

 Introduction

## WRITING THE “REINDEER EWENKI”

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This volume is the first English-language book devoted solely to the Ewenki<sup>1</sup> reindeer-herding community of Aoluguya, China, known locally as the Aoxiangren or people of Aoluguya Ewenki Ethnic Township. The Reindeer Ewenki (Chinese: *xunlu ewenke*), known as China’s only reindeer-using tribe (*shilu buluo*), have also been identified as the country’s “last hunting tribe” (*zuihou de shoulie buluo*). As nomadic hunters of the taiga, they once lived in cone-shaped tents similar to the North American tepee. As tall as ten feet, these dwellings were made of birch bark in the summer and the hides of deer or moose in the winter, supported by larch poles. The Ewenki used reindeer as pack animals to carry tents and equipment as their owners moved through the taiga forest. Women and children would ride the reindeer, and reindeer-milk tea was a favorite drink.

After the founding of the People’s Republic, a “hunting production brigade” was established, and reindeer antlers started to be cut for the production of Chinese medicine. The Ewenki still hunted for subsistence, but as workers in the brigade they were expected to hand over game for “points,” which was the only way they could acquire supplies at the store. Following Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms in the early 1980s, the brigade was turned into a hunting cooperative. Hunting remained an important source of income and subsistence until 2003, when the community was relocated to a new settlement far from their hunting grounds. Prior to the move, their guns were confiscated and a complete ban on hunting was imposed. The Aoluguya Ewenki thus lost a key aspect of their way of life, culture, and identity. After their relocation, reindeer herding was the last remnant of the Ewenki nomadic lifestyle, and since then the reindeer have become a key source of livelihood and symbol of the unique identity of the Reindeer Ewenki.

Chinese ethnologists and historians believe that as early as 2000 B.C., the ancestors of the reindeer-using Ewenki people lived around Lake Baikal and the upper reaches of the Nerchinsk River, northeast of Lake

Baikal. Between the sixteenth and mid seventeenth century, they moved to the areas near the Weile and Weitmu Rivers, branches of the Lena River northwest of Lake Baikal. During the eighteenth century they migrated further, along the Shilka River, and gradually crossed the Argun River (Chinese: E'erguna) into the forests of the Greater Hinggan Mountains,<sup>2</sup> currently known as Daxing'anling, in Hulun Bei'er League, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. According to a 1909 survey conducted by Zhao Chunfang, in the Amur River bend the Ewenki hunted mainly along the Bei'erci River (Russian: Bystraja), the Amur, and the upper reaches of the Genhe River. In the 1950s, their hunting grounds stretched from the banks of the E'erguna in the west (the border between China and the Soviet Union) to the estuary of the Kamalan River and the upper Huma'er River in the east, and from Enhehada and Xilinji in the north to the Genhe River in the south (Kalina 2006). Moving around in this area with their reindeer, they hunted deer, moose, boar, wild birds, and rabbits. In winter they also hunted and trapped squirrel, lynx, fox, and sable. Furs, hides, and meat were bartered with Russian traders known in Ewenki as *andak*, who supplied them with goods such as black tea, flour, salt, sugar, alcohol, clothes, guns, and ammunition (Heyne 2003). From the Russians they learned how to bake pan bread, called *lieba*. Many Ewenki hunters spoke Russian as a second language, and Russian names were popular. While continuing to adhere to Shamanism, some of their customs and beliefs, burial practices, and other rituals were also somewhat influenced by Russian Orthodox Christianity.

In 1932 the Japanese army occupied Manchuria and established the puppet state of Manchukuo (1932–1945). By 1942 the Japanese Secret Service had marshalled the young Ewenki men into camps to be trained as rangers or scouts (Heyne 2007). This was a time of violent killings among the Ewenki, especially after the death of the respected shaman Olga Kudrina, who had mediated in earlier conflicts. After the killing of a Japanese officer, one group of Ewenki, fearing retaliation, crossed the Amur River and stayed in Siberia. The Russian military took over the area after the Japanese defeat at the end of World War II.

Soviet administration continued until 1948, when the Communists emerged victorious in the civil war in China. After the People's Republic of China was founded, Ewenki hunters were given the choice of remaining in China or moving across the E'erguna River to the Soviet Union. In the 1950s the Chinese government constructed houses for the Ewenki hunters in the village of Qiqian, on the eastern bank of the E'erguna (the Chinese call it the "left bank"). Far from becoming sedentary, the Ewenki community continued its hunting lifestyle, living most of the year in cone-shaped tents transported by reindeer.

However, the deteriorating relationship between China and the Soviet Union in the early 1960s had far-reaching implications. Due to growing tension and tightened border control between the two regimes, a new settlement named Aoluguya was built in the interior of the Amur River bend, near the town of Mangui. The Ewenki community was relocated there, and for nearly four decades (1965–2003) Aoluguya was the seat of their “ethnic township” (Chinese: *minzu xiang*). Then the community was again relocated, this time to the “new Aoluguya” near the city of Genhe.

The Aoluguya Ewenki share many aspects of their hunting and reindeer herding culture with neighboring groups, including the Oroqen (Chinese: Elunchun) in Heilongjiang Province (hunters who used horses for transportation), the reindeer-herding Dukha and Tuva in northern Mongolia and the Russian autonomous republics of Tuva and Buryatia, and the Evenki in the Zabaikalsky region and Amur Oblast across the border in Russia. Linguistically they are closely tied to the latter group, with whom they share a language classified as a branch of Manchu-Tungusic. In the past decades, these small groups of hunters and herders inhabiting the border regions of Mongolia, Russia, and China have all undergone social and political transformations driven by Soviet and Chinese communism, followed by economic reforms and marketization leading to further marginalization. As a result, they all face similar challenges to their cultural survival today.

## The Ewenki in the “New China”

After the founding of the People’s Republic, scientists were recruited to identify China’s “nationalities” (Chinese: *minzu*) in the “nationalities identification project” (*minzu shibie*). As a part of this exercise, the unique identity of the Reindeer Ewenki was acknowledged by their designation as “Yakut” (Chinese: Yakute) Ewenki, although they were not given the status of a separate nationality. The “Yakut” label reflected the belief that the Reindeer Ewenki originated in Yakutia, or what Lindgren (1936) called the Iakut Administration, which was an independent polity at the time of the Russian Civil War. According to Heyne (2007: 166) the Reindeer Ewenki began immigrating in clan groups from Yakutia (modern Sakha) to the yet undisturbed taiga of northern Manchuria as of about 1825.

Besides the forest-dwelling Yakut, the nationalities identification project also placed two larger groups inhabiting the grasslands of Hulun Bei’er League in the Ewenki category. These were the “Solon” (Suolun)

and the “Tungus” (Tonggusi) Ewenki, the latter also known by the Buriat-Mongolian term *Khamnigan*.<sup>3</sup> According to the project’s scientists, the three groups all spoke related languages classified as Manchu-Tungusic and had histories of migration from Siberia and the Lake Baikal region. The other Ewenki groups differed from the Yakute in that they had adopted horse breeding and taken up livestock herding and farming as their main livelihoods. Their languages were different, and as the scientists perceived, the groups had different migration histories. Nevertheless, the scientists concluded that the two other groups shared the same ethnic origins as the hunting and reindeer-using Ewenki of Daxing’anling.

Before the founding of the People’s Republic, Ewenki hunters moved back and forth across the Amur River relatively freely in a region alternately controlled by Russian and Manchu administrations. The victorious Communists in China were a force for integration and state expansion as well as increasingly strict border control. As soon as “minority nationalities” were identified, they were recruited into new forms of political organization through the Communist Party and its mass organizations. The Communist leadership also introduced a new production system based on communes and brigades, modern schooling, a new economic system relying on collective and state ownership, and completely new infrastructure (e.g., roads, railroads, power supply, concrete buildings). Frontier areas were simultaneously “opened up” to large-scale forestry, coal mining, and other extractive industries. After the establishment of communes, Ewenki hunters, as workers in the production brigade, were provided with rifles and regular supplies of ammunition. Over the years, the Aoluguya settlement was furnished with a school, a hospital, a post office, a bank, a store, a museum, a cultural center, a retirement home, office buildings for the township government, and a television ground receiving station. Meanwhile, excessive logging diminished the hunting grounds and gradually led to the depletion of wildlife. As the Aoluguya community became more integrated with mainstream Chinese society, dependency on the government also increased, leading to a sense of marginalization, loss of language, and widespread alcoholism.

Since the 1980s, the dismantling of communes and introduction of economic reforms have brought new challenges to the Aoluguya community while largely failing to address the weaknesses of earlier policies. According to one researcher, the root causes of high mortality rates among Ewenki adults are scarcity of resources, limited lands for reindeer herding, declining reindeer population, and unemployment, which lead to loss of livelihood, threats to cultural survival, spiritual

confusion, and feelings of alienation (Kalina 2006). Current efforts to develop China's small ethnic groups seek to rectify issues of marginalization, but authorities continue to render minorities as passive subjects. As with other such groups, the agency of the Ewenki reindeer herders is at stake: once more written as "other," now they are also exhibited as a tourism resource and staged as cultural performance. Their material culture is carefully "protected" in the museum, but the Ewenki language and cultural heritage are gradually disappearing. The last Ewenki shaman, Njura Kaltakun, passed away in 1997. Their language was never written and was taught in school only from 1998 to 2001. According to surveys by Kong Fanzhi (1994) and Kalina (2006), 48 to 77 percent of Aoluguya households contain mixed marriages. The non-Ewenki spouses include Mongolians, Manchu, Daur, Han Chinese, and Russians. At present very few Ewenki children are able to speak their native language.

The government invested more than ¥13 million to resettle the Aoluguya community from the "old Aoluguya" settlement 17.5 km north of Mangui to the "new Aoluguya" 4.5 km southwest of the county capital. The new Aoluguya Ewenki Ethnic Township covers 17,672 square km of land, or 8.83 percent of the total area of Genhe County (Kalina 2006). As of 2009, the 243 Ewenki people living in the township made up 16 percent of the total township population of 1,548 people. According to the local government, the "hunters" increased their annual per capita income from ¥2,892 in 2003 to ¥5,512 in 2009. Each Ewenki household resettled in the new Aoluguya was provided with free housing. Refurbished in Finnish design in 2008–09, these have become comfortable houses with modern amenities such as central heating, cable TV, and indoor plumbing. Attempting to protect their native language from extinction, the inhabitants of new Aoluguya have organized evening classes in Ewenki language and culture. The newly constructed Aoluguya Ethnic Reindeer Resort is a potential source of employment opportunities, including hotel jobs, souvenir production, and tourism services such as "Ewenki home-stays." The master plan for the resort (developed by the Finnish consultancy firm Pöyry) says the concept is "to preserve the Aoluguya cultural heritage and old livelihoods by turning the old skills and unique lifestyle into a tourism product" (Pöyry 2008: 7).

The new Aoluguya settlement was built with central government funds for "ecological migration" (*shengtai yimin*), a government scheme to restore vulnerable ecosystems by moving herders out of "degraded" (*tuihua*) environments and into planned settlements, targeting most pastoral areas in China. In the case of Aoluguya, environmental con-

cerns were clearly not the only grounds for the 2003 resettlement. According to Zhang Rongde and Bai Ying, a key goal of the government was to offer the former hunters a better standard of housing and infrastructure as well as a convenient administrative seat.

The 2003 resettlement also paved the way for creation of an ethno-tourist attraction where tourism could become a new livelihood for community members and a source of profit for investors and entrepreneurs. This raises the question of why a tourist resort was not constructed in the old settlement, where the natural scenery is far more beautiful than in the new site—especially when this was in fact precisely what happened to old Aoluguya after it was vacated. If relocation was required for the sake of environmental protection, why was the old Aoluguya site opened to further exploitation after its original inhabitants were moved out? As illustrated by several of the chapters of this volume, a political ecology story lurks beneath the propaganda surface. There is reason to doubt that resettlement was the only way to protect a fragile ecosystem, whether to save the wildlife from overhunting or the taiga from overgrazing. It seems more plausible that the community was moved to protect the Ewenki and their reindeer from the environmental damage unleashed by an exploitive timber industry and an influx of Han Chinese poachers, as described by Siqinfu. A more critical interpretation would be that further exploitation was already planned, so the community was moved mainly to allow others to profit.

Another important question is whether the “unique lifestyle” of the Ewenki reindeer herders can be a viable tourism product if reindeer herding fails to survive outside the tourist-park parameters. As of 2009, reindeer herding was the livelihood of only twenty-four households in the new township. Herders received ¥35 monthly in “forest protection” compensation. A total of 275 people in the township (other nationalities included) received compensation for hunting restrictions and welfare in the form of poverty aid, ranging from ¥12.5 to ¥104 monthly (Kalina 2006). In 2009, the twenty-four reindeer-herding households held about 650 reindeer—an average of less than thirty reindeer per household, down from a reindeer population of 706 at the time of the 2003 resettlement as per government records. Meanwhile, community members who do not have reindeer face a serious unemployment problem. Even those who are educated have great difficulty making a living in the settlement, as they must compete for jobs with more qualified “outsiders.” For many, welfare payments have become the main source of income.

The herders are well aware of the challenges they face in sustaining the health of their reindeer stock. They know the benefits of increasing the genetic diversity of their herds through interbreeding with reindeer

from other stocks. There is no wild reindeer population in the area, so they have no option to deliberately interbreed their reindeer cows with wild forest reindeer. Restrictions against transporting live reindeer across international borders add to the difficulties. Given these challenges, the main compensatory strategy is to keep a relatively high number of male breeding reindeer. This also increases the reindeer horn harvest, as males have larger antlers than females.

Though acknowledging the serious difficulties facing Ewenki reindeer herders today, this book challenges the implicit pessimism in popular conceptions of the Reindeer Ewenki as a relic of the past, as in the epithet “the last hunting tribe.” Without losing sight of the past, we primarily explore the present, reviewing current challenges and, even more importantly, responses to these challenges. The chapters of this book describe the reindeer herders’ efforts to reclaim their forest lifestyle and develop new forest livelihoods in the aftermath of the hunting ban and resettlement. We also describe how the people of Aoluguya re-envision their identity as “keepers of reindeer” as they engage in ethnic tourism, exchange experiences with Evenki neighbors in Russia, and network with other reindeer herders across the circumpolar region.

## The literature

A substantial English-language literature has described the Evenki of Siberia (Russia) (e.g., Abe 2005; Anderson 1991, 2000, 2006a, 2006b, 2010; Brandisauskas 2007, 2009; Ermolova 2003; Fondahl 1989, 1998; Istvan 2005; Lavrillier 2010; Sirina 2006; Vitebsky 1990, 2005), building on an even larger body of Russian literature. Until the early twentieth century, the scarce literature on their “little cousins” in the Amur River bend consisted of fragmented records by exiled bureaucrats, explorers, and ethnologists, mainly in Chinese, Russian, and Japanese (Kalina 2006; Siqinfu 1999, 2000). Monographs by Russian scholar Sergei Mikhailovitch Shirokogoroff (1929, 1935) were first to describe the “Tungus of Manchuria” in English. Shirokogoroff and his wife, both ethnographers, carried out research in the forests of the Amur River bend from 1915 to 1917. A few years later the Swedish-American anthropologist Ethel John Lindgren did extensive fieldwork in Daxing’anling (then known as the Greater Hinggan Mountains). Lindgren published several works on the “Reindeer Tungus of Manchuria,” including her doctoral dissertation (Lindgren 1930, 1935, 1936, 1938).

With the Japanese invasion and founding of the state of Manchukuo, the area became largely inaccessible to researchers. In the New China,

ethnographic studies of its northeastern region mainly mapped “minority nationalities,” described their stage on the Marxist evolutionary ladder of societies, and investigated the social issues confronting their “socialist development.” This situation prevailed until the departure of Mao Zedong, after which Deng Xiaoping embarked on his Reform and Opening Up campaign (started in 1979). The Japanese ethnographer Kazuyoshi Ohtsuka of Japan’s National Museum of Ethnology was an early member of a new wave of foreign researchers conducting fieldwork in the region. His ethnography of the Ewenki, Oroqen, and other ethnic groups (Ohtsuka 1988) has become a valuable resource for Japanese scholars of the Aoluguya Ewenki.<sup>4</sup> Ethnologists Ingo Nentwig (1989, 1991, 2003), F. Georg Heyne (1989, 1994, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2009, 2013)<sup>5</sup> and Hugh Beach (2003, 2012) subsequently made field trips to Aoluguya in 1985, 1993, and 1997. Another important contribution to the English-language literature is an article by the Inner Mongolian anthropologist Naran Bilik (1996) based on research in Aoluguya in 1994.

There is of course no lack of Chinese (or Mandarin) writings on the Ewenki. Among the early ethnographies in Chinese was Qiu Pu’s (1962) “The Primitive Social Organization of the Ewenki People.”<sup>6</sup> The township government of Aoluguya later published “The Reindeer Oroqen,” based on studies carried out in the 1930s by Haruka Nagata (1985). The Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Editorial Team’s “Survey of the Social History of the Ewenki” (Neimenggu Zizhiqu Bianji Zu 1986), part of a historical research series on China’s various ethnic minority communities, is still among the most important Chinese works on the Ewenki published in the People’s Republic. Works by Ewenki writers include Wure’ertu’s (1998) edited book “Ewenki Narratives.” Kong Fan-zhi, a former government cadre in Aoluguya, has also contributed with several ethnographies (1994, 2002). In the past decade, and especially since the 2003 resettlement, renewed academic interest in the Reindeer Ewenki has resulted in several academic articles and books, still mainly in Chinese (e.g., Bai 2003; Chao and Wang 2002; Dong 2007; He 2007; Kalina 2006; Qi 2006; Xie 2010).

The authors contributing to this volume are either indigenous to the region or have carried out fieldwork among the Reindeer Ewenki since the late 1990s. One of the Chinese contributors is an ethnic Mongolian (Siqinfu), one belongs to the Oroqen minority (Bai Ying) and three are Reindeer Ewenki (Gu Xinjun, Gong Yu, and Weijia). Contributions originally written in Chinese have been translated and carefully edited. The book has four parts. The first, introductory part is a historical account based on fieldwork in old Aoluguya by Siqinfu. The second part, “Migrations: Reindeer Herding in Flux,” comprises chapters by Tang Ge,



Åshild Kolås, and Aurore Dumont, all writing on contemporary practices and organization of reindeer herding. The third, “Representations: Defining the Reindeer Ewenki Culture and Identity,” consists of chapters by Zhang Rongde and Bai Ying, Xie Yuanyuan, and Richard Fraser, all dealing with issues of identity and cultural representation. The final part, “Local Voices,” presents Ewenki contributions in the form of a poem, an essay, and a short story.

Summarizing the recent history of the Reindeer Ewenki, Siqinfu understands nomadic movement as both the Ewenki survival strategy and their key response to the expansion of foreign forces. Toward the end of the twentieth century this strategy became increasingly difficult, however, as “ownerless land” ceased to exist and the influence of the nation-state permeated all spaces. After the nationalization of land and forests in the New China, sedentary lifestyles became the norm, and movement was relegated to migration or resettlement. Siqinfu looks back at the immense changes imposed on the Reindeer Ewenki while they were based at what is now known as old Aoluguya from the mid 1960s until their relocation to new Aoluguya in 2003. Chinese mainstream writing on the Aoluguya Ewenki generally interprets their resettlement as part of their “development,” but Siqinfu questions this notion and instead grounds Ewenki experiences in the larger context of China’s rapid, unprecedented transformation during the past decades.

## **Forest pastures of the reindeer**

In his chapter on contemporary reindeer herding, Tang Ge observes the significant changes brought by the gradual transformation from hunting to reindeer herding. Not only has the main source of livelihood changed, but the shift from hunting to herding has also greatly lowered the rate of migration within the forest. Whereas hunting used to be the main occupation of Ewenki men, now they work mainly in reindeer management. In the past, Ewenki women looked after the reindeer while the men went hunting; now, the women take care of the reindeer in and around the campsite while men seek out the reindeer in distant forest pastures, bringing them regularly back to the campsite. Tang Ge argues that in addition to the predator attacks and poaching that directly cause high death rates among reindeer, the current lack of male labor for herding is an important indirect cause for concern about the future viability of reindeer herding.

Reindeer herding now centers on production of reindeer horn for use in Chinese medicine, with a government-run enterprise still in charge

of cutting and marketing the reindeer horn (although restrictions on the marketing of antlers have recently been eased). As described in my own account of “ambiguities of the Aoluguya Ewenki,”<sup>77</sup> the nationwide decollectivization of farming and pastoralism was never fully implemented in Aoluguya, with vital implications for the reindeer herders’ grazing rights and ownership of the reindeer. Ewenki reindeer herders find themselves in an ambiguous space where they are neither a hunting tribe (*shoulie buluo*) as they were in the past, nor true pastoralists (*mumin*). Meanwhile, different government departments’ various handling of reindeer as domestic and wild animals is not just semantically significant but has very practical consequences for the management of reindeer husbandry.

In her chapter on “the many faces of nomadism,” Aurore Dumont details how the Reindeer Ewenki have maintained and adapted their economy to the present situation. The Chinese state has significantly altered the mode of reindeer herding and use of land through planned economy and sedentarization. However, the author argues, adaptations of old economic forms still endure in the new environment. This chapter analyzes the continuities, changes, and substitutions that are now shaping the Ewenki economy and transhumant lifestyle. Taking into account the herders’ sociocultural practices and adaptability to their natural environment, she explores how local people face the new challenges by developing their own adaptations and rearranging the social and spatial organization of nomadic camps. They do so with the help of the social and economic networks that Ewenki establish with Han people from the small towns and among themselves.

## Representations of Reindeer Ewenki culture and identity

Writing on the Ewenki “passage from forest to state,” Bai Ying and Zhang Rongde describe the museums that emerged and developed in Aoluguya Ewenki settlements as a government instrument intended to help a minority nationality realize modernization while simultaneously constructing the modernity of China. The advent of the museum thus reflects the passage of the Ewenki from the Daxing’anling forests into the fold of the multiethnic Chinese state. A review of museum development in the resettlement of the Reindeer Ewenki shows how a multiethnic state has realized its minority nationalities’ unity and integrity while also constructing ethnic minorities as objects of governance. However, the role of the museum is changing, reflecting contemporary

processes of social change. Since the late twentieth century, when China began socialist economic reforms and entered the global market, marketization has expanded its reach into minority areas, where museums have become an important resource in the production of ethnic visibility. Thus the role of museums for ethnic minorities has shifted from representation of a “development problem” in the modernizing China to market-driven production of visibility.

In her chapter on resettlement and Ewenki identity, Xie Yuanyuan describes how the 2003 relocation to new Aoluguya not only altered the hunting lifestyle as such but also significantly impacted notions of Ewenki identity. Contrary to the earlier relocations in 1957 and 1965, the hunters in 2003 were forced to lay down their guns and leave their hunting grounds behind. As described by Xie Yuanyuan, the Ewenki community falls into at least two different groups, in terms of their reactions to the resettlement. Modern hunters were strongly influenced by discourses of modernization and had thus already abandoned the traditional values of the forest lifestyle. Traditional hunters, however, still cherished their life in the forest and held the prospect of a modern life in disregard. In line with their preferences, traditional hunters never agreed with the ecological resettlement, whereas modern hunters not only agreed to it but conscientiously accepted mainstream values and conceptions of hunting and gathering as a backward, primitive relic of the past. They were therefore willing to support the ecological migration advocated by the local government and leave their seminomadic lifestyle behind for the promise of a modern life in the town. However, after the move they were dissatisfied with the conditions and facilities in the new settlement. The local government officials were aware of their views but also knew that these modern hunters would easily be placated by an offer of better services and conditions. They took a different approach to traditional hunters, who were merely ignored, largely because their views were more challenging and their complaints far more difficult to address.

In the final chapter on identity and representation, subtitled “Vernacular Ewenki Architecture and the State,” Richard Fraser describes the use of the tent as an identity marker, offering insights into the changing nature of minority-state relations (see also Fraser 2010). Despite the state promulgation of the conical tent (Ewenki: *djiu*) as a marker of Reindeer Ewenki identity, the vernacular features of Ewenki architecture continue to be evident in the ridge tents adopted in recent decades (Figure 0.1). Unlike the state, Fraser finds, herders do not explicitly distinguish between traditional and nontraditional architecture.



**Figure 0.1.** Tents in the herding camp, January 2008, Alongshan. Photograph by Aurore Dumont.

Instead, transformations are experienced from within the exigencies of the reindeer-herding lifeworld, where herders make changes to their architecture when they see fit and acquire new materials if and when they become available. In this regard, the adoption of ridge tents and new houses should not be seen as a non-vernacular transformation, but rather as an inherent dimension of contemporary Ewenki architecture.

### **Local voices**

Contributions by three members of the Aoluguya Ewenki community make up the final part of this volume. We shall let their words speak for themselves, briefly presenting the authors here. Weijia, who authored the poem in this volume, was born in 1965 in the Daxing'anling Forest and went to school in Aoluguya. His artistic talent was evident since childhood. Following in the footsteps of his older sister Ljuba, he was accepted as a student in the arts department of the Central University of Nationalities in Beijing in 1995. After studying traditional

Chinese painting for two years, he returned to the forest to live as a hunter-herder, poet, and painter. Weijia's paintings and poems portray the natural environment and wildlife of the forest, the Ewenki people, their campsites, and especially the reindeer.

Gong Yu, who wrote an essay for this volume, was born in 1981 in Aoluguya. Her Ewenki name is Niurika, after the last shaman. After graduating from secondary school, she left the settlement to attend teachers college, returning three years later to work as a teacher in the Aoluguya school. In 2001 she left again for studies at Inner Mongolia Normal University, graduating in 2009 with a master's degree in ethnic studies. Since then she has worked as a researcher at the Centre for Ethnicity, Culture and History, Hulun Bei'er College. She has also written for newspapers such as *Zhongguo Minzu* (China's Nationalities), *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* (China's Youth Newspaper), and *Guangming Ribao* (Guangming Daily Newspaper). Her writings have focused on the traditional culture of her people, as a lifestyle attuned to the reindeer and the natural environment of the high cold mountain forest.

Gu Xinjun is the author of several short stories, including "Hunting along the Bei'erci River," reproduced here for the first time in English. Born in 1964 in Qiqian, he grew up in the hunting camps of the Daxing'anling taiga. After graduating from Inner Mongolia Agricultural College, he served as township leader of Aoluguya from 1992 until 2001, when he was offered a position in the United Front Work Department of China's Communist Party in Genhe County. He currently leads the Ethnic Affairs Committee of the Genhe National People's Congress. Gu Xinjun is also the deputy head of the Association of Ewenki Studies of Inner Mongolia. Several of his short stories have been published by the literary society in Genhe. "Hunting on the Bei'erci River" records the author's experiences in the spring of 1990, on a hunting trip down the Bei'erci River (Russian: Bystraja; also known as Jiliu) in a small wooden boat. Gu Xinjun's motivation for writing this story was to record the hunting practices of the Ewenki people, and in his own words, "let the Ewenki youth know about the old hunting culture."

As the editors of this volume, Xie Yuanyuan and I are happy to present a wide range of contributions, covering academic findings as well as the results of life experiences, including those of members of the Aoluguya community. We see this as the best approach to the book's objective, which is to raise interest in and awareness of the reindeer herders of China, and to let some of their voices reach out to a wider audience, offering a glimpse into the contemporary world of the people of Aoluguya.

## Notes

1. We use the Chinese-mediated Latin transcription of the ethnonym, i.e., Ewenki, rather than a transcription directly from Tungusic, which would render the name as Evenki.
2. Alternative spellings of Hinggan are Hingan, Khinggan, and Khingan.
3. The term “Khamnigan” also defines a group of Tungus origin in Mongolia. According to the 2010 Chinese national census, Mongolians were still the largest ethnic minority group in Hulun Bei’er prefecture, with a population of 230,000. The total Ewenki population stood at 30,875 in 2010, of which the Reindeer Ewenki or Yakut was decidedly the smallest group, with a population of only around 250 people. The Solon was the largest Ewenki group, numbering about 27,000, while the Tungus was the second largest with about 2,000 members.
4. Two other notable contributions to the Japanese literature are *Dai koanreitan ken* (Daxing’anling Exploration), edited by Kinji Imanishi (1991), and *Hoppo kiba minzoku Orochon* (The Oroqen: The Northern Horsemen) by Haruka Nagata (1969), historical accounts of Ewenki culture and livelihoods as documented by the Japanese.
5. F. Georg Heyne has also drawn substantially on works by the Russian ethnographer Anatolii Makarovich Kaigorodov (1927–1998) (see Kaigorodov 1968, 1970).
6. Qiu Pu also authored the monograph *The Oroqens: China’s Nomadic Hunters*, published in English in 1983 by Beijing Foreign Language Press.
7. The chapter is based on the article “Ewenki Reindeer Herding as Exception,” published in *Human Organization* (Kolås 2011).

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