

【論 説】

Recent Emergence of Ancestral Commons in Southern Siberia:

A Case Study of Reindeer Husbandry in Todzhinskii County, Tyva Republic

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Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was a severe blow on the everyday lives of reindeer herders in tundra and taiga regions in Russia. The case of herders in Todzhinskii County, Tyva Republic, was not an exception. The state farms (sovkhozes), which had been reliable employers of reindeer herders, were suddenly liquidated so that herders lost an opportunity to receive relatively good, stable salary and other benefits of the Soviet time. Under such a critical condition of “live or die”, they killed their own reindeers and eat their meat for bare survival.

Such a crisis had been somehow expected to occur so that the newly born government of the Russian Federation, as early as in 1991, adopted the law which allowed the small-numbered peoples of the North to establish rodovaya obshchina. Obshchina in Russian roughly corresponds to a common in English, so does rodovaya ancestral, or of kinship, or so. Some researchers in the English speaking countries translate such rodovaya obshchina into ‘ancestral commons’. Reindeer herders have been most active to organize themselves into obshchinas

in East Siberia and Russian Far East. Emergence of the idea of creating obshchina in Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug in the early 1990s is described in Wiget and Balalaeva (1997). Fondahl (1998) gives a detailed analysis of obshchinas in North Transbaikalia. Gray (2001) discusses the obshchinas in Chukotka.

Though his discussion does not directly put a focus on obshchina, Anderson (1998) gives an analysis of land tenure problem which Evenki people face after the Soviet collapse in the former Taimyr (Dolgano-Nenets) Autonomous District, now a part of Krasnoyarsk Krai. About Chukotka, see Gray (2004). Inamura (2005) describes the lives of Tyvian reindeer herders in Mongolia.

However, one cannot find any research of the emerging obshchinas in Tyva Republic, the obshchinas mainly of reindeer herders. In order to fill this gap of geographical research area, this paper firstly describes the changing condition of reindeer husbandry in Todzinskii County, Tyva Republic in the age of post-Soviet transformation. It secondly describes the current state of newly established, five commons there since 2009. Toward the end of the paper, we make proposals for the commons mainly of the reindeer herders in Tyva Republic to obtain the status of sustainable future.

1 Reindeer Husbandry in the Contemporary World

Reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*) has been a domesticated mammal adapted to the tundra and mountain taiga areas of the Northern Hemisphere since many centuries ago. Limiting our scope to the Eurasian Continent, majority of them live north of the arctic circle; northern part of the Fenoscandinavian countries (Norway, Sweden, and Finland) and arctic Russia. The cases of Northern Norway are described in some chapters of Jentoft (1998) and Bjorklund (2004). However, relatively small numbers of them also live in Inner Mongolia of China, the area near Lake Hubusgul in Mongolia, and the East Sayan Mountains in Tyva (Inamura 2005). About the history

of reindeer husbandry in Tyva, Vainstein (1980) is now the classics. The paper by Brian Donahoe describes more recent situation (Донахо, 2006).

The diet of reindeer are lichen, berries, mushrooms, and grasses which tundra or mountain taiga soil abundantly supplies. A long-run, sustainable relationship among reindeer, tundra/mountain taiga plants and human beings is possible if anthropogenic pressure is not large.

2 Study Area and Method of Research

Our study area, the Todzhinskii County, belongs to Tyva Republic (simply Tyva, hereafter) in East Siberian Economic Region of Russian Federation. The capital city of Tyva is Kyzyl, which is worldly known as the geographical center of Asia. Major part of this republic resides in the Yenisei River catchment area while its southern fringe belongs to the Inner Asia.

The area of the republic is 170,500 km² (some 45% of Japan), and its population is 305,510 (the 2002 Census). The population density is then 1.81 persons/km². According to the 2002 Census, 77% of the people are Tyvians (Tuvans) who speak the Tyvian language of a Turkic origin. 20.1% are Russian, 0.4% are Khakas, and 2.5% are others. The official languages of the republic are Tyvian and Russian.

Table 1 shows the administrative division of Tyva as of 2010. The Todzhinskii County, our study area, is the largest in area and lowest-populated among all counties of the republic.

The only one group of small-numbered indigeneous peoples living in Tyva is Tozhu-tyva people. Table 2 shows the relative position of the Todzu-tyva people in Todzhinskii County. Reindeer husbandry is traditional natural resource use for them. According to the data of the Government of Tyva Republic, 7381 Tozhu-tyva people live in four counties: Todzhinskii, Tere-Kholskii, Mongun-Tayginskii, and Erzinskii as of January 1, 2011. About 34% of the total number of todzu-tyva

Table 1 Administrative Division of Tyva Republic (2010)

County's Name	Administrative Center	Territory (km ²)	Population	Density of Population (persons per km ²)
Bai-Taiginskii	Teeli	7922.82	10800	1.36
Barun-Khemchikskii	Kyzyl-Mazhalyk	6259.66	12800	2.04
Chaa-Kholskii	Chaa-Khol	2903.10	6000	2.07
Chedi-Kholskii	Khovu-Aksy	3706.32	7700	2.08
Dzun-Khemchikskii	Chadan	6484.56	19900	3.07
Kaa-Khemskii	Saryg-Sep	25726.04	12300	0.48
Kyzylskii	Kaa-Khem	8526.65	27600	3.24
Mongun-Tayginskii	Mugur-Aksy	4414.20	5700	1.29
Ovyurskii	Khandagayty	4522.50	7000	1.55
Pii-Khemskii	Turan	8194.12	10100	1.23
Sut-Kholskii	Sug-Aksy	6691.25	8000	1.20
Tandinsky	Bay-Khaak	5091.70	12900	2.53
Tere-Kholskii	Kungurtuk	10050.02	1900	0.19
Tes-Khemskii	Samagaltai	6687.23	8200	1.23
Todzhinskii	Toora-Khem	44757.49	6000	0.13
Ulug-Khemskii	Shagonar	5335.40	19300	3.62
Erzinskii	Erzin	11081.45	8300	0.75

Territory of the City of Kyzyl	200.37	109900	548.5
Territory of the City of Ak-Dovurak	48.69	13500	277.3

Source: Data of preliminary results of Population Census of 2010.

Table 2 The Number of Tozhu-Tyva People in Todzhinskii County, 2006- 2011

Territory	Number of people						The share of Tozhu-tyva people in total number of people (%)		
	2006		2009		2011		2006	2009	2011
	Total number of people	The number of Tozhu-tyva people	Total number of people	The number of Tozhu-tyva people	Total number of people	The number of Tozhu-tyva people			
Todzhinskii County	6126	2514	6290	2890	6068	2787	41.5	46	46
Including population of villages:									
Iy	1190	1091	1295	1270	1302	1292	92	98	99
Adyr-Kezhig	1154	1154	1327	1327	1225	1210	100	100	99
Systyg-Khem	178	178	165	165	146	146	100	100	100
Khamsara	91	91	133	133	138	138	100	96	100

Source: Data of Administration of Todzhinskii County.

people live in Todzhinskii County. As Table 2 shows, the number of the Todzutyva people and their share in the total number of people living in the county have increased in the period of 2006-2011. Todzhu-tyva people live in four villages: Iy, Adyr-Kezhig, Systyg-Khem, and Khamsara, in which their share in the total population there is 99-100% .

The method of our research is mainly the direct interviews with Tyvian and Todzu-tyva peoples engaged in the reindeer husbandry or handicrafts making, and the Tyvian and Russian local government officials, but partly is the collection of literatures and official statistics. As a preparation for this research, co-authors had visited Tyva twice, i.e., in winter 2006, and summer 2009. Then in summer 2011, we made the research trip to Tyva for the third time. Interviews with the people were made in Kyzyl, Toora-Khem (administrative center of Todzinskii County), and Adyr-Kezhig (small village east of Toora-Khem).

3 Post-Soviet Transformation of Reindeer Husbandry in Todzhinskii County

During the Soviet time, the collectivization of agriculture prevailed all over the present territory of Russian Federation. Since reindeer husbandry was regarded as a form of agriculture, reindeer herders and their families were organized into state farms known as *sovkhoz* (es). In our study area of Todzinskii County, there were three reindeer-related *sovkhozes*; 《Pervoe Maya》, 《Toora-Khem》, and 《Kham-Sara》.

One of our interviewees in Adyr-Kedzig was a director of one of these *sovkhozes*. According to him, salary was dependent on the heads of reindeer which *sovkhoze* members took care of. Another man among our interviewees was a *sovkhoz* worker, and took care of 120 heads. His monthly salary was 300 rubles. In addition, he was paid extra 30% as of working in harsh climatic condition of mountain taiga. Furthermore, in winter, one deer was given to him as food. According to the above-mentioned director, there were some *sovkhoz* workers who received basic salary

as much as 400 roubles. Considering the average salary of city workers in the late stage of the Soviet time, it was quite high. It was because reindeer husbandry was an extremely hard work under the harsh living condition in southern Siberia.

In the Soviet era, a medical doctor was assigned always to be with a group of reindeer herders to take care of the diseases of reindeers and people. Such a doctor moved along the seasonal migration of herds in mountain taiga.

Such a period, when reindeer herders' living was stably guaranteed, suddenly ended in 1991. State farms were reorganized into the state company called GUP, and reindeer herders became the members of the GUP. But the operation of the GUP did not go well, and it went into bankruptcy in 1995. It was then succeeded by the municipal company called MUP. Reindeer herders then faced a freedom of choice; either to become a member of MUP, or to be independent.

Such an institutional change in the way of life of reindeer herders has been reflected in the change in the total number of reindeers in Todzhinskii County, which Figure 1 demonstrates.

From Figure 1, we can find two stages of sharp decrease in the reindeer heads;

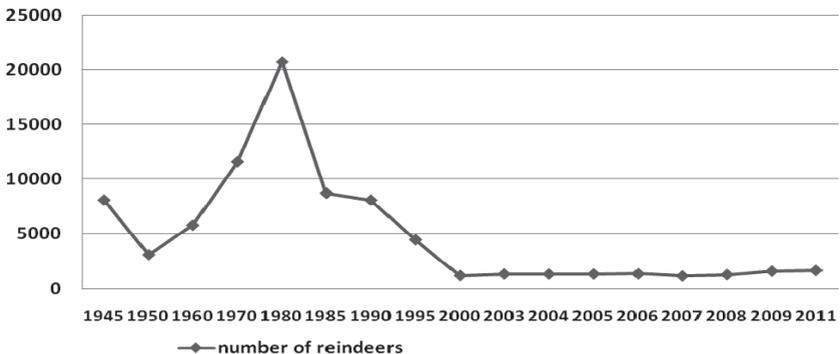


Figure 1 Change in the Number of Reindeers in Todzhinskii County, 1945- 2011

Source: Statistics of Department of Agriculture, Municipal Government of Todzhinskii County.

Note: Datum of number of reindeers in 2011 is as of April 1.

(1) from 1990 to 1995, and (2) from 1995-2000. The stage (1) was the time of quick institutional change due to the Soviet collapse, and the stage (2) corresponded to the time of confusion that the GUP went bankrupt so that many reindeer herders had the most difficult occasion for survival. At this stage, only way for them to live seemed to kill their own reindeers for food.

4 Emergence of Ancestral Commons as an Alternative Institution of Todzu-tyva People

At the federal level of Russia, the law of *rodovaya obshchina* was established in 1991. Though exact details are not well documented until today, some people seemed to have attempted to form reindeer commons following this new law in Tyva Republic. But such attempts did not materialize in the transition period from GUP to MUP in the 1990s.

Looking at the reindeer husbandry in general in Todzhinskii County at the beginning of the 21st century, there were three types of institutional form of reindeer husbandry. One type was MUP named 《Odugen》. Another type was individual/private operation of herders who stopped to be members of MUP. The third type was the practice of GOU NPO which was a state-operated training school for future reindeer herders. In the case of the third type, a herd of reindeers for an educational purpose was a state property.

A new move is now set in the beautifully mountaineous county of Todzu-tyva people. Some people who stopped to be members of MUP, and did not want to be independent, individual reindeer herders either, started to form *obshchina*; ancestral commons. A group of close relatives register to be an *obshchina*. As of our field research in summer 2011, there are five ancestral commons in Todzhinskii County: (i) Oleni, (ii) Kham-Sara-Aldyn-Ivi, (iii) Azas, (iv) Bash-Khem, and (v) Ulug-Dag. Figure 1 demonstrates the details of those commons.

Table 3 Ancestral Commons in Todzhinskii County as of August 2011

Name of the Common	Registered Date	Place of Commons' Registration	Number of Commons including Children	Number of Families	Commoners' Major Activities	Number of Reindeers Belonging to the Members of the Common (01.01.2011)
Олень Olen	April 20, 2010	Адыр-Кежиг Adyr-Kedzhig	32	8	Reindeer -raising	109
Хам-Сара-АлдыңИви Kham-Sara-Adyn-Ivi	June, 2009	Хамсара Kham-Sara	32	5	Reindeer -raising	215
Азас Azas	March 30, 2010	Адыр-Кежиг Adyr-Kedzhig	29	8	Reindeer -raising, gathering	236
Беш-Хем Besh-Khem	May 18, 2010	Адыр-Кежиг Adyr-Kedzhig	18	3	Reindeer -raising, producing of the local handicrafts	53
Улуг-Даг Ulug-Dag	September 21, 2009	Сыстыг-Хем Systyg-Khem	25	4	Hunting, gathering	-

Source: Data of Administration of Todzhinskii County (date and place of commons' registration, number of reindeers) ; Data of Ministry for Economics of the Republic of Tyva (number of commons); The author's interviews with commons in Toora-Khem, Adyr-Kedzhig, Kyzyl, in August 2011.

In terms of the citizenship of commoners in each common, the people of (i) register in the village of Adyr-Kedzhig, the ones of (ii) in the village of Kham-Sara (Chazlar), the ones of (iii) in the village of Adyr-Kedzhig, the ones of (iv) the same, and the ones of (v) in the village of Systyg-Khem.

As Table 3 shows, four out of five commons are related to reindeer husbandry. However, it must be noted that the members of such reindeer commons are not necessarily engaged in reindeer husbandry only. The activities of the common «Azas» include gathering berries and mushrooms. The ones of the common «Bash Khem» include handcraft work. The common «Ulug-Dag» is not related to reindeer husbandry, but is gathering berries and mushrooms. However, one of our interviewees told us that this common has a plan to purchase some number of reindeers in the near future.

Merits of forming an ancestral common are diverse. But some of them include the opening of a bank account under the name of the common, holding an official seal of its own. This makes legal acceptance of donations from outside sponsors possible. Also, privileges to enter universities and other high education establishments for children of commoners exist according to the law about rodovaya obschina.

Table 4 Area of Pastures of Reindeers of the Ancestral Commons in Todzhinskii County

Name of the Common	Area of Pastures of Reindeers (watershed area)
Олень Olen	Biche –Bash river, Ulug-Bash river
Хам-Сара–Алдын-Иви Kham-Sara-Aldyn-Ivi	Bedyi river
Азас Azas	Serlit river, Ak-Attyg-Khol lake
Беш-Хем Besh-Khem	Bash-Khem river

Source: The author's interviews with Svetlana Demkina, the chairperson of the Association of Ancestral Commons in Tyva Republic (Kyzyl, August 2011).

Four Types of Reindeer Husbandry in Todzhinskii County

The whole picture of the reindeer husbandry in Todzhinskii County is shown in Table 3. Categorically, there are, as of summer 2011, four types of reindeer herders; (a) individual/private herders, (b) herders who belong to newly created ancestral commons, (c) herders who perform the role of educators to the youth expected to be reindeer herders in the future, and (d) members of MUP (Odugen) which is the municipal company of reindeer husbandry.

Current State of Reindeer Husbandry in Tyva Republic as a Whole

Currently, as is shown in Table 5, the total number of reindeers in the republic is 2296. About 70% of them are in Todzhinskii County.

As of 2011, once a year every reindeer herder receives 1200 rubles per one reindeer head as a financial support from the republican budget. The members of MUP receive additional 300 rubles from the federal budget per one head. According to Svetlana Demkin, the chairperson of the Association of the Ancestral Commons in the Tyva Republic, the financial support to reindeer herders is much

Table 5 The Number of Reindeers in Counties of Tyva Republic: 2007- 2011

County's Name	2007	2008	2009	2010	01.08. 2011
Kaa-Khemsii	285	324	348	478	574
Kyzylskii	28	–	–	36	47
Todzhinskii	1355	1217	1306	1646	1619
Tere-Kholskii		35	24	58	56
Pii-Khemsii	18	–	–	–	–
Total in the Republic of Tyva	1686	1576	1678	2218	2296

Source: Data of Ministry for Economy of the Republic of Tyva.

Note: Data of Ministry for Economy and of Administration of Todzhinskii County slightly differ from the above.

less than in more economically developed Chukotka and Sakha Republic.

Financial problems, lack of medical care of reindeers, lack of medicine, difficulties of food transportation to reindeer herders' camps are mentioned by reindeer herders as the major problems. According to the Department of Agriculture, Municipal Government of Todzhinskii County, about 48 reindeers died because of lack of medicine in 2011. Reindeer herders killed some of their reindeers to eat the meat or to sell it for family survival and buying medicine for other reindeers.

Reindeer husbandry is not the key priority of agricultural policy of the Tyva Republic Government. However, the Ministry of Economy of the Tyva Republic is preparing the new program to be adopted at the end of 2011 of the support of small-numbered indigenous people (Todzhu-tyva people). Support of reindeer husbandry as traditional natural resources management of Todzhu-tyva people is one of the important issue in this program.

Recommendation to Policy Makers and World Public

Reindeer husbandry does not bring any economic benefits to the republic in terms of regional and local budget revenues. However, it is extremely important from social viewpoint as self employment and food self sufficiency of Todzhu-tyva people. The support of reindeer husbandry is also very important for sustainable natural resources use in tundra and taiga ecosystems.

Recovering (or creating the new) system of medical care of reindeers (including medicine for reindeers) is essential. More financial support per head is needed. The spirits of the law of *rodovaya obschina* have to be materialized in practical life (now mainly on the paper).

Concluding Remarks

Institution of Ancestral commons seem to fit to life of the people engaged in reindeer husbandry after the liquidation of sovkhos system.

Sustainability is not only the one of natural resources use but of culture. Biodiversity has been emphasized in the recent decades in the world scene. In such a context, cultural diversity is very important as well. Reindeer husbandry among Todzu-tyva people in Tyva has to be supported not only as the matter of life or death but also in view of such cultural diversity.

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Photo 1 Reindeers Crossing an Upstream of Kaa-Khem (The Big Yenisei)



Credit: Ivan Demkin, July 2009.

Photo 2 Summer Camp of the Commoners in the Mountain Taiga



Credit: Ivan Demkin, July 2009.

Photo 3 The Town of Toora-Khem Viewed from a Bridge over the Toora-Khem River



Photographed by T. Murota, August 2011.

Photo 4 Meeting of the Commoners and the Co-authors in the Office of the Adyr-Kedzhig Local Administration



Photographed by an administrator of the office, August 2011.

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Abstract

Takeshi MUROTA and Tamara V. LITVINENKO, *Recent Emergence of Ancestral Commons in Southern Siberia: A Case Study of Reindeer Husbandry in Todzhinskii County, Tyva Republic*

Based on field research, this paper describes the recent emergence of the ancestral commons (*rodovaya obshchina* in Russian) of reindeer herders in Tyva Republic, Russia. After the collapse of the state farm (*sovkhos*) system under the Soviet regime, which had previously supported their relatively stable lives, the futures of reindeer herders suddenly became unpromising. As an institutional solution to this problem not only in Tyva but also in other provinces in Russia, the federal government started to allow small groups of people to form ancestral commons with certain privileges. In Tyva, most reindeer herders are Todzu-tyva people who live in the mountain taiga in Todzhinskii County in the northeastern region of the republic. Although the formation of ancestral commons in the county has been late compared with other provinces, five commons have emerged there since the beginning of the 21st century: four related to reindeer husbandry and one to hunting and gathering. This paper describes these five commons using a recent data set.