

Why some peoples avoid the term ‘indigenous people’ as a self-designator and others do not: A Russian case-study.

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Abstract

This paper examines the Russian concept of “indigenous” and its effects. Using an accidental encounter with someone who avoids using the term indigeneity as an introduction to the topic, I investigate the question, under what conditions might the indigenous concept function positively or negatively in the political arena in Russia Federation? The research methodology included literature analysis, and review of Russian census data and the legal framework on indigenous or minority rights. Relative autonomy and low population size are key conditions for understanding the indigenous concept within the Russian institutional framework. The ability of groups to claim the status of indigenous depends to an extent on the degree of political autonomy or titular-ness. Indigenous as a concept in Russia can be seen as a tool for the management of ethnicity and nationality policies as it divides the peoples and prevents the alliance of the aboriginal minorities.

Keywords : Indigenous peoples, Russian Federation, Siberia, ethnic minority,

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1. Introduction

This research stems from a chance encounter in the past. In 2002, at an international conference in Quebec, I met a female scholar from Russia's Sakha Republic, which also happened to be my fieldwork research area. It was my first opportunity to participate in a relatively large conference, and meeting her was an opportunity to discuss some of our common research interests. She identified as Sakha and surprised me by stating that: 'We Sakha are not indigenous people (*korennoi narod*), we are more like the Russian colonizers of Siberia, though in fact we arrived there before the Russians.'

According to the ethno-history of the Sakha it is thought that they moved from the Baikal region to the area of the Lena River sometime between the 10th and 15th Centuries. The arrival of the Sakha affected the inter-ethnic relations and languages of Eastern Siberia, which was an area previously inhabited by the local peoples such as the Evenki, the Eveny and the Yukaghirs. Following the arrival of the Sakha, their language – a Turkic language – became the lingua-franca of the region. In addition, after the establishment of Russian governance, the Sakha were accorded a different status from that of the other peoples mentioned above. During the period of the Soviet Regime, and under a 'nationality-policy', the Sakha region was accorded the status of an autonomous republic, now known as the Sakha Republic in the Russian Federation (Argounova-Low 2012, Takakura 2015).

To understand the situation of the Sakha it is necessary to clarify what has been described as the 'segmentary hierarchy of identity' (Sasaki 1998) in the inter-ethnic relations between them and the other groups in the region. As noted above, my acquaintance at the conference was adamant that the Sakha did not define themselves as an indigenous people. During a subsequent period of field research, I discussed this issue with other Sakha scholars. One among them agreed with the statement by the person at the conference and felt that neither the concept of indigenous peoples nor that of 'colonizer' was appropriate for the Sakha, preferring rather the concept of 'aboriginal (*aborigen*)'. This raises the issue of the difference between the concepts of 'indigenous' and 'aboriginal' in the context of a colonial history in which the Sakha were accorded the identity of an 'indigenous people' (Forsyth 1992, Wolf 1982).

In the contemporary world, the concept of 'indigenous peoples' is viewed positively and is now expanding and developing in Asia and Africa (Hayami 2009, Hudgson 2011, Kurimoto 2009). While the concept was initially viewed quite narrowly as meaning the 'first peoples' who were colonized and made sedentary by immigrants, 'indigenous peoples' is now taken to also mean a suppressed cultural minority within a nation state with a colonial history. Although the concept has generally contributed to the expansion of the indigenous political movement across the world (Hodgson 2011:37), some groups avoid using the term in their political struggles. For example, Hawaiian people refer to themselves as 'sovereign' instead of 'indigenous', because they feel the definition of indigeness has come from the US government (Shimizu 2012: 426) and in Canada the term First Nations is used by the Inuit in their struggle for self-governance (Nadasdy 2012). So, while the term 'indigenous' is adopted in the political arena by some peoples, others avoid it.

My question here is to ask why some peoples refute or avoid the label 'indigenous people' and others accept it? Put another way, my question is: under what conditions might the indigenous concept function positively or negatively in the political arena? In attempting to answer this question I focus on the case of contemporary indigenous affairs in the Russian-Siberian context and by taking a comparative perspective. I will also explore how the use of the concept of 'indigenous peoples' has expanded in the recent past.

The Russian Federation has officially registered more than 190 different ethnic groups (*natsional'nosti*)

as its citizens, which makes it one of the most multi-ethnic states in the world. Due to its history and geopolitical background, the Russian state has developed unique policies towards nationality and indigenous issues, one important feature of which is the concept of institutionalized ethnicity as applied within the citizenship regime of the USSR (Brubaker 1996). All citizens of the USSR were required to select one ethnicity for their personal identification, which was then legitimized by the state. The system of institutionalizing ethnicity was closely related to social welfare and to equalization policies designed to combat socio-economic stratification, leading recent historical studies to refer to the USSR as an example of an early affirmative action style empire (Martin 2001). Alternatively, however, this institutionalization of ethnicity could be viewed as a form of political repression.

2. The problematic nature of Russian statistics

2.1. *Hunters and herders and the concept of indigenous peoples*

The evolution of human adaptation to extreme cold conditions and harsh ecologies raises unique questions for anthropologists about the human-environment relationship. As shown in the seminal work of Sevyan Vainshtein (1980) and Igor Krupnik (1993) indigenous subsistence ranged from inland-hunting, marine-hunting, fishing, reindeer herding, to steppe pastoralism, and has been a central research interest for anthropologists studying the indigenous or native peoples living in Siberia prior to Russian colonization.

Researchers working with the current statistics on population and subsistence practices from official Russian sources are keen to determine the number of people engaged in hunting and herding in Siberia and the ethnic groups they belong to. Although this may seem like a simple research task it is actually quite difficult to complete accurately. This is due in part to the Russian understanding of the term indigenous as well as Russian nationality policy. An extensive body of Russian statistical data has been compiled explicitly for the purpose of maintaining government control. Within these data, particular economic activities such as hunting and herding cannot be easily determined unless the government has independently categorized them, and even then, their small numbers render them relatively statistically insignificant.

The Russian Federation 2002 census data (RFFSGS 2004a: 9, 200, 221, 262) revealed a 'Siberian' population of 39.1 million, or just 27% of the total population of an area encompassing 76.8% of the country. The overwhelming majority (75%) of Siberians, were living in cities while 25% were living in rural areas. This makes Siberia an urban society in terms of residence, with cities scattered across a wide expanse. However, census and yearbook statistics do not adequately describe the reality of a Siberian population and area, since the concepts of Siberia in the academic sense and Siberia in the administrative sense do not overlap. In order to get a more anthropological picture of Siberia, my own reviews and compilation of statistics are based on a combination of data from the Urals Federal District, the Siberian Federal District, and the Far Eastern Federal District. These are three of the seven Federal Districts that are controlled by a President under the system of administrative divisions (republics, krai, and oblasts) that make up the Russian Federation.

The first step to understanding the Siberian hunters and herders is to clarify how they are identified in terms of both anthropology and nationality policies in the former Soviet Union and in present day Russia.

Table 1: The list of Siberian Peoples and the population

#	A	B	C	D	E	F	G					H
							2002 Census*5 [50]					
	Ethnic Groups	Main Geographical Distribution	Book “The Peoples of Siberia” *1 [31]	USSR Titular Ethnic Group in Siberia, RF*2 [5]	USSR Northern Small-Numbered Peoples in Siberia*3 (1926) [25]	Northern Indigenous Small-numbered Peoples of Russian Federation in Siberia*4 (2006) [39]	Total in Russian Federation	Titular ethnic group [D] in Siberia	Northern Indigenous Small-numbered Peoples of RF [F] in Siberia	others in Siberia	ratio of residence in Siberia	2010 Census*6
1	Aleut	Kamchatka Oblast, Koryak AO	+		+	+	540		479		88.7%	482
2	Alutor	Koyrak AO				+	n.d.				—	n.d.
3	Altai	Altai Republic	+	+			67239	66478			98.9%	74238
4	Buryat	Buryatia Republic	+	+			445175	438961			98.6%	461389
5	Chelkan	Altai Republic				+	855		850		99.4%	1181
6	Chukchi	Chukchee AO, Koryak AO	+		+	+	15767		15289		97.0%	15908
7	Chulyum	Tomsk Oblast, Krasnoyarsk Krai				+	656		651		99.2%	355
8	Chuvan	Chukchee AO, Magadan Oblast			+	+	1087		1033		95.0%	1002
9	Dolgan	Krasnoyarsk Krai, Taymir (Dolgan-Nenets) AO, Sakha Republic	+		+	+	7261		7142		98.4%	7885
10	Enets	Taymir (Dolgan Nenets) AO	+		+	+	237		221		93.2%	227
11	Eskimo (Siberian Yupik)	Chukchee AO, Koryak AO	+		+	+	1750		1665		95.1%	1738
12	Evenki	Sakha Republic, Buryatia Republic, Krasnoyarsk Krai, Evenki AO, Chita Oblast	+		+	+	35527		34989		98.5%	37843
13	Even	Sakha Republic, Magadan Oblast, Kamchatka Oblast	+		+	+	19071		18886		99.0%	22383
14	Itel'men	Kamchatka Oblast, Koryak AO	+		+	+	3180		3071		96.6%	3193
15	Kamchadal	Kamchatka Oblast				+	2293		2257		98.4%	1927
16	Kerek	Chukchee AO				+	8		5		62.5%	4
17	Ket	Krasnoyarsk Krai	+		+	+	1494		1385		92.7%	1219
18	Khakas	Khakasiya Republic	+	+			75622	74212			98.1%	72959
19	Khanty	Tumeni Oblast, Khanty-Mansi AO, Yamalo-Nenets AO	+		+	+	28678		28035		97.8%	30943
20	Kumandin	Altai Krai, Altai Republic, Kemerov Oblast				+	3114		3035		97.5%	2892
21	Koryak	Kamchatka Oblast, Koyrak AO, Magadan Oblast	+		+	+	8743		8452		96.7%	7953
22	Mansi	Tumeni Oblast, Khanty-Mansi AO, Sverdlovsk Oblast	+		+	+	11432		11008		96.3%	12269
23	Nagaibak	Cheryabinski Oblast				+	9600		9431		98.2%	8148
24	Nanai	Khabavosk Krai, Primor Oblast, Sakhalin Oblast	+		+	+	12160		11947		98.2%	12003
25	Negidal	Khabarovsk Krai	+		+	+	567		529		93.3%	513

26	Nenets	Yamalo-Nenets AO, Nenets AO, Arkhangerisk Oblast	+		+	+	41302		31449		76.1%	44640	
27	Nganasan	Krasnoyarsk Krai, Taymir (Dolgan Nenets) AO	+		+	+	834		818		98.1%	862	
28	Nivkh	Khabarovsk Krai, Sakhalin Oblast	+		+	+	5162		5044		97.7%	4652	
29	Orochi	Khabarovsk Krai	+		+	+	686		644		93.9%	596	
30	Sakha (Yakut)	Sakha Republic	+	+			443852	439843			99.1%	478085	
31	Sel'kup	Tumeni Oblast, Yamalo-Nenets AO, Tomsk Oblast	+		+	+	4249		4133		97.3%	3649	
32	Shor	Kemerov Oblast, Khakasiya Republic, Altai Republic	+			+	13975		13684		97.9%	12888	
33	Siberian Tatar	Tumeni Oblast	+				9611	9380			97.6%	6779	
34	Soyot	Buryatia Republic				+	2769		2762		99.7%	3608	
35	Taz	Primor Oblast				+	276		264		95.7%	274	
36	Telengit	Altai Republic				+	2399		2372		98.9%	3712	
37	Teleut	Kemerov Oblast				+	2650		2639		99.6%	2643	
38	Tozha-Tova	Tuva Republic				+	4442		4438		99.9%	1858	
39	Tuva	Tuva Republic	+	+			239000	236853			99.1%	263934	
40	Tofalar	Irukutsk Oblast	+		+	+	837		782		93.4%	762	
41	Tubalar	Altai Republic				+	1565		1563		99.9%	1965	
42	Udehe	Primor Oblast, Khabarovsk Krai	+		+	+	1657		1622		97.9%	1496	
43	Uilta (Orok)	Sakhalin Oblast	+		+	+	346		327		94.5%	295	
44	Ul'ch	Khabavosk Krai	+		+	+	2913		2852		97.9%	2765	
45	Yukhagir	Sakha Republic, Magadan Oblast	+		+	+	1509		1394		92.4%	1603	
	#Veps	Karelia Republic				+	8240				—	5963	
	#Saami	Murmansk Oblast			+	+	1991				—	1771	
	Ukrainian						2942961		1011162		34.4%		
	Tatar						5544990		935022		16.9%		
	German						597212		403373		67.5%		
	Bashkir						1673389		291110		17.4%		
	Russian						115889107		33239700		28.7%		
	others in Siberia								1746488		—		
	Population Total							1,265,727	237,147	37,626,855			
	The ration of the total Siberian population (39,129,729) in 2002							3.23%	0.61%	96.16%			

Source: *1: Levin & Potapov 1956. *2: The Constitution of USSR and the Constitution of Russian Federation. *3: Pika 1999: xxx. *4: Law#3. *5: RFFSGS2004b, 2005. *6: http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis_itogi1612.htm

Table 1 is a list of aboriginal Siberian ethnic groups. Row C shows an excerpt from *The Peoples of Siberia*, published in 1956 (Levin and Potapov 1963). This encyclopedic reference work was one of the most influential Soviet-era ethnographic studies that focused on Siberian peoples. Its impact on domestic and foreign research is so great that any reference to aboriginal Siberians in the field of anthropology includes the ethnic groups named here. The traditional livelihood of these Siberian ethnic groups is by hunting and herding.

In the former Soviet Union, ethnic groups were divided into two categories. The 'northern small-numbered peoples (USSR)' shown in Row E, consisted of 26 ethnic groups that the Council of People's Commis-

sar Soviet People’s Committee (Soviet Narodnykh Kommissarov) decided in 1926 were in need of state protection and socio-economic government welfare, based on criteria such as population, social structure, subsistence economy, public sanitation, literacy, and education. In contrast, the ‘ethnic groups (USSR=Russia),’ shown in Row D, were identified as being ‘more developed’ and were therefore granted the right of self-government as autonomous republics.

This categorization has carried over into the Russian Federation. As indicated in Row D, titular ethnic groups in the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation have remained basically unchanged. The only difference is that what were once autonomous republics in the Soviet Union are now the republics that make up the Russian Federation. In contrast, the number of indigenous small-numbered peoples has shot up dramatically. The ‘northern indigenous small-numbered peoples’ in the Russian Federation, shown in Row F, are founded on the original indigenous small-numbered peoples shown in Row E and have been added as newly acknowledged, self-proclaimed ethnic groups that emerged after the rise of nationalism and the collapse of the Soviet Union. (‘Indigenous small-numbered peoples,’ will refer to the groups in Row F throughout the rest of this chapter.)

An indigenous law enacted in 1999 applied to all of Russia (RL #1), including the Caucasus and Siberia (Yoshida, 2000), defined 45 indigenous small-numbered peoples (korennyye malochislennyye narody) with populations under 50,000 (RL #2), thereby associating the concept of the indigenous peoples in the Russian Federation with populations of small size. This was the basis for a list of northern indigenous small-numbered peoples established in 2006 (RL #3)⁽¹⁾. These people are grouped together based on similarities in language and other elements of traditional culture such as their subsistence economies, and/or on their socio-economic status. According to the 2002 census data that is based on these definitions, there were roughly 1,530,000 aboriginal Siberians comprising no more than 3.9% of the total Siberian population. At that time



Figure 1 Current Russian Federation territorial-administrative map. Each republic, Autonomous Okrug, and Autonomous Oblasti are titled by an ethnonym, while other Krai, Oblasts are titled by place or regional name.

there were also roughly 1,270,000 people in titular ethnic groups and 240,000 in other northern indigenous small-numbered peoples (See Figure 1).

2.2. Occupational structure and subsistence economy

Although we have a rough idea of the size of the Siberian hunting and herding population, not everyone in titular and indigenous small-numbered peoples is actually engaged in those activities in the traditional sense. In fact, many have entered the manufacturing, distribution, service, and cultural education sectors under Soviet era modernization programs. However, labor statistics were normally collected at the administrative and regional levels and were not broken down by ethnic group. Moreover, hunting and herding were reclassified as modern industries in terms of the organization of labor and means of production, and were grouped together with agriculture. This makes it almost impossible to count the population engaged strictly in hunting and stock farming, although we can venture some educated estimate as follows.

The two categorizations (“northern small-numbered peoples” and “titular ethnic groups”) employed during the Soviet era and in Russian nationality policies have affected how statistical data, which have socio-economic implications, are collected for each ethnic group. Data on population, forms of employment, and assets are collected for each ethnic group within the indigenous small-numbered peoples, but not for titular

Table 2: The distribution of occupations among 15-64 year old indigenous small-numbered peoples in northern indigenous small-numbered peoples' collective living areas

	Occupation	Ratio	Sector	
1	Farming and herding, hunting, and forestry	23.21%	Primary sector of industry	33.7%
2	Fishing and aquaculture	8.27%		
3	Food processing	2.28%		
4	Natural resource	1.73%		
5	Education	22.51%	Public sector	52.6%
6	Healthcare	9.35%		
7	Public services	9.03%		
8	Military, Police, government	6.15%		
9	Transportation	3.74%		
10	Electricity, gas, and water	1.80%		
11	Building	1.82%		
12	Retailing, Mechanics	4.27%		
13	Hotel and restaurant	0.90%		
14	Finance	0.41%		
15	Estate	3.48%		
16	Domestics	0.02%		
17	Others	1.04%		

Source: RFFSGS, 2005: 397-445

ethnic groups in the republics - where data are compiled only for the regional administrative unit as whole.

Table 2 shows the distribution of occupations among 15-64 year old indigenous small-numbered peoples men and women. The largest occupational group is ‘farming and herding, hunting and forestry’ at 23.2%, followed by ‘education’ at 22.5%, and ‘healthcare’ at 9.4% of the total. Here, I include ‘fishing and aquaculture’ and ‘food processing’ in hunting and herding, which means that 33.8% of the population is en-

gaged in these activities. It is important to note that this figure of 33.8% is not based on the total indigenous small-numbered peoples of 240,000 counted in the 2002 census. Rather, it is based on the population of the rural priority areas, where the indigenous small-numbered peoples live in high concentrations, and which are officially categorized as the 'northern indigenous minority collective living areas.'

The interesting point in Table 2 is that 52.6% of the population is employed in occupations that were introduced under the Soviet modernization policies in the areas of education, healthcare, electricity gas and water, transportation and communication, government affairs and public services; combined with farming, forestry, and fishing. This division into centrally controlled state-run farms (with occupations in fisheries and public services) was typical of the rural occupational structure throughout the former Soviet Union. Most rural communities in Siberia today demonstrate comparatively sedentary residential patterns that were established in the 1950s and 60s and which contrast with the nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyles of the many traditional hunting and herding groups (Vakhtin 1994).

Although labor statistics indicate that 30% of indigenous small-numbered peoples are engaged in traditional livelihoods such as hunting and herding, this does not reflect participation in these activities by people normally in other jobs. In an ethnographic study I undertook in the northern Sakha Republic in Siberia, almost all aboriginal men in rural areas took paid leave from their regular jobs to go river-fishing or to hunt wild reindeer, 'big horns', and other large game. These activities lasted anywhere from a day to several weeks, and in some cases included camping out. The game was used for personal consumption, gift-exchange, or sold. While some aboriginal groups may have settled into modern lifestyles in the Soviet Union, they also still continue hunting and fishing as economic activities, albeit with social and recreational components.

3. Indigenous laws and rights in Russia

3.1. Territorial autonomy and indigeneity

It may seem counterintuitive for the Russian government to set aside certain regions specifically for indigenous people, but giving this form of consideration to indigenous rights and social welfare, helped to smooth the implementation of related policies within the multiethnic society. The idea of creating indigenous small-numbered peoples collective living areas was fixed in law in 1987 towards the end of the Soviet era, and was carried forward by the Russian Federation, which in 1993 formed the indigenous small-numbered peoples' collective living areas (RL #4, RFFSGS, 2005: 562). The underlying principle for this policy was 'territorial autonomy' within the Soviet Union and this justified the creation of national republics, autonomous republics and autonomous *okrugs* and *krai*, which were named after ethnic groups. In addition, the ethnic zones and ethnic villages that had been created in the 1930s and 40s but were later abolished, were revived following the collapse of the Soviet Union (Forsyth 1992: 285).

Territorial autonomy may also be seen as the basis for the legal acknowledgment of indigenous rights within the law of traditional nature-use (*prirodoprizovanie*) by the indigenous peoples (RL #5); that law recognizes special indigenous rights to raise reindeer and to fish and hunt (including for big game). However, conflicts often arise because these traditional activities take place across natural environments that often overlap with modern economic development zones for the exploitation of oil, natural gas, timber, and other resources. Nonetheless, the law aims to protect indigenous rights to engage in traditional activities and also to protect the environment where such indigenous activities are concentrated. This paper will not discuss how this law and related policies were affected by U.N. declarations and other international standards, but

the point to note here is that the law recognizes indigenous subsistence activities as being part of the preservation of cultural identity and not simply as part of mainstream economic activities (RL #5: Article 4). The law also indicates that in the multiethnic system of the Russian Federation, the traditional livelihood activities of the northern indigenous, small-numbered peoples (specifically, reindeer herding, hunting and fishing - including for marine mammals) (RL #5: Article 10) hold a separate status from those in general agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry, and the fishing industry.

The significance of this becomes apparent when we compare how hunting and herding by titular ethnic groups is treated in Siberia. Like the northern indigenous small-numbered peoples, titular ethnic groups have traditionally hunted game. But their farming of horses, cattle, sheep, goats, and camels, which falls within the cultural historical sphere of inner Asia, is not given the same special status that is afforded to reindeer herding by the indigenous small-numbered peoples. Farming, herding and fishing activities by titular ethnic groups are statistically included as the activities of those in the multi-ethnic administrative regions, not as activities by the by indigenous small-numbered peoples.

Attempts to combine the two categories of aboriginal Siberians for analysis is especially problematic in the Sakha Republic and the Republic of Buryatia in Eastern Siberia, where the indigenous small-numbered peoples and the titular ethnic groups are intermingled. Data on the indigenous small-numbered peoples does not include titular ethnic groups, and data on the republics does not reveal any differences between the Sakha and the Russian socio-economic activities. The Sakha republic is 45.5% Sakha and 41.2% Russian, while Buryatia republic is 27.8% Buryat and 67.8% Russian.

The distinction between the titular ethnic groups and the indigenous small-numbered peoples reflects the organization of production after the collapse of the socialist regime. In the market economy, the Russian government has promoted the private agricultural sector. Instead of the gigantic state farm system, a small and flexible market-oriented organization was established with the government providing two new legal structures for the organization of production. One structure is the farmer's collective (*krest'ianskoe khozaistvo*) that is organized by a few households for agriculture and animal husbandry; the other is the Clan Community or *obshchina* which is also organized by one or just a few households but which covers reindeer herding, hunting, and fishing. The law covering the *obshchina* does not restrict eligibility to ethnicity but does restrict the traditional type of subsistence activity by indigenous, small-numbered peoples. As a result, the farmer's collective rather than *obshchina* covers the indigenous animal husbandry of horses and cattle by the titular ethnic groups in this new regime.

Thus, statistical boundaries and categories that have been set up according to the new post-Soviet government agenda present obstacles for us in clearly identifying the characteristics of the indigenous Siberian hunting and herding economy as a whole.

3.2. *Titular ethnic groups and autonomy*

One of the key factors relating to the concept of aboriginal peoples in Russia is associated with the titular ethnic groups. The concept of 'titular' is part of the Soviet legacy. As the dictionary explains, titular means having the title of a position but not the attendant responsibilities, duties or power of that position. In the context of the nationality policy of the former USSR, ethnicity was often given as a prefix to the name of a regional administrative body, as in the case of the Uzbek Socialist Republic; and the Sakha (Yakut) Autonomous Socialist Republic. Certainly, these titular states lacked diplomatic and military powers outside the USSR, however, certain limited powers were granted as long as those did not contradict the policies of

the central government. In this context, the titular ethnic groups have had, and have, some form or degree of autonomy (Kuoljok 1985, Pika 1999).

The Soviet government, which preferred terminology legitimized by socialist ideology, sometimes categorized the titular ethnic groups as a (socialist) nation, because the terms Socialist Republic and Autonomous Socialist Republic were not simply levels of regional local administration but rather regional states with their own governments. Therefore, from the viewpoint of the Russian government, titular ethnic groups were excluded from the category of indigenous small-numbered peoples and any related level of rights because they already had been given 'state' level autonomy as a form. In some sense, this level of sovereignty was nominally or informally given to the peoples by the Soviet regime. While the concept of sovereignty normally refers to the supreme power of political decision making held by a state, the soviet form of weaker sovereignty described above is more accurately referred to as titular sovereignty (Takakura 2009b). This titular sovereignty regime has resulted in the formation of a political body classified as a republic inside the Russian Federation. As such, the republic has its own government whose political jurisdiction and responsibilities range not only over ethnic autonomy, but also over the administrative affairs among several ethnic groups across its territory.

Strictly speaking, the Russian Federal government does not presently promote the titular concept but adopts the Russian concept of indigenous peoples and distinguishes the indigenous small-numbered peoples from the titular groups. While it is significant that the Russian government defines more clearly the concept of indigenous people, the former Soviet idea of the titular group is not part of current legal debates.

3.3. *The impact of small-numbered peoples*

Another key factor relating to the Russian concept of indigenous is that the population of the group should be less 50,000. During the Soviet regime, only the category of indigenous small-numbered peoples equated with the current concept of indigenous peoples. When the law of the Russian indigenous peoples was adopted in 1999, the limitation on population size was introduced and the number of applicable ethnic groups was increased, because the Russian indigenous concept is not limited to Siberia and the Russian Far East but includes all of Russia including European Russia and the Caucasus.

As a result, the number of Russian (not just Siberian) indigenous peoples increased. Some ethnic groups in the arctic region of European Russia, and in the mountainous regions of Southern Siberia and the Caucasus are now registered as indigenous people. Also, some of these indigenous peoples were formerly classified as a sub-ethnic group, but later became part of the new indigenous peoples. This shows that the definition of indigenous peoples was largely decided by the government rather than by the peoples themselves.

As shown in Table 1, a total of fourteen ethnic groups were newly registered as indigenous peoples in Siberia (#2, 5, 7, 15, 16, 20, 23, 32, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 41). The number of groups of recognized Siberian indigenous peoples increased from twenty-five in 1926 to thirty-nine 2006 (an increase of 156%). However, the average population of these new indigenous people was just 3,182, while that of the former classification of indigenous peoples (in row D) was 8,292 (a decrease of 38% per group). That is to say, the number of registered indigenous peoples increased by 156%, while the population per group decreased by 38% - all as a result of current Russian indigenous policies.

The recent emerging concepts of ethnicity and indigeneity are complicated by the historic-political processes which requires examination. For example, in Table 1, we see one group with the name Kamchadal

(#15 in row A) with a population of 2,293. This group was not included in the seminal work *Peoples of Siberia* (in row C) nor in the category of Indigenous small-numbered peoples of the USSR (in row E) but has been recently registered as an indigenous people. However, it is well known that the term Kamchadal was used previously for the current Itel'men people (#14 in row A). Historically, the Itel'men people were known as the Kamchadal from Russia, but the current term Itel'men as an ethnic designation was adopted in 1920s to accord with the nationality policy of the USSR. What does this recent formulation of ethnicity mean for the contemporary indigenous peoples?

The answer to this question lies in the complex history of ethnic designation and Russian colonization. Kamchadal was originally used as an ethnonym by the 18th century Russian colonizers to apply to the indigenous sedentary fishermen in Kamchatka whose descendants include the current Itel'men and the Kamchadal peoples. One of the local sub-groups of this people self-designated as Itel'men rather than as Kamchadal and succeeded in having this ethnonym included in Soviet nationality policies after 1926. However, the other local groups were not sympathetic to the approach of the Itel'men, since their communities were made up of people who were the product of inter-marriage with the Russian colonizers. In 1927 the Soviet government also re-classified them as 'Russified' and deprived them of their status as Indigenous small-numbered peoples. However, through the development of Russian immigration during the Soviet period, these other groups have retained their ethnicity that is different from both that of the Itel'men and of the Russians. After the introduction of Perestroika⁽²⁾ these people (with a population of 9,000 by 1994) adopted Kamchadal as their ethnic designation (Murashenko 1997). Their population decreased from 9000 in 1994 to 2293 in 2002 and the small size of their populations as well as their ethnic identity and cultural history, is a key element in understanding the government's classification of them as indigenous peoples. In this way the indigenous policies of the Russian government resulted in an increase in the number of registered indigenous peoples with small populations.

4. Conclusion

Holding relative autonomy and having small populations are key for understanding the concept of indigenous within the Russian institutional framework. The ability of groups to claim the status of indigenous depends to an extent on the degree of political autonomy or titular-ness. The small size of the populations implies that the state officially recognizes some particular populations as bearing the cultural identity and characteristics as members of defined groups. There are difficulties in counting the populations, even in Russia. However, the government recognizes some minority populations inside its territory. The claim for a minority group to be seen as indigenous people in Russia can be supported by its degree of aboriginality and its political status as an ethnic group that has historically and culturally specific ways to relate to the land or the territory.

Why did the titular ethnic groups reject the indigenous concept? The reason is that they had already been given similar or more rights than had those who accepted the indigenous concept. Those who had already gained titular sovereignty did not need to explore gaining rights as indigenous peoples. While some people do explore their minority rights in the titular sovereignty regime, this is within the administrative system of their own territory and ethnicities. The proposed definition of indigenous peoples under the control of the central government includes that their population would be fixed at no more than 50,000. Theoretically then, if the population of a group registered as indigenous increased to be over this limit, they

would lose their status as indigenous.

On the other hand, those who insist on their minority rights as indigenous people, could explore obtaining their own exclusive rights (Magomedov 2019). However, this would be a double-edged sword as the Russian indigenous concept may prevent them from associating socio-politically with two categories of ethnic minorities of “northern small-numbered peoples” and “titular ethnic groups”. The administrative categorization originated from the Soviet Union survived to the current legal framework distinguishing the “indigenous” reindeer pastoralism with “non-indigenous” horse-cattle pastoralism. The reindeer herders, horse-cattle breeders and their families reside together in the local community level. As shown in the episode in the introduction, there is a deep emotional identity discrepancy among the aboriginal peoples in two categories. Two categories hinder the integrated regional development of rural economy. The Russian indigenous Law of 2002 applies not only in Siberia, but also in the North and the Caucasus, which might have political implications for the case in Chechenia. Due to the legacy of the Soviet nationality policies, the Indigenous small-numbered peoples developed their indigenous rights within the organization of the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON). However, there yet emerged the political alliance covering all indigenous peoples in Russia including the Caucasus.

These two political developments in Russia are similar to processes within the world of indigenous politics. The current expansion of the indigenous concept to Asia and Africa are similar to the case of the Kamchadal in Russian indigenous politics. On the other hand, the titular sovereignty case is similar to that of the avoidance of the term “indigenous” in Hawaii.

In conclusion, it would appear that the concept of indigenous in Russia can be seen as a tool for the management of ethnicity and nationality policies as the way it is defined divides the peoples and prevents the alliance of the aboriginal minorities. However, there are also positive aspects to the adoption of the indigenous concept. The recent Russian laws and acts have seen achievements in the area of indigenous rights to an international standard. The indigenous concept was largely developed by international organizations, but can also be adopted within the legal setting of a state when the national context is part of that process.

Notes

- (1) This concept also applies to the indigenous peoples of Europe and northern Russia.
- (2) The policy reconstructing the economic and political system in the former Soviet Union in 1980s, which resulted in the end of central planning.

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