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Notes on Blood Revenge among the Reindeer Evenki of Manchuria (Northeast China)

Abstract

Of the approximately two hundred Reindeer Evenki still remaining today in the People's Republic of China about thirty individuals insist on continuing their traditional lifestyle as nomadic hunters and reindeer breeders in their homeland, an area in the northern Great Hinggan mountains. The rapid decay of their age-old Tungusic forest culture began in 2003, when the small ethnic group and its reindeer were forced under administrative pressure to resettle about two hundred and fifty kilometers further south in the outskirts of Genhe City. With their resettlement the Manchurian Reindeer Evenki have arrived at the end of a long trail that began when their ancestors, coming from Siberia, crossed the Amur around 1825. Despite the many political changes that had occurred in Manchuria, they were able to live as free nomads up to the 1950s in the almost untouched wilderness of the Great Amur Bend. There they preserved their worldview, their shamanism, and also their ancient social norms almost without change. The ritual rules of blood revenge described in this article, too, represent an original relic of the traditional juridical norms related to their clan system. The events described, which happened more than fifty years ago, document for the first time these rituals. Among contemporary Reindeer Evenki they still represent a regrettable period in their historical experience.

Keywords: Blood feud—blood revenge—Great Hinggan mountains—Manchuria—Reindeer Evenki—shamans

MOST of the approximately two hundred Reindeer Evenki of northeastern China were relocated in 2003 from the forests that were their homeland to the periphery of Genhe, a city about two hundred and fifty kilometers to the south.* Only a small group of about thirty persons resisted this forced relocation and remain to this day in the taiga of the northern part of the Great Hinggan mountains. They remain there in the vague hope of being able to continue their nomadic life and their traditional economic activity based on reindeer breeding.

Since that time, more than half of the reindeer that had been brought to Genhe together with their keepers have died because of inadequate breeding conditions and particularly the lack of lichens. But who in modern China, a country experiencing an economic boom where economic growth and gain count before everything else, would seriously care about a small Tungusic group of people and their reindeer, and who would dare to accuse the bureaucrats and politicians responsible for this situation? Who among those responsible for this tragic situation has an interest in the life experiences transmitted from generation to generation among these last, and until very recently still free-living, nomadic hunters? Who among those in power care of the Evenki's knowledge about nature's secrets, their hunting and toolmaking techniques, their path-finding skills in the wilderness, and their religious beliefs and their shamanism? Who is familiar with their customary legal norms, their social system, and the concepts of honor in the taiga? A yearning for freedom and striving for independence are the distinguishing characteristics of the Reindeer Evenki of Manchuria. Freedom and independence were already the goals of their ancestors when they began coming in clan groups from Yakutia (modern Sakha), to immigrate into the yet undisturbed taiga of northern Manchuria beginning about 1825.

If I dare to offer a contribution about such a bloody topic to the volume celebrating my friend and colleague, Professor Peter Knecht, I ask him to excuse me. The reasons for my request are these: first, I want to document the knowledge of those who were directly involved in the events about the final outcome

of blood revenge among the Reindeer Evenki of the Great Amur Bend, and second, I think it has scientific value for ethnology because, even in terms of the rules governing the society of the Manchurian Reindeer Evenki, blood revenge is an extreme, and therefore a most rare, event. Under ordinary circumstances the people of the taiga were peaceable and respectful towards the members of their own ethnic group as well as towards outsiders. They had a strong sense of justice and brutality was alien to them.

Blood revenge committed to avenge a crime was an essential means of self-help among many societies adhering to customary law. It was based on a principle of retaliation, the *lex talionis* (blood for blood, life for life), where in the case of homicide the killing of the murderer would put an end to the conflict. Accordingly, the family of the victim punished the culprit and his family because the survivors owed it to the spirit or soul of their slain fellow. Family in these small-scale societies included not only the members of a single family, but also the members of a clan or even of a local group. It was by no means unusual for the families concerned to try to clarify what had happened and to discuss with the help of an arbiter (a shaman or chief with the necessary authority) means and methods for how to proceed. In some cases it was possible to find a resolution with the payment of an indemnity (*wergild*), which had to be paid by the murderer's relatives to the closest relatives of the victim. If no person in authority able to defuse the conflict without further bloodshed could be found, it was quite likely for the situation to escalate. In such a case blood revenge could develop into bloody feuds lasting for years, because the punished family would take revenge for the punishment suffered, which in turn triggered reciprocal revenge. In such a situation, the egalitarian organization of the society of these hunters could become a serious handicap, as the events described below, which occurred among the Manchurian Reindeer Evenki, will clearly demonstrate. The events, which were part of a serious series of cases of blood revenge, occurred after the death of the shamaness Olga Dmitrievna Kudrina (ca. 1890–1944), who was recognized by all groups of Reindeer Evenki in Manchuria as endowed with the necessary authority for equalizing and balancing social relationships.

Although Hiekisch writes in his monograph on the Tungus that blood revenge does not occur among them, his statement should be understood as a reflection of the situation at the time he was writing in the nineteenth century (HIEKISCH 1879, 69). Later events, which happened among the Reindeer Evenki of Manchuria in the first half of the twentieth century, indicate that his statement cannot be taken as true for every stage of Evenki history.

The Manchurian Reindeer Evenki led a generally peaceful life as nomads in the mountains of the Great Hinggan, where they had their hunting and roaming grounds. In their life close to nature they showed such characteristic traits as kindness, sincerity, and honesty. A sign of this was their willingness to help

other members of their group in any way possible. They helped one another selflessly in times of need and even provided new reindeer to families who had lost their animals to beasts of prey or as a consequence of epidemic disease. Even the wild animals whom they chased in the hunt were of equal rank with themselves as coinhabitants of the land they shared. They never saw the animals as merely objects to be exploited and did not take more game than they needed. They had a singularly close, almost loving, relationship with the reindeer, the mainstay of their forest culture. Yet, in spite of this almost proverbial gentleness in their character as a people, their social life was not free of conflicts.

The most significant unit in structuring the society of the Reindeer Evenki was the clan (Evenk: *chala, kala*). Each clan possessed its own distinctive traditions and its own origin myth. Society was organized on the basis of patrilineal and patrilocal principles, and strictly adhered to clan exogamy. On her marriage the bride invariably left her paternal household and clan in order to live with her husband. The couple's children were counted as members of the husband's clan, while his wife and the children's mother throughout her life remained a member of her father's clan, retained her original clan name as her family name, and also venerated the spirits (Evenk: *malu*) of her father's clan. Originally, in each clan there was the position of the male elder (Evenk: *sagdan*) and of his substitute. They were both elected to office by the adult members of the clan for an undetermined period of time at the clan meeting that was held every year in summer. There was also a quasicouncil of clan elders (Evenk: *suchlen*). In practice, however, the authority of the clan elders and of their council was not significant because the nomadic communities roaming their vast hunting areas would only rarely encounter one another.

In actual practice, communities (Evenk: *džu*), usually consisting of two to four families (although in summer there might be up to eight families), would combine for purposes of their economic activities, share their nomadic life, and hunt together. In such cases the participating families often belonged to different clans. These purpose-oriented production groups, called *urilen*, were relatively short-lived and underwent frequent changes in their structure. Once the necessary tasks of the day had been taken care of, these *urilen* communities provided the natural framework for various social activities. The women would exchange visits in the afternoons and drink tea together. In the evenings women and men would sit around the campfire and enjoy talking until late at night. On days of bad weather they would meet in a family's tent (Evenk: *dju*), to tell tales and stories or sing songs. However, because of the vast size of the area in the Great Amur Bend wherein they lived, social life beyond these family gatherings was not very developed. For the same reason there was no need to divide the hunting area into hunting units for families and *urilen*. Occasions for encountering other nomadic groups were, except for occasional encounters at wedding

ceremonies, limited to clan gatherings and (until 1951/1952) to the seasonal trading meetings (Evenk: *bogžor*) with their mainly Russian trading partners (Evenk: *andaki* [pl.]). However, besides the families united in a *urilen* group, there were also some inveterate individualists among the Manchurian Reindeer Evenki who would live in the taiga either as a single family or even as a single person.

Since the end of the 1920s, the Manchurian Reindeer Evenki can be divided into three regional groups (Evenk: *tege*; *omuk*) on the basis of the places where they conducted trade: the Mohe group in the north on the banks of the Emur He (Russ.: Albazicha) who traded mostly with Chinese and Russians living at Mohe, a settlement on the right bank of the Upper Amur (Heilong Jiang); the Cigan group (Ciganč'en), south of the Mohe, who traded mainly with partners from Qiqian (Russ.: Cigan); and finally, the Three-River group (Gunač'en), which engaged in exchange operations at the southwestern border of the Reindeer-Evenki hunting grounds with partners from the so-called "Three-River-Area" (Russ.: Trechreč'e), especially from the villages of Dubovaya and Ključevaya. The trading partners of the Reindeer Evenki were mostly Russian emigrants of Cossack extract who, because they were opposed to the Soviets, had fled after the Russian civil war to Chinese territory, where they settled in villages of their own. Because as Cossacks they had served at the borders of czarist Russia, they had already previously traded with Reindeer Evenki roaming the Chinese territory, with whom they had cultivated friendly relationships.

Although a core family among the Manchurian Reindeer Evenki was an independent social and economic unit, it was also, due to the patrilineal structure of society, part of the clan of the male's family, which it regarded as its dominant group of blood relationships. In accordance with the rule of exogamy, however, the wife belonged naturally to another clan, namely that of her father.

At the time that the Širokogorov husband-and-wife team, both of them ethnologists, visited the Manchurian Reindeer Evenki in 1915, the group consisted of nine clans. At the end of the 1940s, seven of them were still left. In 1960 six clans still existed, but only four of them remain to this day. The continued existence of the Reindeer Evenki as an independent group has, therefore, become impossible.

Širokogorov, probably the most knowledgeable person of the time as far as the Tungusic populations of Transbaikalia and the Far East are concerned, considered blood revenge among them to be a phenomenon of the past, something they had done away with long ago. He writes, "Clan vendetta is practiced no more, but it is still in the memory of the Tungus: in former days, according to tradition, the most insignificant conflict between two clans took the form of a continuous vendetta, followed by murders of hostile clan members" (ŠIROKOGOROV 1929, 197). On another occasion he writes, "this practice [i.e.,

vendetta] is at present unknown among the Northern Tungus investigated by me..." (ŠIROKOGOROV 1926, 144).

Cases of violent death, which occurred under the influence of alcohol at drinking events, as a rule were judged by the Reindeer Evenki of Manchuria as being accidents. Homicide committed under the influence of alcohol was not considered a crime. In such a case, retribution in any form was not to be sought. It also made no difference whether the culprit was a member of the victim's clan or of another clan. This kind of "accident" happened sometimes, when the men had received alcohol from their trading partners (*andaki*) at a trade meeting (*bogžor*) or at a chance meeting with another outsider, and had drunk the whole supply in one night. If Evenki women with their wise foresight were present, they would have removed all axes, *utkan* (a long knife used to work wood or cut branches when on the move), hunting knives (Evenk: *koto*), and especially rifles. The hunters, although usually gentle and well-poised, when completely drunk were prone to fight and attack one another recklessly with any weapon they could get their hands on. Such unnatural deaths were not rare. In fact, in later years they tended to be more frequent, yet they were no cause for blood revenge. In the same manner, homicide within a clan was neither avenged nor punished. The perpetrator was mainly considered a "bad person" to be avoided whenever possible. This fact is confirmed by Ethel J. LINDGREN, who writes that "Nikolay Ivanovich's [Sologon] statement that there are 'no murders' among the Tungus may probably be explained by the fact that the violent deaths which often occur during drinking parties are not regarded as crimes demanding vengeance or severe punishment. Russian traders have even told me that no rancor is ever felt nor compensation demanded when wounds, fatal or otherwise, are inflicted on such occasions..." (1936, 99–100). Lindgren also mentions a murder case, following the report of the Reindeer-Evenki shamaness Olga Dmitrievna Kudrina, that had happened in the area of the Mohe group on the river Albazicha (Chin.: Emur). At that time, Ivan Petrovič Kaltakun had been hit with a stick and killed by a man of the Sologon clan in the presence of two men and three women (LINDGREN 1936, 100–101).

The shaman of the Mohe group, Filipp Vasil'evič Sologon, who at that time was also the elder of the Sologon clan, had not yet ordered the payment of compensation (*wergild*) when Lindgren learned of this incident. This means that the case was not yet definitively resolved, because the murderer's family had not yet paid, although the father of the slain young man had requested the payment of compensation. Rumors also spread that no alcohol had been involved. Had alcohol been involved, the criminal act would have had less significance as a crime and would not have incurred the obligation by the perpetrator's family to pay an indemnity. Unfortunately, Ethel J. Lindgren had to leave the Reindeer Evenki of the Great Hinggan a week later and, for that reason, could not learn anything

more about how this murder case was eventually resolved. Nevertheless, the important role of the clan elder and shaman, Filipp Vasil'evič Sologon, as mediator invested with authority, is apparent.

After the occupation of Northern Manchuria by the Japanese army in 1932 had been completed and, two years later, the puppet state of Manchukuo had been established, it became impossible for foreign ethnologists to legally live with the Reindeer Evenki of the Great Hinggan and do fieldwork among them. Therefore, neither Lindgren nor anyone else was able to learn and provide further information about how the case developed, making a final evaluation of it unfeasible. However, I suspect that the case was not completely resolved at that time between the involved clans and that this state of affairs was at least one of the reasons why thirteen years later a series of gruesome events and murders in relation to the old Evenki rules concerning blood revenge erupted. I further believe that still another reason for this situation was the death in the mid-1930s of the shaman of the Mohe group, Filipp Vasil'evič Sologon.

By the year 1942 the Japanese had monopolized all the *andaki* trading among the three local groups of Reindeer Evenki. They brought together the young Evenki men in formation camps, which were under the authority of the Japanese Secret Service, in order to train them to become rangers to be used for reconnaissance and scouting purposes in the impenetrable wilderness of the Great Amur Bend. This kind of forced measure was a further reason that disputes broke out; they pitted pro-Japanese Evenki hunters against anti-Japanese Evenki hunters.

After the shaman of the Mohe group died, the shamaness Olga Dmitrievna Kudrina took over responsibility for this local group, too. When she was called by a member of this group to perform a séance, she had to make the onerous trip over the drainage divide of the Great Hinggan mountains in order to reach its hunting area in the river basin of the Albazicha.

After an Evenki hunter of the Mohe group killed a Japanese in 1944, there was fear that the Japanese occupation authorities would take repressive measures. For that reason, the nine families (about fifty persons) of this local group secretly crossed the Amur and fled back to Russia.

In the fall of the same year shamaness Olga Dmitrievna Kudrina, well-respected and popular among all of the three local Evenki groups, died. After her death, a sense of uncertainty and hopelessness spread among the Cigančen and Gunačen groups who had stayed behind in Manchuria. In addition, the increasing nervousness among the Japanese occupiers that resulted from the war situation in East Asia growing more and more critical, also spilled over to the Reindeer Evenki.

At that time there still were other shamans among the Reindeer Evenki who had remained in Manchuria. These were the shaman Innokentij Ivanovič

Kudrin (a patrilineal cousin of the shamaness Olga Dmitrievna Kudrina), who had lost his eyesight in a hunting accident, and the shamaness Njura Kaltakun, who had already been initiated but still remained inactive. Neither was considered a powerful shaman by his or her own ethnic group; therefore neither commanded the authority needed for them to be a force in warding off the approaching misfortune.

As a consequence of the dramatic changes in the political situation that occurred with the end of the war in Manchuria in August 1945, the population was in the grip of a general sense of insecurity. In addition, as a consequence of the Reindeer-Evenki belief in spirits, the lack of a shaman capable of functioning as a safety valve had disastrous consequences. Fear of the evil influences of a shaman's unbound spirits had such deep roots in the psyche of the people that, in cases where a capable shaman was rendered ineffectual through lack of optimism, misfortunes in every section of daily life began piling up. The hunt was without success, the reindeer did not prosper, and terrible acts of violence began to be committed.

The Tungus scholar Anatolij Makarovič Kajgorodov,¹ an eyewitness of these events, observed in his letters to me that "the spirits run loose at the death of a shaman and can inflict great misfortune.... [This] can easily be noted in the example of the Three-River Evenki. Murder followed murder among the clans. The Russian trading partners (*andaki*) of the Evenki demanded that the Russian military administration (at the time of the Russian occupation of Manchuria from 1945 to 1948) prohibit these atrocious rituals, but because of the huge distances in the taiga this proved to be impossible. There can be no doubt about the Evenki belief that evil spirits may run loose, because after the death of the shamaness Olga Dmitrievna I often heard people talk of her plans to invite a shaman of the Oročon [a neighboring Tungusic group of horse breeders] to come and control the spirits and protect the people from them. However, as far as I can remember, these plans were not carried out" (Correspondence 35). In another letter Kajgorodov added the following: "...when the catastrophe broke out in the taiga after the death of Olga Dmitrievna, the problem of a shaman arose. In this time of need the Reindeer Evenki intended to invite a shaman of the Oročon. For that purpose they dispatched Ivan Dmitrievič Sologon (whose nickname was 'Kundo' or 'Kundo-Ivan') to the river Gan. I cannot say whether or not this trip really took place, because his departure fell about the time that the area was taken over by the Chinese administration" (Correspondence 453).

When the series of cases of blood revenge among the Reindeer Evenki of the Great Hinggan began in 1945, still within the period of the Japanese occupation, the ethnic group consisted of the Sologon, Buldotin, Kaltakun, Kudrin, Kelike, Zolotovski, and Larionov clans (the last-named might have been a sub-clan or part of another clan).

According to the letters I have received from Kajgorodov (Correspondence 11, 35–38, 85, 107–109, 130, 190, 261, 374, 375, 453, 564–66, 646, 658, 694, 695, 838, 1031, 1038) the cases of ritual blood revenge among the Manchurian Reindeer Evenki began when J. B. Buldotin, a grandchild of the master hunter P. P. Buldotin, killed the hunter I. A. Zolotovski. Kajgorodov learned the gruesome details of these terrible ritual killings from Victor Kudrin (whom the Evenki called Goko), the adopted son of the late shamaness Olga Dmitrievna Kudrina, at the *bogžor* in March 1948. According to Victor's information the murders conformed to the following rules. The person harboring the intention to commit a murder in relation to a blood feud would at first carefully hide his intention and observe the chosen victim over a long period of time. He would try to stay close to the victim, awaiting a favorable opportunity. When such an opportunity finally presented itself, the armed avenger would sneak up to the tent (*dju*) where the victim was sleeping or to the campfire where he was resting or eating. Immediately before shooting, the avenger had to insult the intended victim using the most abusive terms in the Evenki language. A peculiar rule dictated that in this situation nobody, whether brother, son, or wife, was allowed to plead for the victim, even if they happened to be nearby. After that the avenger would kill his victim with a single well-aimed rifle shot, jump out of his hideout, and run up to the victim's body. For an hour, or even for a whole night, he would dance and rage around the victim, spitting out more insults against him. According to the ritual's prescriptions, everyone present at the place where the murder had occurred was obliged to participate in this wild dance, and nobody was allowed to mourn the dead, show signs of grief, or weep. The most repulsive thing, however, was that the avenger had to try to mutilate the slain victim by, for example, putting out his eyes with a hunting knife or cutting off his ears. A person killed as a consequence of blood revenge was not buried, but rather his mutilated body was burned. According to Victor Kudrin's account, I. A. Zolotovski had violated the rules of the ritual by fleeing before the blood avenger J. B. Buldotin. The latter had to chase his victim for almost thirty kilometers before he could shoot him. He then danced around his victim for a long time until he finally left the corpse in the taiga to be devoured by the wolves.

About the second case of blood revenge Kajgorodov wrote: "I. S. Kaltakun committed the second ritual murder somewhat later at the upper Džin, a tributary to the Bystraja. I knew this victim as well; he was P. G. Zolotovski. At that time, the wife of the slain Evenki told me about the incident. I believe her given name was A. She declared to me that in any case she would insist on having the death of her husband avenged. However, because the murderer did not attend the *bogžor*, which at that time was held in the neighborhood of our village, she aimed her rifle all the time [instead] at F. S. Kaltakun, the murderer's brother. She had a six-year-old daughter and an adorable son about one year old, who

already would stretch out his hand when greeting people. I had the boy baptized in his absence in the Orthodox Church and, being his godfather, had him given my first name so that his name was A. P. Zolotovskii. In March 1948, during my last visit to the taiga, I encountered A. again. It happened at one of the last traditional meetings in which the Reindeer Evenki traded with their Russian trading partners, with some Chinese already present. Later I heard of terrible things. On returning to their hunting area, A. had stopped with her children at the campsite where her husband had been killed. While the other Evenki moved on, she kindled a large fire, yet did not unload her reindeer. Then she shot and killed first her little son and then herself with her rifle. The little girl in a state of shock ran after the other Evenki and was able to catch up with them. To this day I experience feelings of guilt towards the boy, my godson, because I did not keep him in our village. However, at that time I had to leave for my studies in Harbin. I should add that when I asked A. why she had aimed at F. S., who after all was not the one who had killed her husband, she replied: 'He danced along with the others'" (Correspondence 37, 38).

After that, murder followed upon murder among the Reindeer-Evenki clans, and the Russian military administration, which had been established in the area at the end of the Second World War and continued until 1948, found itself totally unable to stop the ritual killings. The members of the various clans, and also of the two local groups of Ciganč'en and Gunač'en who had remained in the area, were afraid of one another and tried to avoid any mutual encounters. The series of ritual killings connected with blood revenge continued up into the early years after the establishment of the People's Republic of China.

Blood revenge among the Manchurian Reindeer Evenki originated in the obligation of a clan's members to mutually help and protect one another. Especially in a case where someone had been insulted or wounded by a person foreign to the clan, he had to be supported for compensation by the members of his own clan as much as they could. As the aforementioned cases reveal, blood revenge was still deeply entrenched among the people as an old and traditional customary law even as late as 1945. But when the blood feuds began to spread, claiming an increasing number of victims, the Reindeer Evenki themselves began to recognize the danger it posed to the survival of their small group in Manchuria and tried to prevent any further such killings. An example of their efforts is the following known case, mentioned also by QIU Pu (1962, 58). In 1948 Kundo-Ivan (Ivan Dmitrievič Sologon), who at that time belonged to the local group of the Ciganč'en, arrived in the vicinity of the Russian settlement Dubovaya in the so-called Three River Area. There, members of the Gunač'en local group captured him in order to kill him. But the old and wise hunters among them said: "Why should members of our ethnic group even now kill one another when there are so few of us left?" Thereupon they tied Kundo-Ivan to a

tree, then set up a loaded and unlocked rifle as a spring-gun aimed at his stomach. A string attached to the trigger of the gun was fastened to his body in such a way that by any of his movements he would himself trigger the deadly shot. For a whole night he had to remain in this terrible posture. The next morning, people of the Gunačen finally untied him and released him from his status as “a person condemned to death.”

This proves that human reason had finally won the day over the blind observance of old and outmoded norms of customary law in the thinking of the Reindeer Evenki, and that the actions of the Evenki people of the taiga were not completely entangled in outmoded ideas.

In the early 1950s, blood feuds finally began to dwindle until they disappeared completely. Not the least reason for this was that the shamaness Njura Kaltakun had succeeded in bringing the harmful spirits, which had run loose after the death of her famous predecessor Olga Dmitrievna Kudrina, under control. With this she acquired the requisite authority in her small Tungusic ethnic group living in the taiga of the Hinggan.

In summing up, on the basis of the known and reported details concerning cases of blood revenge that occurred in the years from 1945 to 1951/52 among the Manchurian Reindeer Evenki, we can state the following:

- a) Blood revenge had been an old, traditional customary law.
- b) It was conducted according to specific ritual rules and norms.
- c) A murder, committed by a person foreign to the clan, obligated the adult male members of the victimized clan to resort to blood revenge and kill the perpetrator.
- d) At first, however, repeated efforts were made to avoid the escalation of violence and arrive at a peaceful solution, in which the family of the killer paid compensation (*wergild*) to the family of the victim. In order for this to happen, someone had to serve as a troubleshooter and mediator—someone who commanded the necessary authority among both clans concerned, such as the male elder of a clan or a powerful shaman or shamaness.
- e) If such a mediating authority was lacking, the violence escalated into full-scale blood feuds, involving ever wider circles of people. Murder followed upon murder.
- f) Blood revenge was not fought in the form of single combat or a duel. Rather, the avenger killed the victim with a well-aimed rifle shot, often from a secure hiding place or in ambush.
- g) The victim was always insulted by the avenger immediately before being killed, but was not tortured to death. In most cases the victim was quickly

killed by a single shot and efforts were taken to avoid inflicting unnecessary suffering.

- h) The body of the slain victim was again insulted and also partly mutilated. The avenger and those who happened to be present at the killing were obliged to dance around the body.
- i) The body of the victim was not buried but was either burnt or simply abandoned in the wilderness.
- j) Only males were targeted; women and children, boys included, were immune and never became victims of blood revenge. (The case mentioned above, in which the widow of a victim targeted the brother of her husband's murderer, then later took her own life and that of her son, was a rare exception.)
- k) To those involved, blood revenge was never considered a kind of adventure; it was always felt to be an oppressive and onerous obligation to the clan.

As a rule, the contemporary Reindeer Evenki of Manchuria do not talk, or talk only very reluctantly, about the events related to blood revenge, which now date back more than fifty years, as I discovered myself during my fieldwork among the last Tungusic hunters in the forests of the Great Hinggan.² In fact, at that time it seemed to me almost unimaginable that cruel and bloody acts of vengeance had occurred among such a small, peaceful, and gentle population. Yet it appears from an investigation into the known cases that even these nomads of the taiga were not without conflict and violence, particularly when their customary means of settling disputes through mediation by influential shamans had been disrupted by the incursion of outside authorities.

NOTES

* This article was translated by Peter Knecht.

1. Kajgorodov (1927–1998) was a scholar of Tungus and a librarian. (Editors' note: see his obituary in *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. 61, 149–62.) He was born into a Cossack family in Transbaikalia. His family had trade relations with the Evenki, although he was not an Evenki himself. One of his godparents was the famous shaman Olga Dmitrievna Kudrina, mentioned above. Kajgorodov knew almost all Reindeer Evenki personally. He often went hunting with them in the taiga. He is an absolute authority on the history of the Evenki in the 1930s and 1940s, not least because of his encyclopedic knowledge of those times.

2. It was the express wish of the last shaman of the Reindeer Evenki, Njura Kaltakun (ca. 1912–1998), as well as the oldest man of the Kaltakun clan, that the author investigate and write about all aspects of Evenki life and their history, which includes the period of 1945 to 1952 during which the gruesome events of blood revenge occurred. All people directly involved in the incidents discussed are deceased, as are their descendants.

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