

1. Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family: (2)

Name: Koryak (also known as Chavchuven or Nymylan)

Classification: Chukotko-Kamchatkan, Northern, Koryak-Alyutor

Language: Koryak

Language Family: Chukotko-Kamchatkan (part of the Paleo-Asian languages)

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): (3)

kpy

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): (1)

Kamchatka (north half of peninsula), also in Magandanskaya Oblast

56.1327°N, 159.5314°E

1.4 Brief history: (1, 5, 6, 7)

The Koryak people live in the northern part of the Kamchatka peninsula which is part of the Russian Federation. They were conquered by the Cossacks at the end of the 1600s and were then incorporated into the Russian empire. However, the tsar mainly left them alone except for he required a fur tribute from all adult males and some transportation services. During Stalin's rule, many Koryak shamans and reindeer herders were executed. In the 1930s, the Koryak Autonomous Region (KAR) was established in the northeast of the Russian Federation. This was established under the Communist Party when they tried to give individual nationalities "rights" to their cultures. After World War II, the regions designated for individual nationalities like the Koryak were incorporated into their surrounding provinces, so therefore the KAR became part of the Kamchatka province. In 1991 when the Soviet Union fell apart, the Koryak and many other groups like themselves declared themselves autonomous from the provinces in which they were forced to become part of. However, this has caused difficulty as the Russian Federation requires the Koryak and other groups to create an economic and administrative infrastructure in order to be considered autonomous from the provinces.

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: (2)

The Koryak have been influenced by the Russian Government since they were conquered by the Cossacks in the 1600s as they have been forced into incorporation with surrounding provinces. In 1954, the teaching of the Koryak language in schools was prohibited, and now only 13 schools teach the Koryak language. Soviet control also resulted in the forced settlement of many of the reindeer herders. In the 17th and 18th centuries the Christianization of Russia affected many settled Koryaks as they were forced to take Christian names. However, most Koryaks kept their traditions names.

1.6 Ecology: (1)

The area in which the Koryak live include the river basins of the Paren' and Penzhina rivers, the coast of the Bering Sea, tundra, plateau, and mountains. The climate on the Kamchatka peninsula is oceanic and the average annual temperature is below 0°C. Therefore, the main sources of food for the Koryak are fish and reindeer.

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density (1)

Population size: 1,670 (Ethnic population: 7,950)

Mean village size: A village was usually made up of 6 or 7 family units, which included grandparents, parents, and children

Home range size:

Density: between 0.1 and 0.08 per square mile

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): (9)

The Koryak diet is predominantly meat and fish, but their main source of carbohydrates were berries and roots. In modern day though the Koryak trade for processed carbohydrates such as cereal and bread.

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: (9)

Reindeer, fish, sea mammals

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: (6)

Iron spears, armor, and leather

2.4 Food storage: (3)

Within their semi-underground huts, there are compartments for sleeping, a hearth for cooking, and then compartments for storing and preserving food.

2.5 Sexual division of production: (4)

Men's tasks generally include reindeer herding, fishing and hunting. Women's tasks include making clothes, housekeeping, and gathering (which was later replaced by gardening in some areas).

2.6 Land tenure: (2)

The Koryak have never "owned" land so therefore the entire concept of land ownership is foreign to them

2.7 Ceramics: (4)

Some groups of Koryak made metallic armor.

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos: (10, 11, 6)

Wolves are considered their relatives and the raven has an important place in their mythology. After giving birth, women are not to eat ringed seal, white whale, fresh fish, or raw thong-seal. She also cannot eat whale meat in the fall, but can in the winter.

2.10 Canoes/watercraft? (3)

On the water Koryaks use boats that are hollowed out from an entire tree trunk. They also used kayaks that were covered in sealskin.

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): (7)

1596 mm (m), 1491 mm (f)

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f): (7)

13-14

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): (8)

Female: between 18 and 20

4.3 Completed family size (m and f): (1, 2, 10)

Women usually have between 5 and 7 children in their lifetime and stop having kids around age 40 which is considered old. Therefore, the completed family size for males and females is between 7 and 9 (including themselves).

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): (1, 2)

There is about a three-year inter-birth interval between children in Koryak families as women often nurse their children until about age three. The average number of children born to a mother is five.

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): (8)

Female: between 18 and 20

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: (6)

There is not a specific number for the proportion of marriages ending in divorce, only that among the Koryak they were quite common. After a divorce, the woman would often return her family.

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: (5)

The Koryak practice monogamous patrilocal marriage and patrilocal kinship.

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: (11)

In Koryak tradition, men had to do a bride service to his future wife's family which could last from several weeks to several years.

4.9 Inheritance patterns: (6)

The Koryaks do not own land, so instead reindeer herds are passed down through the male line. However, during the Soviet era inheritance generally lost its significance.

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: (5)

Homosexual activities among men were quite common and accepted among Koryak peoples. There is not much information on homosexual activities among women, however there is no doubt that they did occur. Homosexual shamans were quite common in Koryak communities and highly respected.

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): (2)

Among the Koryak reindeer herders, marriage outside of the community was just as normal as marriage inside the community. Common groups that the Koryak married outside of the community were the Even and the Yukagir. However, more settled Koryaks preferred to marry within the community. However, traditional marriages were endogamous.

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows")

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? (6)

It is believed that before a child is born the Supreme Being sends into the mother's womb the soul of some deceased relative of the child to be born.

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? (8)

Females do not enjoy sexual freedoms and infidelity is punished severely. Of all transgressions, infidelity is considered the worst by the Koryak and almost always causes a social reaction within the community in which the transgressor is punished by exile or execution.

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

100/86= 50:43

4.22 Evidence for couvades

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? (11)

Respect for kin is based on age, relationship, and to lesser extent gender. For example, among the female members of a family the father's older sister is the most respected, and then the rest of the women follow in order of age.

4.24 Joking relationships?

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations (2)

The Koryak do not traditionally follow a pattern of descent, neither unilineal nor an elaborate genealogy. When naming a child, the parents name off both maternal and paternal ancestors in no particular order until the baby responds to a name.

4.26 Incest avoidance rules (2)

Incest is actually quite common in Koryak tradition in that marriage between cousins and even siblings is accepted.

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? (4)

There is a formal marriage ceremony which includes a tradition called the “grabbing of the bride” in which the groom must touch the wife’s genitals while she and her relatives tried to prevent him from doing so.

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? (11)

Instead of carrying the names of genealogical clans, the Koryaks name mainly after the place of current residence, which is usually by a river. All children born to Koryaks are named after ancestors who have died.

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?) (2)

Among the Koryak reindeer herders, marriage outside of the community was just as normal as marriage inside the community. Common groups that the Koryak married outside of the community were the Even and the Yukagir. However, more settled Koryaks preferred to marry within the community.

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: (2)

There have been various wars that the Koryak have participated in with neighboring groups throughout history. Living in close proximity with the Chukchi and Yukagir, wars were common, especially in the 17th and 18th centuries. When the Cossacks came in the late 17th century, the Koryaks fought back against them, capturing some of their firearms and then using them.

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: (2)

The most common cause of outgroup killing is because of war or some crime that was committed by another group against the Koryaks. Within the Koryak community though, the most common cause of killing is execution after a trial due to a serious crime, such as adultery.

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

4.18 Cannibalism?

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: (1)

About six or seven families (six or seven in number each) would make up small bands. Therefore, village group size is usually around 36-42 people.

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): (1)

The Koryak are often split into two groups: those who predominantly fish and those who hunt reindeer. The Koryak who hunt reindeer would follow the herds based on the season, and the fishers would fish in different areas based on the season.

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): (1, 2, 4)

The political system consisted of communities that were run by elders who directed all economic and social life. However, during the end of the 1700s this began to disintegrate and the economic unit of the family became isolated and continues to be today.

5.4 Post marital residence: (4)

If a woman’s husband died, she was to marry his brother and live with his family.

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

Land ownership and territory is virtually unknown to Koryak people. Also, since they are mainly fishers and hunters they either follow the reindeer herds or the fish.

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization: (1)

In the past, many families (about 5 or 6) would live together in a semi-underground hut. Today however, it is rare that more than one family lives in a single hut.

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses): (1)

Since the Koryak are seminomadic, the only village structures are the semi-underground huts in which they live. In the past, between 3 and 5 families lived in each hut, but nowadays only about 1 family lives in each hut.

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? (2, 4)

Before the 1800s, the Koryak lived in communities in which the whole clan lived in one semi-underground hut. Today Koryaks still live in huts like this only one family lives in each hut as opposed to the entire clan. The huts were portable and covered by a tarp of reindeer hides, with internal compartments that were used for sleeping.

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: (1)

The Koryaks are predominantly egalitarian with bands of about six or seven families. There was a chief for the bands however he did not really have any authority. Instead, bands would discuss issues together and come to a consensus to make decisions.

5.12 Trade: (1, 2)

The Koryak trade with each other often as some are reindeer herders and others are more settled. They also are engaged in extensive trade networks with neighboring peoples.

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): (11)

Koryaks do not call people shamans, but rather see them as “genuine Koryak art.” They also do not call healers shamans. An important specialization in Koryak religious tradition is dance, and dancing to drums are important in their belief system. They believe that drumming and dancing are linked to spirits and connecting with deceased ancestors.

6.2 Stimulants:

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): (11)

The Koryak have a thanksgiving holiday in autumn called Hololo which lasts several weeks where they feast and wear traditional masks.

6.4 Other rituals:

6.5 Myths (Creation): (11)

The Koryak believe that everyone came from Big-Raven, known as Kutkh, was the first man, father and protector of the Koryak. They believe that Kutkh dropped a feather while swooping over the sea, creating the Kamchatka peninsula where the Koryak live. Once the land was created, Kutkh created men and women and when these original men died the Koryak believed that they became mountains and erupt because of the men’s love for the women.

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): (11)

Dance is very important to the Koryak as they believe that drumming and dancing are linked to spirits. Special costumes were created for the dance usually out of a reindeer skin coat. Oftentimes there was not a set choreography at performances but rather dancers were encouraged to do their thing, following their feelings and doing what felt “right” to them.

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect: (11)

In the 1990s Protestant missionaries came to the Koryak camps, however many of the Koryak people got strange messages. The missionaries targeted the young people who were looking for a morality guideline as the Koryak religious tradition had been lost with their parents. The young people’s parents had been raised during Soviet rule and had therefore been forced to go to boarding school so they were not taught the religious traditions by their parents. In some Koryak areas Protestantism did take hold, but in the process all Koryak religious tradition was lost because the Protestant religion does not allow any indigenous ritual.

6.9 RCR revival: (11)

Today, many older members of the Koryak are trying to revive the Koryak religion by subtle teaching and music. Dance is an integral part of the religion so in some places elders have begun to teach the dance again and hold performances like they used to before the Protestant missionaries came. This is difficult though because they reject the word “shaman” because it garnered persecution under the Soviets, but many of the dancers are still called shamans by the outside world today. As a result many young people stop participating in the dance.

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: (11)

In some Koryak groups, different methods of burial were used for different types of deaths. For example, those who died naturally were cremated, infants were buried, and those who committed suicide did not receive a burial. Reindeer herders were often cremated with all objects they may need in the next world burned with them. The Koryaks believed that all things were diametrically opposite to things in this world, so reindeer were harnessed incorrectly when they were burned with the body of a reindeer herder.

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? (11)

The Koryak do not have a taboo of naming dead people as everyone in a Koryak community is named after a dead ancestor.

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.) (11)

The Koryak have a main figure in their mythology called Big-Raven who was believed to be the first man and therefore the father of the Koryak. Sacrifices are made to both good spirits, which consist of ancestors, and bad spirits. Each village also had a guardian spirit. For sacrifices, the dog was considered to be the most important sacrifice for the spirits because it could be reborn and serve the ancestors.

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

7.2 Piercings:

7.3 Haircut:

7.4 Scarification:

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): (11)

Hats are very important in Koryak culture as they signify regional variation and cultural differentiation. Each clan of Koryak would make their hats differently, with separate ones for summer and winter. Beads are often used on ceremonial clothing, and masks are occasionally worn for traditions such as Hololo.

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: (11)

For dances, Koryak dancers wear headdresses made of beads and a decorated parka. The drummers also wear a decorated parka, however they do not wear the headdresses.

7.7 Sex differences in adornment: (11)

For dancers, male and female dancers both wear the parka.

7.8 Missionary effect: (11)

When Protestant missionaries came in contact with the Koryak, many Koryak traditions were lost as they were not allowed to practice their traditional beliefs. As a result some of the most important parts of Koryak culture have become more and more rare, such as dancing.

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: (11)

There has been a recent push by the elderly generation to revive some of the Koryak traditions that have been lost on their children and grandchildren. An example of the most common cultural revival is the teaching of dance classes by Koryak elders to revive the dance that is so important to Koryak culture.

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system: (4)

Those who were biologically related to a person were considered their sibling.

8.2 Sororate, levirate: (10)

When a woman's husband dies, she either goes back to live with her family or goes to live with the brother of her husband.

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.): (10)

The Koryak kinship system is bilateral, with social organization based on residence.

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them): (11)

The Koryak language is split into four main dialects: Northern Kamchatka, Reindeer and Kamenskoe-Paren' Koryak, Alutor, and Kerek.

Textbooks have been written using the Koryak language, however the writing system used was Latin.

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