### **Leaving Footprints in the Taiga: Enacted and Emplaced Power and Luck among Orochen-Evenki of the Zabaikal Region in East Siberia**

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My dissertation focuses on the ways the Orochen-Evenki reindeer herders and hunters living in the taiga and villages of the northern part of Zabaikal’ia responded and adapted to a post-Soviet environment. This environment featured the collapse of a centralized system of resource redistribution and the privatization of collective property. One important response by people was to appropriate taiga territories for subsistence, as well as increase their reliance on taiga resources. Hence, vernacular notions of mastery (R. khoziian) and luck (O. kutu, R. udacha) have become important Orochen concerns shaping their interactions with other persons as well as taiga places or achieving hunting and herding success. Drawing on ethnographic and comparative sources, this thesis investigates the underdeveloped concept of mastery in Siberian ethnography. Orochen mastery describes relational forms of power intrinsic to interactions among humans, animals and spirits associated with different places, material objects and experiences of luck. Luck is achieved because of the good will of master-spirits and because the hunter is strong enough to win his contests with animals. Hunters and herders engage in complex relations of cooperation with other persons aiming to gain luck and maintain well-being, while at the same time relying on aggression to achieve hunting success. They creatively re-enact old forms of rituals for gaining success in subsistence, securing their territories as well as reassessing their identities. Mastery is based on adjusting one’s activities to the shifting environment, especially to places that are ruled by master-spirits, and by creating networks of exchange with different persons, so that one can be in the right place and be ready for various subsistence opportunities. Thereby, mastery can be analyzed through the variety of skills, kinds of knowledge and discursive strategies, and the empathy and awareness, all of which are necessary for gaining hunting success. This study also is critical of statements found in countless ethnographies that animals give themselves to hunters as long as they are treated with respect. Rather it is here suggested that these interactions are based on complex relations as well as experiences infused with anxiety, ambiguity and doubt. The dissertation also aims to fill an ethnographic gap by focusing on communities that have scarcely been studied since émigré ethnographer Sergei Shirokogoroff’s classic works in the early 20th century.