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## **Transcultural Interactions and Elites in Late Pre-Soviet and Early Soviet Chukotka, 1900–1931**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The article explored the history of Chukotka's people during the late Tsarist and early Soviet periods focusing on regional interaction patterns between indigenous and non-indigenous actors, and their change after the establishment of the new regime. The restriction and ultimate abolition of free trade in the region resulted in dissatisfaction voiced by Chukotka's pre-Soviet elites. Much attention was devoted to individual actors who were members of the regional transcultural elites during the period under study such as Frank, a Luoravetlan (Chukchi) shaman from Uelen and possibly Rytkeu's grandfather, and several non-native traders who integrated into indigenous societies and became part of the elites. The new authorities first compromised and negotiated with these people including them into the Soviet system of self-government, but then opted for excluding the pre-Soviet elites from most regional interactions. The overall policy was inconsistent and had much to do with the major shifts in Soviet politics. The article is based on the less explored indigenous and non-indigenous sources.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The indigenous peoples of Chukotka, Asia's northeastern extremity, retained their independence from the Russian Empire and were recognized as semi-independent by the state. This means that the new Soviet government had to subjugate the region and its popula-

tion. Chukotka was incorporated into the Soviet state completely only in the 1950s with the end of collectivization of reindeer herders. Unlike other Siberian regions, Chukotka was not subjected to mass settler colonization (Sablin and Savelyeva 2011) and indigenous peoples comprised the majority of the regional population until the 1950s (Thompson 2008: 4–5). This study seeks to explore the late pre-Soviet and early Soviet periods of regional history, to define major actors and to track their interactions' determinative for shaping regional social, cultural and political environment.

Besides well-known sources, this study relies on several less explored materials. The first group of sources includes indigenous memories about the past published in the 2000s (Krupnik 2000; Bogoslovskaya *et al.* 2008). Many people interviewed by Krupnik and other researchers left valuable accounts on transcultural interactions and changes they witnessed. This group of sources is treated as oral history: most of the material was used when studying the perception of changes in indigenous communities.

Autobiographic non-fiction works of indigenous writers such as Rytkeu published in the post-Soviet period form another group of sources (Rytkeu 2010; Ayvangu 2008; Dyachkov 2006). Despite their unique historical value there are, however, some problems with using them. This especially relates to Rytkeu who lived most of his life outside Chukotka and often fictionalized his memories. This group of sources is also treated as oral history (Sablin 2012).

Another major source for the late 1920s and early 1930s is a report prepared by an NKVD Border Guard officer Kaltan who visited the region in 1930–1931. This document was not meant to be published and the author was extremely critical in his conclusions about the first years of the Soviet rule (Kaltan 2008). The consequences of this criticism for the author are unknown.

These sources provide a new perspective on the transitional period between the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union and challenge the evolutionary development of Soviet policies narrated by Soviet authors and sometimes repeated in international literature.

From a transcultural perspective Chukotka is viewed as a zone of interactions between different groups and individuals rather than as a geographic region (Fig. 1). Natural geographic conditions – arctic

and subarctic climate; remoteness from the European, Siberian and Far Eastern centers of Russian settlement; and wild life – are nevertheless very important for understanding regional affairs. Major indigenous identities were based not on ethnicity or religion like in Europe, but on occupations and corresponding landscapes and animals: the reindeer herders of the tundra and the sea mammal hunters of the coast, the *Ankalyn* (costal man) and *Chauchu* (rich in reindeer) in Chukchi terms, were the main groups of population (Sablin 2012).

Non-indigenous sources heavily rely on external ethnic-based identities and therefore the latter cannot be left aside. A comment here, however, is needed. The Eskimo of the region who spoke three distinct languages (Central Siberian Yupik, Naukan Yupik and Sireniki Eskimo) did not view themselves as an ethnic group. Nevertheless, by other groups of regional population they were often seen as such. For the Chukchi (Luoravetlan), who were always viewed from ‘the outside’ as a separate group, the ethnic dimension of identity based on the language, religion and collective historical memories was rather important (Krupnik 2000). In terms of occupation, most Eskimos and some Chukchis belonged to the *Ankalyn* who were often not differentiated in ethnic terms by newcomers. The *Chauchu* mainly included Chukchis and Koryaks (although they did not recognize each other as such), whereas Even and Yukaghir reindeer herders had been never called this word. The maps (Figs 2, 3) show regional groups based on ethnic division, as occupational division here would be less informative visually.

In the pre-Soviet legal system it were the Chukchi who were officially semi-independent from Russia – according to the Law of 1822, the Chukchi formed a special group of those ‘not quite dependent on the government’, paid tributes of their own free will and were free to administer themselves (The Statute 1830) – but in practice all *Ankalyns* and most *Chauchus* enjoyed the *de facto* independence.

The periodization used in this study is based on the character of relation between the Russian state and the indigenous population. During the first period (1900–1919) there was no real state authority in Chukotka and indigenous peoples could interact with practically an unlimited number of internal and external actors. The second pe-

riod (1919–1931) was the time of transition between the Russian Empire and the totalitarian Soviet state, when external contacts became limited, but the new government was still ready to negotiate and compromise with regional elites, the period when attempts were made to bring about changes with the established way of life being disrupted as little as possible (Forsyth 1992: 265).

### 1900–1919

The population of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Chukotka can be roughly divided into two groups: nomadic and sedentary, with the *Chauchu*, comprising the majority of the former, and the latter consisting of the *Ankalyn* as well as of the Russian and Russified villagers of the riverside (Forsyth 1992: 247; Gray 2005: 84). The Russian authorities in the region were represented by about a dozen of Cossacks and functionaries under command of the head of the Anadyr district. Although in 1909 the administrative structure was expanded through the establishment of the Chukotka district with the center at Provideniya Bay (since 1912 in Uelen), there is no evidence of any significant increase in Russian personnel (Korzukhin 1909: 27; Gorovsky 1914: 10; Krushanov 1987: 140).

The *Chauchus* who travelled with their herds throughout Chukotka communicating with the two subgroups of sedentary population and with each other were the most mobile group in the region. The *Ankalyns* also traveled, although not so extensively. They visited settlements in Chukotka, Alaska, on St. Lawrence Island and the Diomedede Islands (Inaliq and Imaqliq) and through the Alaskan Eskimo had indirect connections with other American indigenous groups (Bogoras 1904–1909: 188, 228, 642).

After wars and skirmishes between and within different groups of population had ended, trade became the main objective of regular interactions. Besides trading the products of their economies, the *Ankalyns* offered articles brought by the Americans and Europeans to the Chukchi Peninsula, whereas the *Chauchus* brought the goods from the zones of Russian presence on the Anadyr and Kolyma (Bogdanovich 1901: 20; Ivanov 1902: 12; Sverdrup 1930: 266–268; Krupnik 1989: 69; 2000: 226–228; Rytkeu 2010: 270–271, 370–371). Since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the coastal

trade was dominated by Americans in spite of the restrictions from the Russian government and the collapse of the whaling industry in 1907–1914. Although trade with Russians on the Kolyma and Anadyr continued, it was far less active than that on the coast (Nielsen 2007: 157; Korguz 2009: 372–376; Slezkin 1994: 99–101, 106–108).

The several decades of whaling and walrus hunting resulted in a major decline in provisions, which created a strong demand for imported foodstuffs. Up to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century regional food supplies were supplemented with tea, sugar, tobacco, alcohol and other goods which by no means can be viewed as indispensable to life. Since the 1900s cereals, flour and canned food occupied an increasingly larger share in the imports and became important for survival (Krupnik 1989: 55; 2000: 195; Kaltan 2008: 305). Firearms and motor vessels became necessary for a successful hunt, as sea mammals were less in numbers and further from the shore. The use of labor-saving mechanisms was also needed as poor nutrition provided hunters with less energy. Wider usage of firearms and motor vessels by the Chukchis and Eskimos exerted extra pressure on sea mammal populations (Krupnik 1989: 79). The decline of walrus and whale populations had negative consequences for the fur-bearing animal populations: on the one hand, their nutritive base declined, on the other hand, fur hunt increased greatly due to the market increase and due to the reduction of sea mammal product supply and foreign demand.

The indigenous people also bought the articles of no particular economic utilization. The quality and variety of goods present in local households were of course dependent on the income: poor families hardly had any manufactured objects, whereas the surroundings of rich families could be considered luxurious. In 1901, Bogoras noted that ‘Kuvar [see below] had everything, even a phonograph that was used by his daughter to record Eskimo, Chukchi and other songs’ (Krupnik 2000: 457).

A major development in trade operations and a further influx of foreigners began after the discovery of gold in Alaska. The increase of population and demand for food and clothing across the Bering Strait increased trade volume, whereas first geologists and gold prospectors from Russia and America appeared in Chukotka in 1900 and 1902 respectively (Vdovin 1965: 170). Although since 1900 the monopoly right for gold prospection belonged to a retired Russian

Colonel Vonlyarlyarsky, the Northeast Siberia Company (NESC) established by him in 1902 was under strong influence of the American capital, and employed many American, Chinese and Korean workers. The NESC sponsored several geological expeditions led by Bogdanovich, Ivanov (an agronomist, who passed himself off as a geologist), Korzukhin (1907) and Pfaffius (Vonlyarlyarsky 1913: 53). Tulchinsky who was sent to investigate the company's activities in 1905, however, found out that it did not have any success in mining operations and mainly engaged in trade, including the illegal alcohol trade. Through two functionaries who proclaimed themselves Russian officials (Podgorsky and Lipinsky) the company charged foreigners for prospecting in Chukotka, sold 'alcohol trading rights' to local population and supposedly was responsible for several violent crimes against Russian authorities (Tulchinsky 1906: 37, 44, 58–59, 65, 70, 75). Indeed, it is most likely that the NESC abused its duty-free import rights (Vonlyarlyarsky 1913: 25) and established three warehouses in the Provideniya Bay, St. Lawrence Bay and in Keniskun as trading stations, whereas 'prospectors' of the NESC were trading agents. Although during the Russian-Japanese War the NESC was assigned by the government to supply Chukotka, the absence of results in the field of gold mining and the negative image of the NESC in Russian press resulted in refusal to prolong its concession after 1910 (Krushanov 1987: 139; Owen 2008).

Americans continuously visited several *Ankalyn* settlements (Unazik, Uelen, Keniskun, Naukan, villages at the Provideniya Bay) and often had permanent local trade partners who distributed imported goods throughout Chukotka. Some of them grew very influential and became a major part of local and regional elites. The Eskimo Kuvar (Kovar or Goharren), the 'master' of Unazik (Krupnik 2000: 457), for example, was well-known to both Americans and Russians, with whom he maintained good relations. He had wooden storehouses (Ivanov 1902: 41, 244–245), several boats and hired workers. His assistance to Bogoras and other visitors was recognized and rewarded with souvenirs. Tulchinsky also reported that Kuvar, at the request of Russian officials, protected Russians from American abuse. His assistance was quite important for Tulchinsky himself. Podgorsky expressed hatred towards Kuvar supposedly be-

cause of his opposition to alcohol trade, but could not do anything against him, which can be seen as a further sign of Kuvar's authority in the region (Tulchinsky 1906: 34–37).

Whalers, traders and travelers often hired locals for land expeditions and working on board (Krupnik 2000: 495). These workers travelled to Alaska, San Francisco and other whaling bases, especially when the ice cover prevented the ships from returning to the workers' home settlements. In America they wintered and then returned home. Some stayed longer: an *Ankalyn* from Uelen named Frank<sup>1</sup> worked as a dishwasher in San Francisco for three years; another *Ankalyn*, Cornelius from the Provideniya Bay, visited Washington, D.C., and New Bedford (Bockstoce 1986: 202). Ryt-kheu (2010: 227) states that his grandfather Mletkyn also worked on a whaler and even participated in the Ethnographic Exhibit at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893.

Trade soon became more organized. In the 1910s – early 1920s there were several trading companies and many individual traders operating in Chukotka, including the Vladivostok-based Churin Company with a trading station in Keniskun, the Seattle-based Olaf Swenson Company, F. I. Karaev and the famous Hudson's Bay Company. These companies and individuals had broad networks with native and non-native representatives across the region. Although the competition, especially on the peninsula, was extremely strong (Sverdrup 1930: 261, 280), most of the traders became very powerful. One of the native trade agents, Alitet (a Chukchi), was still influential in the early Soviet period and became a prototype of the central character of a popular Soviet book about Chukotka (Syomushkin 1952). Among the non-native traders that settled in Chukotka at this time one should mention Bent Wall (a Norwegian) and Magomet Dobriev (an Ingush). Wall and Swenson were among the prospectors of the NESC who soon turned into traders. Gorovskiy, who met Wall in 1911 near Cape Serdtse-Kamen, described him as 'a simple prospector', 'a man with almost no means, who lived now in a rich Chukchi's house (*yaranga*) and was married to his daughter' (Gorovsky 1914: 74). Nineteen years later Wall still lived near the cape with his family, but now he was well-known in the entire region. Although in 1925 Wall lost both of his hands in an

accident with dynamite and since then depended upon Tynale (his brother-in-law), he still was very active. He had a plan of organizing a fur farm and wanted to stay in Chukotka as a naturalized citizen. Together with Tynale and Tynale's brother Tynano, who also used to be employed as trade agents, all three were among the richest, most influential and experienced people in northwestern Chukotka in the 1920s and early 1930s (Kaltan 2008: 296, 301–304).

Chukotka of the 1900s – 1910s was an attractive destination for various scientific expeditions, including the famous ethnographic Jesup North Pacific Expedition carried out by Bogoras, the Arctic coast survey under Tolmachev (1909–1910), hydrographic expeditions on the icebreakers *Taymyr* and *Vaygach* (1910–1915) (Starokadomsky 1916), archaeological and ethnographic fieldwork by Sakari Pälsi (1917) (Gurvich 1982: 114–127). The imperial government also organized several inspection expeditions led by Buturlin (1907), Kallinikov and Unterberger (see Kallinikov 1912; Unterberger 1912). Some individual adventurers like Gorovsky or Niedieck (1909) also visited Chukotka. The success of all land expeditions and travels and those voyages that implied wintering was very much dependent on the assistance of the local population whose hospitality in the harsh natural environment literally was a guarantee of survival. Tulchinsky, for example, met Oskar Iden-Zeller (who is often regarded as one of the first German ethnographers) who came here from Europe on foot and had nothing except the things and clothes he received from the Chukchi. His main objective, however, was not ethnography, but a bet of 15,000 DM that awaited him in Berlin. He also did not intend to come to Chukotka, but had to do so because of the war with Japan that made him reject the idea of going to Vladivostok (Tulchinsky 1906: 51). Russian old settlers also helped travelers (Swenson 1951: 187).

The newcomers in return often helped the locals, especially during frequent famines and in medical cases (Bogdanovich 1901: 22; Gorovsky 1914: 4–5, 40–47; Korn 1926: 71–72; Sverdrup 1930: 259, 289, 303). Giving presents to the hosts was usual, even though it was not mandatory (Swenson 1951: 63). Mutual assistance between different indigenous settlements and families was also com-

mon place (Rytkeu 1974: 71; Krupnik 2000: 228). This kind of attitude is understandable: in such a harsh natural environment the dependency of humans on each other increases.

The level of mutual trust between American traders and the *Ankalyns* was rather high. Bogdanovich, whose expedition came to Chukotka from Seattle aboard an American ship the *Samoa*, noted that as soon as the vessel arrived at Unazik many locals headed to it on dozens of *umiaks* and soon 'crowded its deck' bringing women and children (Bogdanovich 1901: 22). Ivanov aboard the *General Siglin* from Nome described a similar situation. He also noted that the warehouse built by Bogdanovich's group (mainly Americans) a year before in the Provideniya Bay area was untouched and even the wood boards outside it were still in place (Ivanov 1902: 34, 40). This can be seen as a further sign of mutual trust, as wood in this treeless area was a valuable resource and it is doubtful that locals had any reasons to be afraid to take it. Credits and goods to the natives were usually given on one's word of honor. Traders who worked here permanently cared much for their reputation among the locals (Swenson 1951: 68, 180).

Human relations in Chukotka, however, should not be idealized and mutual assistance should not be overestimated. On the one hand, traders often deceived local buyers, sold shoddy goods, set extreme prices, used alcohol to increase their complaisance and transformed many natives into debtors; many health problems and famines originated from external influences; and violence also occurred. On the other hand, local hired workers, both Russians, Chukchis and Evens, were often unreliable. Natives occasionally provided expeditions with inaccurate or even intentionally false information,<sup>2</sup> were eager to swindle in trading operations or renounce prepaid obligations. Sometimes theft of provisions also took place (Kallinikov 1912: 20, 57–58, 67–68, 71; Sverdrup 1930: 261, 295, 300; Bockstoece 1986: 187–191).

Bad relations between indigenous groups and newcomers seem to be more typical for the northern coast and western regions of Chukotka, as the evidence mainly comes from there. Possible reasons of incidents between Russians and Chukchis in the western areas include both the relatively high level of historical and contem-

porary mistrust and food shortages that were common for this area during the period. The negative influence of alcohol on all groups of population should also be kept in mind (Galkin 1929: 161). The inhabitants of the Chukchi Peninsula, as most sources state, had good relations with Americans and knew very little of Russians (Bockstoce 1986: 204). The furs brought to Churin's trading station were usually of very poor quality, as by then the best stock had been sold to Americans. The opinion of Russian traders was not very favorable because of poor quality of goods and dishonesty (Sverdrup 1930: 295). Russians further blackened their reputation here in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century after confiscating a schooner bought by Kuvar on her first cruise without any compensation (Bogoras 1904–1909: 62–63; Bockstoce 1986: 198–199).

Despite the fact that the relations between native and non-native groups of population were complex, they did not produce any appreciable enmity towards the newcomers among the locals (Gorovsky 1914: 9). Personal friendships and marriages between people of different backgrounds were also quite common. Mutually beneficial voluntary relations predominated in the region.

The regional and local elites of pre-Soviet Chukotka were to a large extent formed by the trade interactions, with imported goods being the main source of their influence. The argument of trade exploitation frequently backed by price comparisons of local and imported goods in US dollars, however, appears irrelevant, as indigenous people obviously had their own considerations concerning the relative value of certain objects. If measured in expended labor or time, the value of products like 'a couple of tarnished mirrors', 'a broken wall clock' or 'a phonograph' seen in Kuvar's *yaranga* (Ivanov 1902: 41) that needed glass, lumber, metals and several production chains could as well be much higher than that of a trapped polar fox.

Trade elites were to a large extent foreign consisting of both settled and visiting traders. Although their share in regional population was small, it would be a mistake to say that their impact was insignificant (Gray 2005: 85), as they controlled the material bases of indigenous economies.

### 1919–1931

The Russian Revolution did not have significant consequences for the situation in Chukotka until December 1919 when the first Soviet authorities in the form of the Anadyr Revolutionary Committee appeared in the region. This Anadyr-based body ‘nationalized’ the property and trade rights of locally operating companies and individuals, initiated the creation of *soviets* (councils) in Ust-Belaya, Markovo, Eropol and Penzhino, and attempted to create soviets among the *Chauchus* of the Anadyr and Anyuy basins. This can be viewed as the first attempt to subjugate regional elites to an external power. This attempt was doomed: in January 1920 all members of the Committee were killed by local traders. Soviet authorities remained in Markovo where the Second Revolutionary Committee of Chukotka was formed (Gray 2005: 90–91; Forsyth 1992: 263). These and other events of the Russian Civil War almost exclusively affected the Russian areas on the Anadyr and Kolyma, although Bolsheviks claimed entire Chukotka as a part of Soviet Russia (the Far Eastern Republic in 1920–1922). On the Chukchi Peninsula, Uelen, as the center of the Chukotka district, was one of the few places of power struggle. In 1920, authorities of the Far Eastern Republic arrived here from Kamchatka and gained control over the settlement (Krushanov 1987: 150–151).

Although the capitalist nature of the Far Eastern Republic and the shift of Soviet economic policy towards liberalization (the New Economic Policy) made it possible to keep the existing trade relations in place (Swenson 1951: 109), the new authorities at Uelen (under A. M. Bychkov and G. G. Rudykh) attempted to control Russian and foreign traders through taxation and fixed prices. This second much more moderate attempt to subjugate regional elites demonstrated the willingness of the new government to negotiate and compromise about the future of Chukotka in a situation when it had no other means to control the region (Slezkin 1994: 134).

Bychkov and Rudykh also put much effort into winning Chukchis and Eskimos over to their side. This seemed to be a complicated task, as very few people spoke Russian. Among the first Chukchis to become Soviet activists in Uelen were Tegrynkeu and (Okko-)Frank

(probably the man who worked for three years in San Francisco). Rudykh noted later that Tegrynkeu was the only person in Uelen to speak fluent Russian and therefore his service as an interpreter and agitator was essential for Bolshevik propaganda (Kaltan 2008: 298). Later Rudykh and Bychkov enlisted Gemal'kot, an influential local elder (Krushanov 1987: 149–152). After the White Guardsmen from Vladivostok under Colonel Bochkarev occupied Kamchatka and the Kolyma region in 1921, Bychkov and Rudykh took the money 'collected from merchants as taxes' and escaped to European Russia over Alaska and the USA aboard an American trading schooner (Krushanov 1987: 152). Regional trade elites became independent again.

Neither the Whites nor the first Reds appear to have had any influence on the majority of the indigenous population: the reindeer Chukchis apparently knew nothing of the Revolution or the Soviets (Sverdrup 1978: 10). On the peninsula the remnants of the weak Tsarist rule disappeared and the Soviets were yet to come (Schweitzer 1990: 119), whereas American influence increased (Korn 1926: 39). Sverdrup notes that the only money that circulated on the Peninsula was the American silver dollar (Sverdrup 1930: 264).

In 1922, the Russian Far East was retaken by the Red Army. Bochkarev's men were forced to northeastern Siberia, from where they were expected to escape to Alaska. The Bolsheviks continued to pursue the policy of compromise aimed at gaining control over Chukotka: the leading position in the Anadyr region was offered to Karaev, whose elite status in the region was legitimized by the new government. Karaev established connections with several Communists who hid themselves from the White Guard in Uelen and in tundra. The same year Karaev traveled to Uelen and organized a militia of 112 Chukchi and Eskimo hunters there. Then Karaev and Tegrynkeu inspected the area between Uelen and Cape North (Cape Shmidta) with this detachment, but did not find any Whites. These were defeated by the regular Red Army the same year (Krushanov 1987: 153), whereas some of the Guardsmen managed to escape to Alaska or settled in tundra among the *Chauchu* (Shatalov 1978: 68, 168–169).

The year 1923 can be considered the time of the nominal establishment of the Soviet power in Chukotka under the Far Eastern Revolutionary Committee. Bringing Chukotka under actual control lasted several decades and in some inland areas it ended only in 1952 with the collectivization of the last *Chauchu* communities (Andronov 2008: 102). The year 1923 still meant a lot for Chukotka's status in global context: the *Maud* Expedition happened to be the last foreign expedition in the region for several decades. Knud Rasmussen, who spent two days in Uelen and Dezhnev in 1924, did not receive a permission to stay on the peninsula. Even though the permission was issued and arrived at Uelen three weeks after Rasmussen's departure (Schweitzer 1990: 124), this event can be seen as a watermark in Chukotka's openness to the world. In practice it was still accessible for some time: in 1925 the settlements on the peninsula were still visited by unauthorized American vessels (Vilensky-Sibiriyakov 1925: 17).

After defeating the Whites in Chukotka the Bolsheviks changed their policy again: now it was only the indigenous elites with whom they were ready to compromise, whereas the non-native traders had to leave Chukotka. The property of Olaf Swenson and some other companies was 'arrested' for nonpayment of taxes and weapons sales to the Whites. Swenson even got arrested for a short period himself. Although in his opinion this was a put-up affair initiated by his competitors, he did have some operations with the Whites and even transported some personnel. Nevertheless, after he had established direct relations with the Soviet government, he managed to get back some of his property. Despite the cancelation of all pre-Soviet debts some individuals also paid Swenson back, which can be seen as a sign of the reputation and authority he retained in the region. Moreover, his company won all private suits of exploitation and fraud. Unlike many other foreign traders Swenson decided to neglect the loss of property and cooperate with the Soviet government which did not have either resources or experience to supply Chukotka even with basic provisions (Forsyth 1992: 264). In 1925, Swenson entered into a joint venture with the government and in 1926, in conjunction with two other companies, Swenson signed a contract for five years. Americans were obliged to bring merchan-

dise according to specifications from Moscow for which they received delivery payment and furs from a specific territory. Swenson noted that the government carried out its commitments and that 'in spite of the financial ruin and the months and months of difficulty' which the Russian Revolution meant to him he had 'no complaint to make against the Soviet government' (Swenson 1951: 136–145). Before the deal with Swenson, Chukotka was supplied by Hudson's Bay Company in 1923 (also by contract), and in 1924 by the Okhotsk-Kamchatka Fishing and Hunting Company (a state monopoly), which proved to be a failure (Kaltan 2008: 318).

The deal with Swenson was necessary for the success of the Soviet policy towards the Far Northern regions of the country which was designed by the Committee of the North<sup>3</sup> – a specialized organization consisting of prominent experts (Bogoras, Buturlin and others) (Sergeyev 1955: 224) – between 1924 and 1935 (Forsyth 1992: 244–246). The most important assumption here was the role played by the indigenous population in the future colonization of Chukotka and the Soviet North at large: it was the key to the colonization of the vast territory and exploitation of its natural resources:

Nevertheless, these northern tribes, no matter how small-numbered they are, are the only possible dwellers of tundras and taiga, and it is possible to use the countless treasures of the North and to draw these treasures into the economy of the country only through them (Leonov 1928: 92).

The objective of establishing control over the vast arctic and sub-arctic regions and their resources was seen as unachievable without having good relations with the native population and its elites. Stable supplies were necessary not only for maintaining these, but also for the very survival of indigenous peoples who depended on import. Although the assistance to the indigenous people had the same reasoning as in the Tsarist times – the government was interested in improving their life in order that they could continue to provide furs to the state<sup>4</sup> – the Committee of the North sought to increase the indigenous participation in the economic development (Schindler 1992: 54).

The practical inability of the government to supply Chukotka without the non-indigenous trade elites made it compromise with

them: although the Far Eastern State Trade of the USSR (*Dal'gostorg*) established its own stations in Chukotka, these were much less popular among the indigenous population than Swenson's schooners (which in fact supplied these stations). Swenson offered better goods, better prices and had a much better reputation. The cooperation between *Dal'gostorg* and Swenson who had been expelled with great pomp as an exploiter not long before seemed unbelievable and even ridiculous to many *Ankalyns*. Some members of the Committee (Buturlin) considered Swenson's involvement politically harmful, whereas others (Adrianov) supported it and even proposed to use foreign influence further by purchasing the *Maud* associated with Amundsen (Vonlyarlyarsky 1926: 92–94; Swenson 1951: 181).

In the 1920s, besides Swenson, private trade in Chukotka was represented by Alitet, Sven Olsen and Magomet Dobriev who traded near Cape Serdtse-Kamen, in Vankarem and in Yandagay respectively. Private trade supplemented the state owned stations at Ryrkaipiy, Keniskun, Urelik, Yandagay, Nunligran and the Preobrazheniya Bay (near Nunligran) (Kaltan 2008: 318).

Since 1928, during a period known as the 'Stalinist Revolution', Soviet policies underwent many significant changes (Slezkin 1994: 187). After the NEP was over, the government withdrew itself from negotiations with trade elites. By 1930 private trade got out of the picture. Swenson's contract ended in 1930, but he still visited the USSR several times until 1933 to finish the business (Swenson 1951: 219), whereas small individuals appear to have been forced out from trade: in Kaltan's report Alitet and other individuals are called 'former traders' or 'kulaks' (Kaltan 2008: 295, 296, 302, 304, 309). The state Kamchatka Company founded in 1927 became the main supplier of Chukotka until 1945 (Gavrilov 2007: 237, 245, 414).

The change in trade patterns had negative consequences for the native population: although the supplies did not cease, they diminished both in their quality and quantity. Supplies of whaleboats, weapons, tea, tobacco and other basic goods became both irregular and insufficient. Some places were not supplied at all, whereas in others stocks ran out in several months. Hunters and reindeer herders were dissatisfied with the purchasing prices offered by state agencies, with the sale prices and quality of manufactured

goods, and with dishonesty of state buyers. The times of trade with the Americans were often regarded as better times (Kaltan 2008: 289). Some of the goods brought by the Soviets were completely irrelevant. Although this was common for Russian traders before the Revolution (Gorovsky 1914: 11), later this became a problem due to the absence of competition. Among unmarketable goods found in a trading station at the Chaun Bay in 1931 Kaltan listed 'shoes, boots, galoshes, underwear for men, woolen socks, cotton scarves, cotton, satin, calico and other cloth, different textiles, drills, buttons, fishing hooks, clocks, chocolate and other sweets, cigarettes, corned beef, Monte Cristo pistols and small shots' (Kaltan 2008: 332).

Although the compromise with trade elites was not welcomed by the new authorities already in the 1920s, the state was still willing to address the interests and needs of the indigenous population, for which information was needed. In order to train experts to be sent to the northern regions and to educate representatives of the indigenous peoples a special institute was established in 1925.<sup>5</sup> The establishment of a large school system, Russian learning and elimination of illiteracy; introduction of written Chukchi, Eskimo (Central Siberian Yupik), Koryak and Even in the early 1930s brought many teachers to Chukotka. Some of them like G. A. Menovshchikov, P. I. Skorik, E. S. Rubtsova and I. S. Vdovin later became prominent linguists and anthropologists. Since the second half of the 1920s the two-way exchange of young people between Chukotka and mainland Russia was established (Vdovin 1965: 384–386; Dikov 1989: 181–185, 220–221; Krupnik 2008: 19).

In 1925 the Committee of the North proposed to establish special centers of interaction between indigenous peoples and the Soviet Union called 'culture camps' (*kultbazas*). *Kultbazas* were supposed to be model centers of assistance to indigenous population and feature medical, veterinary, economic and educational facilities. The main idea was to bring scientific achievements to traditional economies, to provide learning 'not for the city, but for taiga and tundra' and to foster a gradual, non-violent change. New services were not designed as entirely stationary and could be rendered by mobile brigades of *kultbazas* (Lvov 1926: 31). The first *kultbaza* in the region was established in 1928 in the Lavrentiya Bay. Two

more – Chaunskaya and Vilyuneiskaya – followed in the early 1930s (Dikov 1989: 180). After the turn in Soviet policies, however, these spaces designed for mutual adaptation turned into an instrument of one-sided acculturation (Schindler 1992: 58).

The political aim of putting an end ‘to American brag in the eyes of Chukchis and Eskimos’ and winning the indigenous population over to Communism also had to be achieved by means of *kultbazar*s (Orlovsky 1928a: 53) and mobile educational and propagandist facilities – red *yarangas* (Dikov 1989: 181). New political cadres from the natives were badly needed, as the number of the Russians in Chukotka, despite the influx of teachers, scientists, doctors, administrators, propagandists, policemen and technicians, was still very low to control the region. Elections to clan and village Soviets and other bodies<sup>6</sup> began in 1924 and 1925 respectively. Gemal'kot was elected chairman of the Uelen Executive Committee and entered other positions in district and regional bodies. Another early supporter of the Soviets, Frank, participated in the All-Union Congress of Soviets in 1927 and was the first Chukchi to visit Moscow (Krushanov 1987: 155–157) where he was received by Kalinin. In 1931, Kaltan met Frank who then was vice chairman of the District Executive Committee and noted that as Frank did not speak Russian at all, all he could do as an administrator was to put his name onto all outgoing papers. Personal characteristic was much more favorable: Frank's *yaranga* was described as very tidy and clean, whereas Frank himself was very polite and reserved, without any ‘undue familiarity’, but also without ‘any sincerity’. Frank's son, Atyk, was one of the best dancers in Uelen and supposedly a shaman. Moreover, Kaltan stated that Frank himself was ‘the main shaman in Chukotka’ (Kaltan 2008: 296–299).

Frank and Mletkyn, Rytkeu's grandfather, could be the same person. In his Soviet autobiography Rytkeu stated that it was Mletkyn who was known as Frank, lived in San Francisco and was the chairman of a clan Soviet (Rytkeu 1974: 151). In his post-Soviet autobiography where he confessed that Mletkyn, the shaman of Uelen, was his grandfather he mentioned that he was killed by the chairman of the Chukotka Revolutionary Committee A. A. Khoroshavtsev (Rytkeu 2010: 267). The Revolutionary Committee itself was

reorganized into the District Executive Committee in 1929, which means that Mletkyn must have been killed by then. Frank, as it is evident from Kaltan's report, was alive in 1931 and moreover chaired the Committee. After Kaltan's report, however, Frank is not mentioned in any sources. There appear to be two possible explanations: Mletkyn and Frank were two different persons or Mletkyn-Frank was killed in the early 1930s by the *former* chairman of the Chukotka Revolutionary Committee. There is further evidence that supports the second version: Mletkyn conducted the rite of name selection for Rytkeu – born March 8, 1931, according to his own words (Rytkeu 2010: 109–110, 113) – which means that he was still alive by then. Therefore, it is very likely that Frank (Mletkyn) was Rytkeu's grandfather.

The stories of Frank and Mletkyn (even if they were not the same person) demonstrate that the Soviet government was ready to negotiate and compromise with the indigenous non-trade elite (shamans and elders). Just like the trade elite, these people owed much of their authority and influence to the transcultural exchange. The proficiency in foreign languages gave them the status of intermediaries,<sup>7</sup> whereas knowledge and instruments acquired abroad made them more successful in performing their traditional roles in indigenous societies: in both autobiographical texts Rytkeu states that Mletkyn was very effective as a shaman (whose main tasks were to treat illnesses and forecast weather) because he acquired some education in the United States and brought a barometer and surgical instruments with him. The transitional system of self-government (Savelyeva 2011) basically legitimized Gemal'kot's and Frank's elite status through the elections. Although this was the case for other influential natives as well, many refused to participate in *Soviet* elections and saw no need in being legitimized (Slezkin 1994: 174).

The Stalinist Revolution brought about changes here as well, but the state began to question the idea of compromise already before it: since 1927 clan soviets, although not yet officially abolished, were substituted with ethno-territorial native soviets, whereas the European institutions were further introduced in their stationary and not mobile forms. The state headed for educating new indigenous elites, completely loyal and ready to subordinate. The Institute of the Peo-

ples of the North came in handy: after it became independent in administrative terms in 1930, its main focus shifted from education *per se* to political upbringing and ideological correctness (Slezkin 1994: 222). Among members of the new elite one should mention Tevlyanto from Ust-Belaya, a student of the Institute of the Peoples of the North who frequently worked as a guide and interpreter for many newcomers (Kaltan 2008: 294, 300, 305, 312–313) and later became Chukotka's first representative in the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union.

In 1929, district party bureaus were formed and by 1930 there were 52 Communist Party members in Chukotka (Krushanov 1987: 158); in 1923 there was one and in 1924 there were seven Communists in the Anadyr district (Korn 1926: 51). The same year the Chukchi National Region was formed (Slezkin 1994: 270–272). Initially it covered most of the territory inhabited by the Chukchis in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but in 1931 the lower Kolyma area was given to Yakutia and the region took its present form. In 1932 there already were 158 Communists in Chukotka, of whom 80 were of indigenous origin. The first regional Congress of Soviets, where Tegrynkeu was elected chairman of the Region's Executive Committee, outlined the priorities of Soviet policies in Chukotka for the years to come: struggle against rich reindeer herders and shaman influence, creation of *kolkhozes*, improvement of trade, education and healthcare, and exploitation of regional resources. The basic economic reasoning of the interactions with the indigenous population of Chukotka also underwent significant changes: the assumption became dominant that the natural resources of the region could be extracted by Russians (by volunteers or prisoners) without the natives. The industrialization of the USSR changed the public demand as well: mineral resources became much more important than furs, meat or fish. The natives still had a place in the economy of the region, but their role was reduced to that of supplying Russians with food and furs through collective farms (Savelyeva 2011: 78). Their participation in industrialization was hardly needed. In the early 1930s, the clan *soviets*, a compromise between the new system and traditional lifestyle, were officially abolished (Krushanov 1987: 158–159). Native *soviets* were later supplanted by village soviets, which can be

seen as the ultimate end of indigenous self-government (Dyachkov 2006: 503). The marginalization of the Committee of the North in the early 1930s and its abolishment in 1935 epitomized the end of the dialogue (Slezkin 1994: 275–276).

The indigenous population's attitudes towards the new authorities and the increasing Soviet activities were very different. This early period of Sovietization mainly covered the coastal regions populated by the *Ankalyns* and the sedentary population of the Kolyma and Anadyr. In addition to the political change the inhabitants of these areas also experienced economic alterations: since 1926 Chukchis and Eskimos were encouraged to organize themselves into production and consumption cooperatives (Krushanov 1987: 163–165).

The tundra regions and therefore the majority of the *Chauchu* were difficult to access and control. Some *Chauchus* supported the idea of mobile medical and veterinary services, but claimed that they did not need literacy to educate their children as herders and *yaranga* mistresses. Others were not interested in any Soviet influence and avoided the newcomers (Orlovsky 1928b: 61).

The attitude of some influential Chukchis towards the new authorities appears to have changed over the late 1920s. Alitet, for example, was eager to help T. Z. Syomushkin, a future writer, during the Circumpolar Census of 1926–1927, but in 1931 he met Kaltan with enmity and even though the latter stayed in his *yaranga* did not say a word to him and left. Some other former traders like Tynale, Tynano and Wall did not show any discontent, at least in person (Kaltan 2008: 301–302, 309). Wall's application for Soviet citizenship can be viewed as his willingness to comply with the new regime.

The conflict between the non-trade elites and the Soviets was not as obvious as it was portrayed in Soviet literature. Although some shamans did oppose schooling and medical services (which were a direct competition to their role), some of them (like Mletkyn) were very progressive. Some of them took self-government seriously and viewed the *soviets* as a tribune for expressing criticism. Avay, the chairman of the Yandagay Native Soviet and a shaman, for instance, stated that there was discontent with the Soviet authorities who 'only promise and do not give anything'. His words were

translated to Kaltan as follows: '[...] the representatives of the Soviet power tell lies and one cannot believe them. Americans brought everything in sufficient amounts formerly' (Kaltan 2008: 290).

Such discontent was not general: many people welcomed the new authorities, gladly sent their children to school (Rytkeu 2010: 174), consulted doctors, brought their deer to veterinarians and apparently were quite satisfied with the new services. Many Chukchis and Eskimos became strong supporters of the Communist ideas presented to them in simple categories of 'good and evil' (Forsyth 1992: 265–266). The absence of any large scale fights or resistance proves that the advocates of the new regime were quite influential. Some Russian agitators were attentive to traditional values and convincing in their words and actions. Many people really wanted to build a new life and believed in what they were doing providing a good example to locals (Swenson 1951: 143).

Similar thing could be said about many young doctors and teachers (Dikov 1989: 188–189). But not everyone was enthusiastic: many newcomers could not endure the harsh conditions of Chukotka and lack of basic equipment and materials and left the region (Vdovin 1965: 386; Kaltan 2008: 307). Many administrators also made a very bad impression. In 1931, Kaltan and Tevlyanto who visited all *yarangas* in Enurmin noted:

Omkyt (chairman of the native *soviet*) himself and Chukchis told us that they see '*erms*' (supervisors) that 'examine everything themselves visiting every *yaranga*' for the first time. Before, they said, 'supervisors stopped in the best *yaranga*, did not show any interest in anything and only scolded us'. They also pointed at the former head of district police Leontiev who inspected the district in 1929 and supposedly 'threatened a child with a revolver' and at the former chairman of the District Executive Committee Ponomarev [...] (Kaltan 2008: 303).

It is difficult to judge these particular accusations, as the level of trust between the indigenous population and the Soviets was not very high and false information was a common place, but the overall tendency was clear: the reality of Soviet rule was very far from the idealistic images produced by official propaganda, and the indig-

enous elites voiced their discontent. Despite all this, the generally good attitude to foreigners and hospitality were still in place in 1931. Kaltan stated that Chukchis received them well everywhere, always offered food and tea, and eagerly shared information. Some people still had no idea about the Soviet government (Kaltan 2008: 289, 294, 310; Shatalov 1978: 37–38).

### CONCLUSION

The early Soviet policies in Chukotka did not destroy the existing patterns of interactions. Although the approach of the new regime was paternalistic from the very beginning, the early Soviet policy-makers were eager to ask the indigenous people about their needs and to compromise with regional elites. The institution of clan *soviets* can be considered as an example of a transcultural form of self-government. The early Soviet trade relied on American experience. The propagation of the new ideology was also not very aggressive during the early Soviet period, whereas shamans were not persecuted. Many people, including representatives of traditional elites, voluntarily accepted the new political ideas. There is no evidence that any ideas of political independence were present in Chukotka, and people were ready to negotiate with the new government about the practical integration of the region into the state.

Nevertheless, the negative tendencies became clear already in the late 1920s: the elimination of the private sector and monopolization of trade was disadvantageous to local people, as in practice the needs known to the government were never satisfied; all external and many internal interactions gradually became limited; the Soviets expressed less and less interest in receiving something from the people of Chukotka and more and more interest in exploiting regional natural resources. The transitional phase ended very quickly, whereas first conflicts between traditional and Soviet authorities began already during it. By the end of the 1920s, many people realized that the reality of the Soviet rule had little to do with the images drawn by propaganda.

The combination of the paternalistic approach and violent methods made interactions in the region in the 1930s and 1940s extremely asymmetric. The capacity of native agency diminished

greatly: the natives turned into involuntary receivers of ideas, institutions and material objects produced by a 'superior' culture, whereas all opposition was violently suppressed. Indigenous peoples had to adopt all novelties and it was unimportant if they needed them or not.

Soviet policies were not as systematic, as they are sometimes portrayed (Schindler 1992: 54–59). The basic assumptions behind them changed several times and the question if there was a place for indigenous peoples and pre-Soviet elites in economy and politics of Soviet Chukotka was not closed until the early 1930s.

The trade elites shaped by trade-related interactions and consisting of both native and non-native people were excluded from regional affairs already in the late 1920s. Even though there were many problems originating from asymmetric trade interactions, such people as Bent Wall and Magomet Dobriev cannot be viewed as 'exploiters' or 'predators', as they were portrayed by the Soviets: they integrated into native societies and to a large extent adopted the traditional way of life, becoming members of the 'indigenous' elites. In 1931 the idea of compromise in Chukotka was renounced completely and the state started its violent campaign against the remaining pre-Soviet elites, depriving shamans of vote, kicking them out of the meetings, expelling (Slezkin 1994: 227), imprisoning or murdering them like Mletkyn. At the same time new native and non-native elites were formed. It was this new unquestioning loyal group of Chukotka's population that was given a role in both regional and national politics (Gray 2005: 115), whereas the pre-Soviet authorities were excluded from the regional politics, even if they were willing to adapt. The state chose the violent way of incorporating Chukotka, although there were other options available.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Indigenous names seemed difficult to American sailors and they often gave native workers European names.

<sup>2</sup> Sverdrup, however, noted that inaccurate information originated from irrelevant questions, as the issue of distance was related both to time and space. A place was considered to be 'near' if one could get there before the dark and therefore could become 'far' if the travelers asked about the distance late in the day.

The enquirer also had to ask for comparison of a distance to a section that he already knew (Sverdrup 1930: 274).

<sup>3</sup> The Committee for Assistance to the Peoples of the Outlying Districts of the North under the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (Slezkin 1994: 150–183).

<sup>4</sup> Although taxes were abolished, the natives still supplied the state with furs (Forsyth 1994: 246–247).

<sup>5</sup> The Worker's Faculty of the Leningrad University was reorganized in 1930 into the Institute of the Peoples of the North (Gray 2005: 104; Slezkin 1994: 180, 221).

<sup>6</sup> The transitional administrative system was to combine the requirements of the Soviet government with indigenous cultures (Schindler 1992: 54).

<sup>7</sup> Rytkheu claims that Mletkyn could speak Russian.

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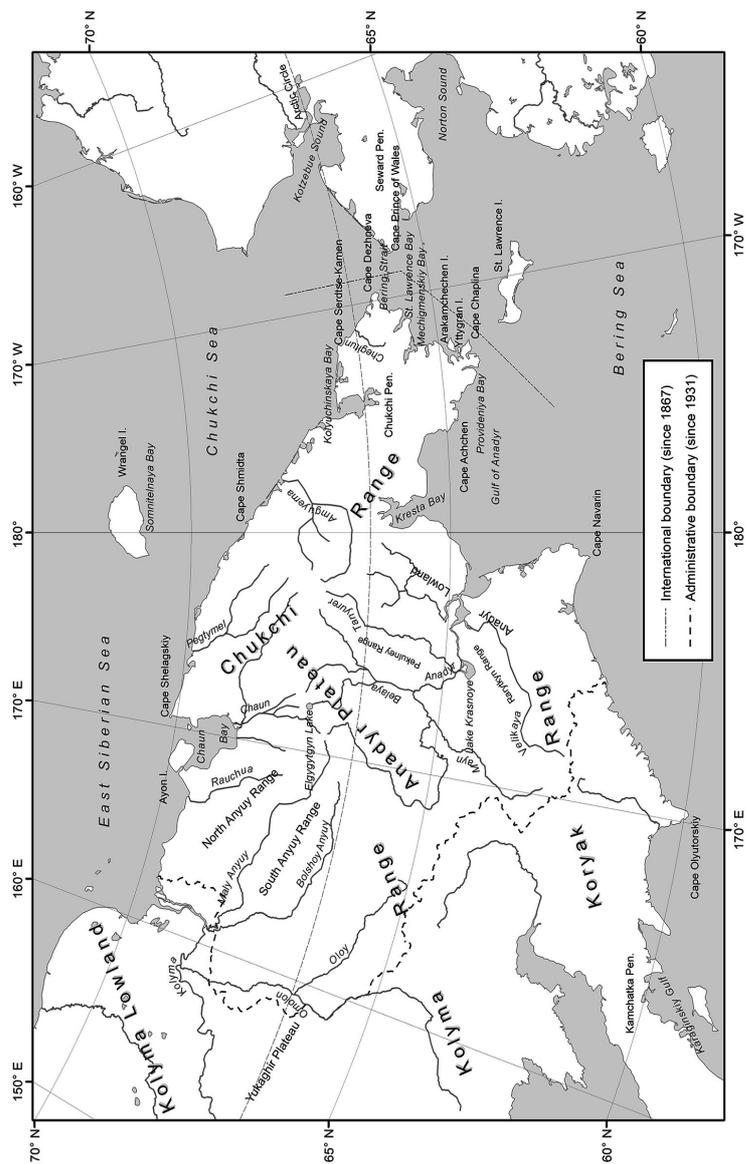
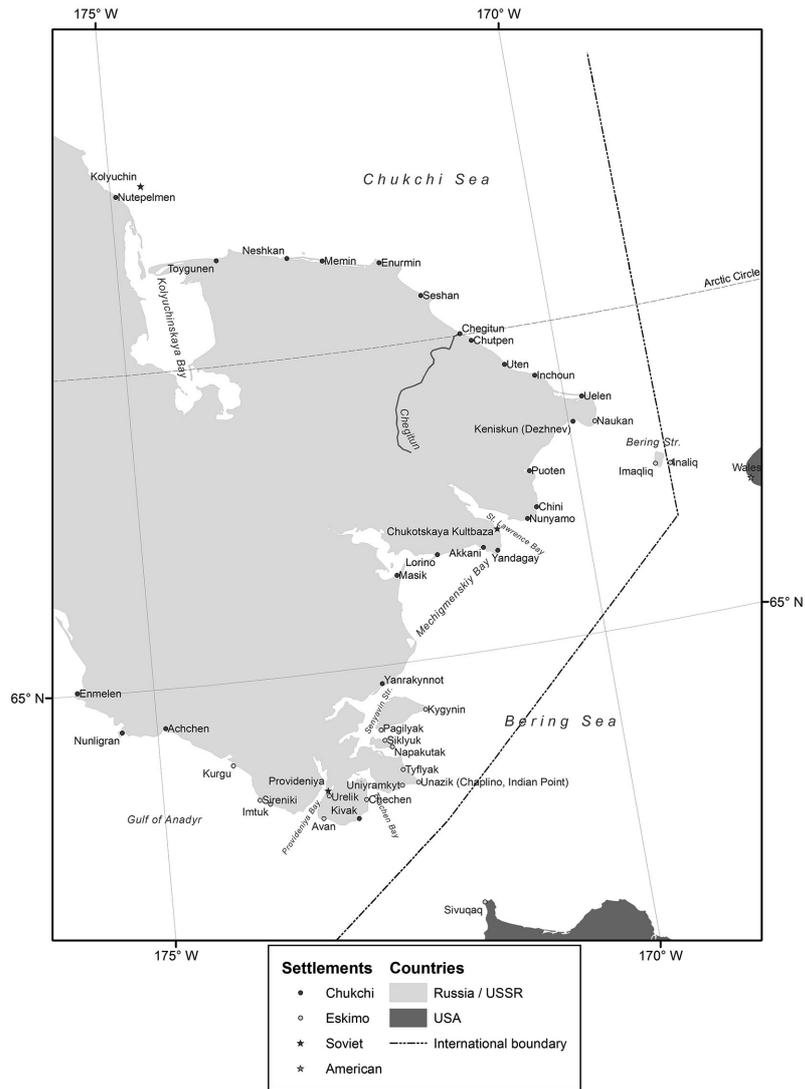


Fig. 1. Chukotka, physical map (Gvozdetzky 1978: 450-458)





**Fig. 3. The Chukchi Peninsula, native and Soviet settlements, national boundary (Schweitzer 1990; Krupnik 2000; Kaltan 2008)**