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Natalya Koptseva D.Sc. (Philosophy), Professor, Siberian Federal University, Krasnoyarsk, Russia 79 Svobodny Ave., Krasnoyarsk, 660041, Russia Kopceva63@mail.ru

# The current economic situation in Taymyr (the Siberian Arctic) and the prospects of indigenous peoples' traditional economy



**Abstract.** Today's Siberian Arctic, including Taymyr, is a reindustrialized area where the traditional economy of indigenous minorities finds itself clashing with global transformations, while non-market economic relationships typical of indigenous communities are being badly damaged by the capitalist market relationships of post-Soviet Russia. Based on insights collected via field research between 2010 and 2015 and a critical analysis of statistical data on modern Taymyr's economy (from January to July 2015), this paper attempts to assess the economic situation of Taymyr and its indigenous peoples, such as Dolgans, Nenets, Nganasans, Evenks, and Enets. Occupational employment and income statistics clearly demonstrate that the indigenous population is moving from a traditional economy to the modern post-industrial world. Traditional economic activities are 3 to 4 times less profitable than other types of business. State subsidies are no longer helping to mitigate the impact of the impoverishment process of the indigenous population. The establishment of traditional nature management areas, which could be used exclusively by the indigenous population, is being slowed down by the poorly developed legal framework required for creating such areas.

Keywords: Northern Siberia; Taymyr; Indigenous Minorities; Forecasting; Traditional Economic Activities JEL Classification: A13; C93; N55; O18; R58

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### Копцева Н. П.

доктор філософських наук, професор, Сибірський федеральний університет, Красноярськ, Росія

Сучасна економічна ситуація на Таймирі (Сибірська Арктика) та перспективи

## традиційної економіки корінних народів

Анотація. У статті представлені результати оцінки сучасної економічної ситуації на Таймирі в Сибірській Арктиці. На основі польових досліджень, аналізу статистичних даних щодо економіки Таймиру з січня по липень 2015р. робиться висновок про значне скорочення сфери неринкової традиційної економіки корінного населення Таймиру. Ключові слова: Північний Сибір; Таймир; корінні нечисленні народи; прогнозування; традиційне господарювання.

#### Копцева Н. П.

доктор философских наук, профессор, Сибирский федеральный университет, Красноярск, Россия Современная экономическая ситуация на Таймыре (Сибирская Арктика) и перспективы традиционной экономики коренного населения

Аннотация. В статье представлены результаты оценки современной экономической ситуации в Сибирской Арктике, на Таймыре. На основе полевых исследований, анализа статистических данных по экономике Таймыра с января по июль 2015 г. делается вывод о значительном сокращении сферы нерыночной традиционной экономики коренного населения Таймыра.

Ключевые слова: Северная Сибирь; Таймыр; коренные малочисленные народы; прогнозирование; традиционное хозяйствование.

1. Introduction. Russia's Arctic and Northern territories are home to unique indigenous ethnic minorities from Siberia and the North. These days the global community believes that the unique economic, environmental, and cultural practices of Siberian and Northern indigenous peoples are a common heritage of mankind and require special protection. The economic situation of Siberian and Northern indigenous peoples is characterized by a number of specific features, such as tough climate conditions, unique forms of social communication, environmental thinking, and coexistence between man and animals, man and flora, man and the natural environment. Processes associated with globalization, urbanization and mass culture domination are undermining indigenous peoples' traditional uniqueness and cultural environment. Secondary industrialization of the Russian Arctic is a subject requiring a detailed study into the current economic situation of the indigenous peoples living in the North and a wellplanned strategy for the area's socioeconomic development, taking into account the above features.

**2. Brief Literature Review.** The economy of Arctic Taymyr has been studied by economic scientists since 1960s. Studies by C. Chard (1963) [1] and D. P. Dunn (1963) [2] were among the first who looked into the unique economic practices of the Nganasans and examined the transformations

occurring in the economic and cultural status of various ethnic groups living in the Soviet North. L. H. Keeley (1988) [3] studied the features characterizing the economic status of indigenous hunter-gatherer communities. The American and British scientist D. Anderson conducted a vast amount of field research in Evenkia and Taymyr (2000a) [4], studying ethnocenosis, ethnic identities (2000b) [5], environmental and hunting practices among indigenous peoples across the globe (2001) [6], and other unique social and economic aspects of indigenous life in the Siberian Arctic. Another prominent researcher of the economy of Taymyr's indigenous peoples, J. Ziker, focused on the Nganasans and their land use and hunting practices (2002) [7]. He also analyzed social commu-nications in the Dolgan, the Nenets, and the Nganasan communities in the context of food redistribution (2004) [8] and conducted a detailed study of gender role shifts within Taymyr indigenous communities between 1917 and the 1990s (2010) [9]. When out on their field studies, Siberian researchers V. I. Kirko, L. M. Fatkulina-Yaskova, and V. V. Zakharyuta conducted a construction and medical survey of Nosok and Karaul, Taymyr villages populated by Nenets reindeer herders (2012) [10]. The results of the 2010-2012 field studies conducted from the Siberian Federal University reveal the influence of global transformations on today's ethnic dynamics in the

Siberian Arctic [11]. V. Krivonogov studied socioeconomic characteristics of the Dolgan community in the context of classical ethnography (2013) [12]. His foresight study into the subject brought together expert opinions on the future of indigenous peoples of Krasnoyarsk Krai (including Taymyr) [13], looked into post-Soviet practices of forming ethnocultural identities among the indigenous peoples of Taymyr [14], and set a target to research the quality of life indicators for Siberian native communities [15; 16]. Most relevant to the study are demographic and migration processes happening in the Arctic [17] and social identification practices among the indigenous peoples of Taymyr [18]. An interesting study by R. Czarny makes a number of predictions regarding future relationships between the aborigines' traditional economy and the industrial reclamation of the Arctic, including market and non-market economic practices [19]. The field research conducted by N. Koptseva and V. Kirko (2015) also suggests that global changes are inevitable for traditional economic, environmental, and cultural practices of the indigenous populations of Taymyr and Russia's Arctic areas [20].

But the traditional indigenous economy, which is the focus of most existing studies, is rapidly disintegrating. Taymyr's indigenous population is going through a transitional period which economic aspects require a more detailed analysis.

**3. The purpose** of this paper is to study data gathered through the 2010–2015 field research and analyze modern Taymyr statistics in order to assess the economic state of the area and its population which is the indigenous minorities of Siberia and the North.

**4. Results.** What makes Taymyr's economy special is that Northern indigenous communities populating it tend to live in rural settlements situated near water and the tundra, that is, where people can engage in their traditional economic activities. The distribution of indigenous peoples across such settlements is uneven, which was conditioned historically. Five key economic areas were formed here over history. They were associated with: the Yenisei Nenets, the Avam Nganasans, the Eastern Taymyr Dolgans, the Khantai Evenks, and the Potapovo Nenets. Historically, the Yenisei Nenets people have been living in the settlement of Karaul and in the western part of Dudinka. Their ethnic hub is in the settlement of Nosok. The area surrounding Lake Khantai is populated by the Evenks and the Dolgans. The Evenks have their ethnic hub in the settlement of Khantaiskoye Ozero (Lake Khantai).

The central part of Taymyr historically has been home to the Avam Nganasans. At the moment, it is also populated by the Dolgans and the Nenets. A vast part of Eastern Taymyr and the rural areas near the settlement of Khatanga have been the historical home to the Dolgan people. The area surrounding the settlement of Potapovo is populated by the Enets. According to the All-Russia Census of 2010, there were 10,132 indigenous people living in Taymyr in total, 53.2% of them being the Dolgans, 34.5% – the Nenets, 7.4% – the Nganasans, 2.6% – the Evenks, and 0.3% – other indigenous groups.

These days, the borders between historically formed economic areas are becoming fuzzy and are no longer expressed territorially. Modern social and economic conditions allow for high ethnic integration and the development of common social and cultural centers, where the government's targeted cultural policy is also a factor. Out of the total number of indigenous people (10,132), the majority (81%) lives in rural areas.

As of 1 January 2015, there were 653 businesses operating in Taymyr. Most of them are involved in reindeer herding, fishing, and hunting. Domesticated reindeer herding is practiced by people living in the settlements of Khatanga, Karaul, and Dudinka. There are 103,404 domesticated reindeer herded in Taymyr. The area's fishery includes 240 rivers stretching to some 50,000 km in total. The Transpolar area includes 173 fishing-friendly lakes with a total area of 10,200 sq. km.

Other than traditional economic activities, there is also pig farming developing in Taymyr. This industry is represented by just one farmer, Nikolay Fuchenko, whose livestock amounts to 207 pigs.

As of 1 July 2015, there were 260 rural businesses of various types of ownership and legal status operating in the area, including sole traders and farms. Country farms make up 16.9% of all such businesses, hunting and fishing family and clan businesses – 5%, limited liability companies – 8.5%, indigenous communities – 19.6%, artels (cooperative associations) – 5.8%, consumer cooperatives – 4.1%, sole traders – 40.4%, allotments – 0.7%. These figures suggest that sole traders and indigenous communities make up the biggest business segments in the area.

The total of 12,968 people worked in various businesses at the above time. They were involved in: traditional economic activities (farming and agriculture, forestry, hunting, and fishing) – 318 people; mineral mining – 264 people; processing and manufacturing - 194 people; generation and distribution of electricity, gas, and water - 542 people; construction - 102 people; trade, retail, and repairs - 136 people; hospitality and catering - 30 people; transportation and communications -2,653 people; finance - 65 people; real estate operations -1,884 people; government administration and social security - 1,933 people; education - 2,372 people; healthcare and social work - 1,627 people; utilities - 847 people. There is a total of 8,775 pensioners living in Taymyr; 3,765 of them collect pension and continue to work, while 5,010 do not work and rely on pension alone. 325 people are registered as unemployed. The unemployed to working-age population ratio is 1.6%. The highest level of unemployment is found in Dudinka (1.7%) and the lowest in Dikson (1.1%).

The figures quoted above suggest that Taymyr's economy is largely out of touch with its roots (reindeer herding, fishing, and hunting). It is more of a typical post-Soviet Siberian mixed economy dominated by modern businesses (such as real estate, transportation, and communications), with the vast majority of people employed in the public sector (education, healthcare, and government). As a result, today's Taymyr is no longer an area based on traditional economic activities of Northern indigenous peoples. Instead, it is a typical post-Soviet economy zone with most people employed in transport communications and the public sector. The indigenous population engaged in traditional economic activities relies on subsidies and targeted grants from the federal, regional or municipal budget, provided that claimants work specifically in traditional business, such as reindeer herding, hunting, and fishing. State and local governments support indigenous peoples by purchasing radio kits and parts, construction materials for building baloks (traditional hunting shacks), petrol engines and power generators for lighting herders' lodges, first-aid kits for nomadic herders and their families; covering indigenous students' university travel expenses; paying them higher scholarships or, where applicable, partly covering their tuition fees. This policy is known as paternalism, and now that its resources have been exhausted, there is demand for a new kind of relationship between indigenous peoples and the financial and industrial groups setting up their business projects in Taymyr. This also raises a question of who exactly qualifies as an indigenous person these days and which tell-tale signs indicate that they are involved in traditional economic activities. This is particularly important now that we are facing an exodus of indigenous people from their traditional ways into the modern post-industrial economy.

Income and quality-of-life stats also testify to the fact that Taymyr's population is shifting from a traditional to a modern economy. It is not uncommon for people engaged in traditional economic activities to earn no more than 16,000 rubles a month. The structure of their income largely depends on government subsidies for supporting the traditional indigenous economy. People living in Taymyr and working in modern areas of the economy tend to earn several times more than that amount: the average wage in mineral extraction is almost 143,000 rubles a month, in processing and manufacturing the amount is equal to 60,000 rubles. Occupations related to electricity, gas, and water distribution pay similar wages. Construction pays some 78,000 rubles a month and small business jobs (in retail or repairs) pay almost 50,000 rubles a month. People working in hospitality and catering earn a little over 40,000 rubles a month, whereas transportation and communications pay substantially more: over 70,000 rubles a month. Real estate operations allow one to earn on average 62,000 rubles a month. Government administration jobs pay 70,000 rubles a month on average, education jobs some 50,000 rubles; healthcare - about 55,000 rubles; and utilities - about 70,000 rubles. Traditional economic activities are far from profitable. As a result, most indigenous people turn from the traditional to the modern economy and start a career in business or areas backed by government funding.

At the same time, the past year has seen an increase in the overall consumer price index: the figure for the period between 1 January and 1 July 2015 was 113.3% of that for the same period in 2014. This includes 117.5% for groceries and 111.6% for non-food goods. Retail turnover for Q1 and Q2 2015 amounted to nearly 2 billion rubles, while commercial services totaled to almost half a billion.

A step from paternalism to the policy of strategic partnership between the government, big businesses and Taymyr's indigenous peoples appears to be possible only once the indigenous population has an exclusive right to dedicated nature management areas. The Russian legal system refers to such areas as «territories of traditional natural resource use». However, the Federal Law 49 of 7 May 2001 «On territories of traditional natural resource use by the indigenous minorities of the North, Siberia, and the Far East», which is currently in place, is far from perfect and does not apply to post-Soviet Russia's legal framework, as has been pointed out on a number of occasions by non-profit organizations speaking on behalf of indigenous peoples.

5. Conclusions. The economic situation faced by Taymyr's indigenous peoples can be characterized as «transitional»: their involvement in traditional nature management is shrinking, while many are turning to the modern post-Soviet Russian economy typical of the country's Northern and Arctic areas. This is backed by statistical data on the employment and income of Taymyr's indigenous population.

Creating traditional nature management areas could substantially better the economic situation of indigenous peoples, provide maximum environmental protection to Russia's North and Arctic, and help increase the aborigines' quality of life. But the currently existing legislation still has a lot to clarify. For example, the borders of traditional nature management areas should follow the natural outlines of indigenous peoples' habitats and be defined by rivers, streams, forests, water partings, and so on. Managing such areas also requires scrupulous strategic planning. Given the native population's way of social and political thinking, the local administration running such traditional nature management areas on behalf of the government or the municipal authorities should certainly include a Social Committee representing indigenous communities and civic associations. Only this kind of combination can lay the foundation for successful political management in Russia's Northern and Arctic territories populated by small settlements of indigenous minorities.

There is a need for further scientific research into the methodology that could be used by indigenous communities wishing to switch from paternalism to self-sufficiency. These methods, on the one hand, will be based on particular indigenous communities' experience in interacting with the government and big businesses. On the other hand, they will allow indigenous communities to fast-track the process of joining the post-industrial world, while maintaining their economic, environmental, and cultural uniqueness.

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