maintain and develop their languages, to observe their traditions and religious customs and to encourage communication among native individuals across the Russian state and beyond its boundaries. Aboriginal peoples can establish organs of territorial self-government according to the law. They may set up communes or obshchinas. Native enterprises and individuals receive priority rights to property and resources when forming enterprises based on traditional activities. Native peoples enjoy not only the right to protection of their rights via the court system, but courts are directed to consider aboriginal customs and traditions in their deliberations.

This legislation has some notable shortcomings. For example, while this legislation is heavily dependent on the concept of traditional activities, the very term “tradition” itself has not been defined, nor was a definition provided for what constitutes “traditional economic activities and trades.” Another problem was that while this legislation has provided rights for those numerically small indigenous people who are living on “the territory of traditional occupation of their ancestors,” this can be a problematic term legally, given the high mobility and historic iterative displacements of aboriginals over the last five centuries.

This legislation, which took many years to enact, can be seen as a critical first step toward recognizing aboriginal rights in the Russian Federation, providing a framework for regional governments to revise their laws and administrative procedures to accord with federal standards. Some regional governments had already begun such a process even before this federal legislation was in place; others started after its enactment. The implementation has been hindered by a lack of financial support although, in many ways, this problem applies to all levels of Russian government.

(b) Legislation on Clan Communes (Obshchinas)

As Yuri Slezkine (1994) concluded in his study, Arctic Mirrors, many of the reforms being considered by social scientists to assist these indigenous Northerners with the collapse of the Soviet Union amounted to something he characterized as “Backwards to the Future.” A number of prominent Russian ethnographers have characterized aboriginal socioeconomic and political organization as having evolved from clan lines to a more territorial based structure of family-clan communes (obshchinas) at the end of the 19th century. Such communes had been relatively stable economic and demographic collectives oriented to self-sufficiency and reproduction, which had been able to exert real control over their territory. Over the course of the 20th century, as aboriginal societies suffered from reduced life expectancy, high suicide rates, alcoholism, and other social malaise, aboriginal leaders attributed much of this to their extreme dependency on the state and almost no control over decision-making on the issues most germane to their lives. When, the late 20th century, aboriginal leaders and academics sought some way of reinvesting aboriginal groups with more power over their lives, they devised a plan to recreate some of these pre-Soviet aboriginal structures as a way to encourage cultural
persistence and economic self-sufficiency. They even convinced the government of the desirability of institutionalizing the *obshchina* into law. In March 1992, a federal decree called for the development of legislation on “clan, *obshchina* and family lands” which would govern the establishment of such communes and the transfer of land to these collectives. Soon after this, then-President Boris Yeltsin issued an edict ordering the transfer of lands important to traditional activities “to clan *obshchina* and families of the numerically small peoples of the North: who pursued traditional activities “for life long possession... or lease.” This edict served as an interim measure, allowing aboriginals to receive land until a federal law was enacted.

On 20 July 2000, President Vladimir Putin signed into law a second significant piece of legislation related to aboriginal rights, “On general principals on the organization of *obshchinas* of the Indigenous Numerically Small Peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East of the Russian Federation.” Prior to this, a number of regions in Russia had adopted their own laws (Sakha Republic, Khabarovsky Territory) with temporary regulations (Sakhalin Province). Using these legal acts, or the presidential edict, aboriginal peoples across Russia have established and registered hundreds of *obshchinas* before the enactment of the federal law. While hundreds of *obshchinas* had been formed prior to the passage of this federal legislation (e.g., more than 200 in the Sakha Republic alone), many regional governments and local administrations had resisted, citing the lack of federal law. This legislation can be used as an effective means for establishing self-governing units (both economically and politically) throughout Northern Russia.

Section 1 of the law defines *obshchinas* as “forms of self-organization of persons belonging to numerically small people and joined by blood-clan (family, clan) and (or) territorial-neighbour indication, created in order to defend their ancestral environment, and to maintain and develop traditional ways of life, economy, trades and culture.” Thus, an *obshchina* is vested with goals of cultural protection and environmental preservation. The commune is legally authorized to be a non-commercial economic and potentially self-governing unit. It controls its internal affairs, which may be governed by customary law. It may also be invested with specific authorities held usually by the local government in which it is located. The law on *obshchinas* established general procedures for establishing, reorganizing, and liquidating *obshchinas*. It provided such general membership rules as neither foreign nor non-aboriginal persons being eligible to establish *obshchinas* nor were foreigners even permitted to be members. The law set provisions as to what the government or council of the *obshchina* would be responsible for and what issues were handled at general assemblies. *Obshchinas* are entitled to join in unions or associations to facilitate the pursuit of their goals. While this legislation did not say anything specific on land, it did allow *obshchina* members the right to access faunal, plant, common mineral, and other resources in the course of their traditional activities. The legislation authorized regional governments and the federal government to budget monies for the operation of these communes within the regional and local development program setting. These communes were also encouraged to develop a curriculum for members’ children based on traditions and customs.

For the purposes of this survey, since all but two sets of interviews had been completed before the enactment of this legislation, all references to commune lands in these interviews would be either to actions initiated under the presidential edict of 1992 or by one of the regions that had decided to be proactive in establishing such economic units.

(c) Legislation on Territories of Traditional Use

A federal law to establish the limits of TTPs was first identified as a national priority in 1991, during the Soviet era. The third key piece of federal legislation that addressed Russia’s aboriginal-state relations was proclaimed on 7 May 2001, “On Territories of Traditional Nature Use by Small Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East of the Russian Federation.” This legislation governs the
CHAPTER 4: Post-Soviet Transformation and Cultural Renewal

The desirability of development of aboriginal settlement of such obshchina and for life long term to receive land designated as “territories of traditional nature use” of aboriginal peoples, in order to protect and maintain these lands as a base for traditional aboriginal activities, such as reindeer herding and hunting. Although aboriginal groups can form clan communes and then petition for possession of lands on which to pursue traditional activities, this results in archipelagos of native lands. Aboriginal leaders have also lobbied for the designation of more spatially extensive TTPs that would be off limits to resource development, in order to provide ample space for the continuance of traditional fields.

The federal law overrides a number of regional laws (Irkutsk province 1997, Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Province, 1997) and lesser legal acts (Khanty-Mansiisk District 1990, Primorsk Territory 1993). It established as its goals the protection of the environment on which traditional aboriginal ways of life depend, and in turn, the preservation and development of aboriginal cultures and the preservation of biological diversity. Like the other two acts, this law on TTPs is general and declarative in nature. It provides the framework for establishing TTPs, and the basis for regional governments to adopt more specific legislation on the creation of, and legal regime governing the operation of such territories.

Aboriginal persons or obshchina can initiate applications for the creation of such territories at the federal, regional or local level. They also participated in the drafting of the regulations that govern a TTP operation. The federal law indicates what other bodies must participate in their formation, deepening on level, and notes that the general population must be informed of their creation. The size of a TTP is determined by the spatial extent necessary to ensure the maintenance of biological diversity of the territory’s fauna and flora. It must also provide for the continuity of historical, social and cultural ties among aboriginal persons, and preserve the inviolability of any cultural or historical objects. The TTP is not a highly exclusive or protective designation. Aboriginal persons and obshchina have the right to use natural resources for the pursuance of traditional activities, and can possess obshchina lands within the boundaries of a TTP. Non-aboriginal residents also may use resources for personal needs in accordance with TTP regulations. These regulations can permit the use of non-renewable as well as renewable resources, for entrepreneurial as well as subsistence needs. RAIFON has considered establishing several model TTPs, in order to work out the mechanisms for establishing and operationalizing such territories.

4.3.3 Current Legislative Situation in Russia

The Russian Federation, in recent years, has put together an interesting package of legislation that attempts to address many of the complex problems facing the numerically small indigenous peoples of Northern Russia. As it is a Federation, clearly much work remains in resolving disputes between the central and regional governments as to jurisdiction over lands on which essential raw materials are located; the central government will have to resolve many issues through negotiations with different regional and local governments. Many indigenous peoples will need to be prepared to participate fully in such discussions and, just as importantly, in the subsequent planning and implementation. Gail Pundahl, in her 1998 study on the land title rights of the Evenki people in south-eastern Siberia, analysed how the Evenki have been able to pursue their traditional livelihoods through the centuries. The chapter in her book entitled “Obshchina Lands: Progress and Pitfalls,” written during the period of the 1992 Presidential edict but before the enactment of the actual legislation on obshchina lands, outlined in detail a number of obstacles that could hinder the implementation of this reform, including: (i) functional constraints; (ii) financial challenges; (iii) spatial marginalization; (iv) cultural marginalization; (v) competing activities; (vi) partial tenure; and (vii) blatant resistance to indigenous land allotments. “Together these obstacles severely challenge a land reform process which could potentially provide indigenous people with a significant level of self-governance at the local level.” The enactment of Federal legislation should facilitate this process but the problems outlined in this study remain very real and will involve a great deal of work at all levels of government in co-operation with the indigenous applicants.
RAIPON spokespersons regard this legislative package with trepidation: “Nevertheless, so far, the effects of these laws has been negligible. This is due to several reasons: the laws are declarative, there is a need to develop the mechanisms that will implement the declared rights. The indigenous peoples of the North lack experience in protecting their rights: there are practically no specialists in Russia that would be able to protect the rights of indigenous peoples, and the indigenous peoples themselves have no experience of defending their rights in court.” Olga Murashko went on to point out how the very existence of these special laws and rights for the indigenous peoples of the North had been met with resentment on the part of many regional administrations and the non-indigenous peoples that constitute a majority of the local population.

Looked at from a different perspective, however, the Russian government, to some extent, comes at these matters with a comparatively fresh approach. It is not burdened with the baggage of a long-standing reservation system as defined in Canada’s Indian Act, for example, that can make the delivery of a program of economic, social and educational services by government problematic if not chaotic. The Indian Act, first enacted in 1876 and last revised in its entirety in 1953, was enacted in an era of government paternalism but today, unamended, continues to be the primary legislative basis for delivery of government programs to most of Canada’s First Nation peoples whether they live on reserves or not. Many of the modern land claim settlements negotiated between government and First Nation since 1975 make a point of specifically excluding the continued applicability of the Indian Act.

Although the experiences suffered by aboriginal peoples in Russia and Canada (as well as other Arctic jurisdictions) have been vastly different over the past several centuries, it does look like at this point in time (2006) that some very real changes, both incremental and comprehensive, are possible for government and Northern peoples in Russia with respect to traditional uses of the land. For the first time in over 400 years of contact with incoming Russians, the indigenous peoples of Northern Russia are being identified in national legislation as nationalities with distinct rights and characteristics and have been elevated to a legal position that enables them to select lands that may be of interest to maintaining their traditional way of life. There is, therefore, a possibility for many of these people, to choose lands for ownership or other form of title, that can enable them to continue with a way of life as their ancestors have done since time immemorial.

4.4 Situation Today

RAIPON has established itself as a political umbrella organization for forty-one indigenous peoples whose total population in 2002 was around 250,000 people. These peoples are represented by thirty-four regional and ethnic organizations that have the authority to represent these groups both in Russia and in the international community. RAIPON states that it is a public organization that protects human rights and defends the legal interests of the indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East. It assists these peoples to address and resolve environmental, social and economic issues affecting them and to promote their education and culture. Most importantly, RAIPON strives to guarantee the right of indigenous peoples to be able to protect their native homelands and traditional way of life and to promote their right to some form of self-governance in these regions they have traditionally occupied according to national and international legal standards.

RAIPON has been very effective in developing alliances with other aboriginal organizations in the Arctic where there has been a growing assertiveness by the aboriginal peoples of the circumpolar North themselves to have governments recognize their rights within their homeland regions. Its greatest ongoing success has been through its Permanent Participant status on the Arctic Council, where it can establish coalitions with other circumpolar indigenous organizations through the Indigenous Peoples Secretariat. RAIPON representatives have held the chairmanship of this Secretariat.
The United Nations and the Arctic Charter process have created opportunities for RAIPON to promote its interests through international co-operation with indigenous peoples in other regions of the world. A unique aspect of co-operation at the Arctic regional level has been the recognition by all governments that the indigenous peoples of the Arctic will play an important role in any new administrative arrangements. The indigenous numerically small peoples of Northern Russia have been very skillful at emerging from centuries of isolation to mobilize politically within the Russian political infrastructure and to establish partnerships with indigenous peoples in all parts of the world.

Endnotes


2. On November 8, 1990, representatives from fourteen of the world’s northern regions (which include states, provinces, territories, counties, prefectures and autonomous regions) met in Anchorage, Alaska to adopt the Northern Forum Charter. These representatives were from the Soviet Union (Magadan, Kamchatka, Chukotka, Khabarovsky, and the Jewish Autonomous Region); China (Hetingliang); Mongolia (Dornod); Japan (Hokkaido); Korea; Norway (Finnmark and Troms); Finland (Lapland); Canada (Yukon) and the USA (Alaska). The Northern Forum is an inter-governmental, advisory organization on cultural, economic, political and social and economic issues that issues official position statements on northern issues.
3 On January 11, 1993, the foreign ministers of Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Russia and the Commission of the European Communities met in Kirkenes, Norway to sign a Declaration on Cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region and to adopt the terms of reference for a Council of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. The participating states stated that expanded cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region will contribute substantially to stability and progress in the area and as part of the process of evolving European cooperation.

4 Monica Tennberg (1993) The Arctic Council, 53-54 examined how Arctic countries and non-governmental organizations began process of co-operation that led to mutual inter-dependence on issues related to environment and the establishment of the AEP.

5 The Saami Council, established in 1956, is the oldest international aboriginal rights organization in the world, uniting the Saami of Finland, Sweden and Norway into a pan-Nordic organization; in 1992, the Kola Saami in Russia formally joined. It should be noted that the Saami signed the AEPs accord as the Nordic Saami Council.

6 The Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) was founded in 1977 to unite the approximately 115,000 Inuit peoples of Alaska, Canada, Greenland and, in 1992, Russia, under a common program of action. In 1983, the ICC was granted non-governmental organization status at the United Nations. Since the mid-1980s, the ICC has promoted the development of such northern policies as a pan-Arctic conservation strategy, Arctic security and disarmament, and action on a number of other activities related to the Arctic.

7 In 1993, it was formerly registered as the Association of Indigenous Minorities of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation (later to be known by its acronym RAIFON).

8 Chapter 29 on Aleuts in Part II contains a description on the founding of the AIA, including an interview with Vladimir N. Dobretsov.

9 Interview of Finnish Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen in AHSIS 1/1999. "The Initiative for a Northern Dimension emerged from the perception that the northern regions are of special significance to the European Union. The policies of the Northern Dimension aim at security, stability and sustainable development in Northern Europe... (C)ultural goals are connected with these principles."

10 Address by Mr. Paavo Lipponen, Prime Minister of Finland, to the Fourth Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region at Rovaniemi, Finland, 28 August 2000.

11 For example, a speech by Finland’s Ambassador on Arctic issues, Peter Stanlund, "The Arctic Window of the Northern Dimension,” at the Second Foreign Ministers’ Conference on the Northern Dimension. 26 March 2001.

12 Slezkine 1994: 377. One of the first demands with regard to the former soviet peoples, therefore, was the (re)creation of autonomous districts, or at least national soviets or villages, for the nineteen nationalities who did not possess any.

13 Hans Dahl (1990). Indigenous Peoples of the Soviet North. IWGIA Document No. 67. Copenhagen, July 1990. The official keynote speech by the Nivkh ethnographer, Chunder Teksami, sought to maintain a balance between the existing situation and the position of the Communist Party that was organizing this conference (ibid., 23-42). Dahl writes how, during the course of two days of this Congress, one Northern speaker after another rose to denounce the existing situation of exploitative development in the North and its impact on the environment and lives of all Northern peoples. Dr. Teksami’s moderate approach may have misread the mood of the Congress and this would later cost him in the vote for the Presidency.

14 As presented in Chapter 22 on the Nivkh in Part III, Vladimir Sangu was interviewed by Dmitry A. Frenk for this survey. Dr. Frenk also wrote the entry on V. Sangu for the Encylopedia of the Arctic (Nuttall, ed., 2005: 1836-38).

15 Leif Halonen, the Sámi Council representative in the negotiations that led to the AEPs in 1991 and later the Arctic Council in 1996, told this researcher how the Sámi Council had paid travel costs so that Vladimir Sangu could attend an AEPs preparatory meeting in Kiruna, Sweden, 15-17 January 1991 and the signing ceremony in Rovaniemi. Interview with L. Halonen, 2007.

16 The Arctic Indigenous Leaders Summit of June 1991 also adopted consensus statements on subsistence and on renewable resource harvesting. These leaders from Canada and the President of the Alaska Federation of Natives also attended.

17 Fægling and Prakhova, 1996, Arctic Leaders Summit II.


20 Ibid.


22 This was to continue until by a decree signed on May 17, 2000, by President Vladimir Putin abolished the Russian Ministry of the Environment and Ekomos from their separate entities and their functions were amalgamated within other ministries. Some time after this, RAIFON also moved its office to new quarters in Moscow. D.J. Peterson and Eric K. Blieka, “The Reorganization of Russia’s Environmental Bureaucracy: Implications and Prospects,” Post-Soviet Geography and Economics, 2001; 42:1: 65-76.
CHAPTER 4: Post-Soviet Transformation and Cultural Renewal

2) Pavel Sulyandziga, for example, was invited to become Vice-President Administration, which, effectively, had become the number two position within RAIFON. In an interview, Sulyandziga told of how Sergej Khenchit has been very effective in realizing that he really could not accomplish much alone but, by building coalitions, he found himself in a far stronger position (2 December 2006).

3) Some affiliated organizations were established prior to the March 1990 Congress that created RAIFON, including: (i) "Saving Yugra," uniting all of the indigenous peoples of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug; (ii) "Yamal for Future Generations," uniting indigenous peoples of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug; and (iii) "Kamchatkan Ilt’in Mom Revival Council," uniting the Ilt’in inhabiting the Koryak Autonomous Okrug and the Kamchatka Oblast.

4) Subject or provinces of the Russian Federation (also termed as republika, okrug, oblasti and krai). – O. Murashko in NGWIA; footnote 5, p. 28.

5) Other aboriginal rights associations have take similar action. For example, in 1971, the VII Nordic Sámi Conference at Gällivare, Sweden, adopted a comprehensive Sámi cultural policy and political action program acceptable to the Sámi of all three Nordic cultures. This Program came to serve as a declaration of the fundamental rights of the Sámi as an aboriginal people (Siltanen 1994:59-63).

6) Kryazhev 1998; 87-88. Interview with Vladimir Kryazhev, 12.06.2003 in Moscow.

7) O neotekhnicheskom mernakh po zashchite mest proizkhodstva I khlozayavstvovoy deyatelenosti malochislennyykh narodov Severa (On urgent measures to defend the places of habitation and economic activities of the numerically small peoples of the North). Edict No. 399 of the President of the Russian Federation, April 22, 1992.

8) Article 13 of CIO Convention 169 requires governments to: respect the special importance for the cultures and spiritual values of the peoples concerned of their relationship with lands... which they occupy or otherwise use, and in particular the collective aspects of this relationship. Article 14 recognizes the rights of ownership and possession of the peoples concerned over the lands which they traditionally occupy and calls for measures to safeguard the right of the peoples concerned to use lands that are not exclusively occupied by them but which they have historically used for their subsistence and traditional activities. Furthermore, Article 15 calls on governments to safeguard the rights of indigenous peoples to the natural resources pertaining to these lands and to include these peoples in management decisions on these resources and sharing in the benefits from these decisions.


10) During the drafting on this federal legislation in 1992, considerable debate took place among academics and legal experts as to what constituted "a numerically small people." It was eventually decided that 50,000 would be the maximum number for a Northern people to be considered small. The legislation stipulated that a list of numerically small peoples was to be prepared for the approval of the Government once the legislation had been enacted. Eleven months after the law was adopted, the Russian government confirmed such a list of 44 peoples, most of whom live in the Russian North. "Izdannye pereschy" korenennykh malochislennykh narodov Rossiiskoy Federatsii (Unified List of Indigenous Numerically Small Peoples of the Russian Federation). Confirmed by Decree No. 395 of the Russian Government, March 24, 2000. While drafting this law, it was determined that there were 65 peoples within the Russian Federation numbering less than 50,000 but more than 20 of these resided in the republics of the Northern Caucasus. The official list of "indigenous numerically small peoples" specifically did not include the numerically small peoples of the Northern Caucasian Republics.


15) O dopolnennykh mernakh po uluchshenniyu sotsialno-ekonomicheskikh usloviiy narodov Severa na 1991-1995 gody (On additional measures to improve the social-economic Conditions of the Life of the Numerically Small Peoples of the North). Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the USSR and the Soviet of the RSFSR No. 8, 11 March 1991. While this 1991 decree, enacted during the Soviet period and still implemented under the new regime, required county administrations, such as the one in Murmansk, to define areas where indigenous populations will have a priority right to use lands for reindeer husbandry, hunting and fishing, the Sámi recognize that their newly acquired fishing rights has caused dissatisfaction among non-Sámi residing in the same region. Moreover, since the Russian state encouraged foreign tourists to fish in the Kola region, Indigenous Sámi were frequently prevented from deriving a livelihood in the waters they have historically used. Interview with Nina Alekseeva, April 2005, at V RAIFON Congress, Moscow.

AWAKENING SIBERIA. From Marginalization to Self-Determination: The Small Indigenous Nations of Northern Russia on the Eve of the Millennium

38 Gail Fondahl 1998, 98-99. Fondahl then went on to describe in length how each component step in this process might be performed, indicating the complexity of establishing such communes for client groups unversed in legal training and financial accounting. Chapter 6. “Obshchina Lands: Progress and Pitfalls,” 89-117.

39 Murashko Towards a New Millennium, IWGIA 2002; 25.

40 In a lengthy meeting hosted by the Council of the Nisga’a Lisims Nation, on the occasion of the visit of the Sámi Parliament of Norway, held on 17 September 2000 in New Aiyansh, British Columbia, Grand Chief Joseph Gosnell stated most emphatically and with great pride that, under the terms of the Nisga’a Final Settlement that had been promulgated earlier that year, all Indian reserves that had been part of the Nisga’a holdings had been eliminated and that the settlement specifically stated that the Indian Act no longer applied to the Nisga’a people and their lands.

41 R. Sulymadiga et al. 2003.

42 United Nations General Assembly Resolution 48/163 of 21 December 1993 which proclaimed the International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People.


44 Interview with Pavel Sulymadiga, 6 December 2006 in Moscow, in which he outlined his plans. Progress on this strategy can be found on the RAIPON website.