

# River Stars Reindeer



Imaging Evenki & Orochen communities  
of Inner Mongolia & Siberia



*"She looks just like my grandmother."*

Xu Giu, February 2015



Opposite Page:

*"Old mother, daughter & grandchild."*

Ethel Lindgren, 1 September 1931 | Evenkis | Ikhe Bebe, Barga Region, Inner Mongolia | MAA N.40513.LIN

Front Cover:

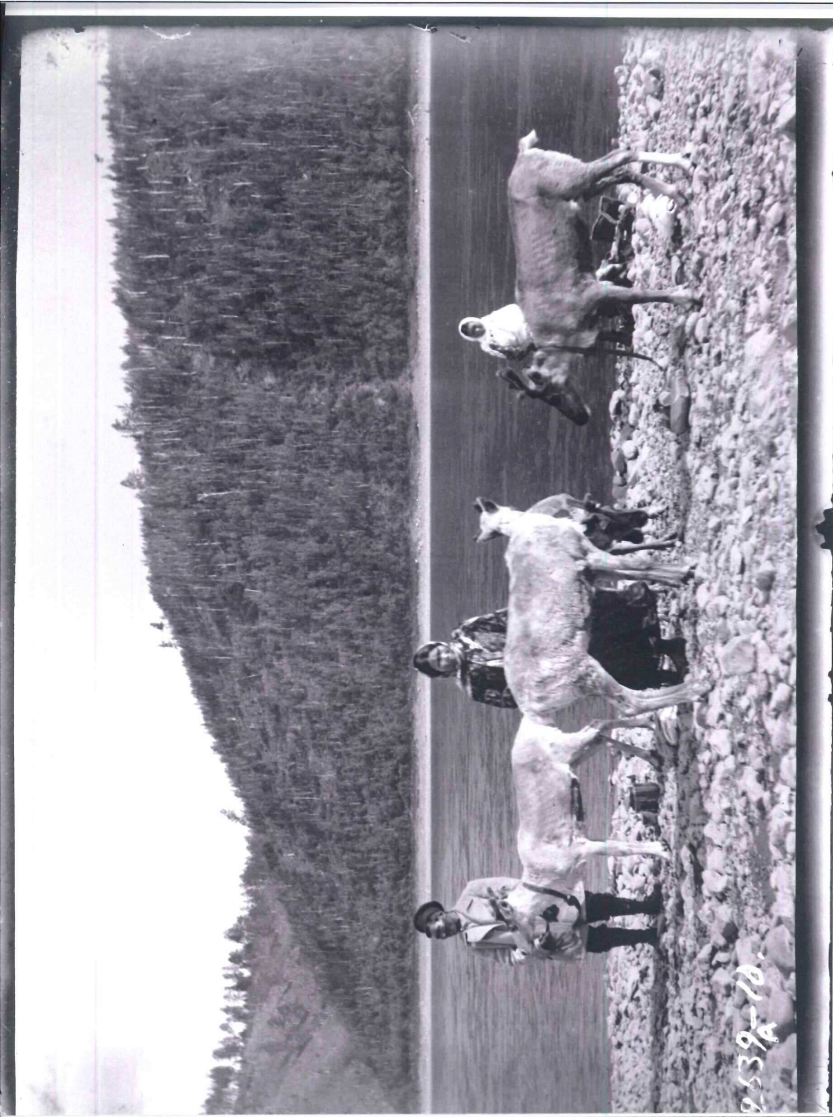
*"Trader 2F holding reindeer with cradle packed on it."*

I. to r.: Nikolay Nikolaevich, Innokenti, Nikolaevich, Okorofena Alekseyevna, Kudrin (Trader 2F) and Oksinka.

The unnamed baby in the cradle is the child of Innokenti and Oksinka.

Oscar Mamen, 3 August 1929 | Evenkis, Cossacks | Baramakan, Inner Mongolia | MAA N.21731.LIN



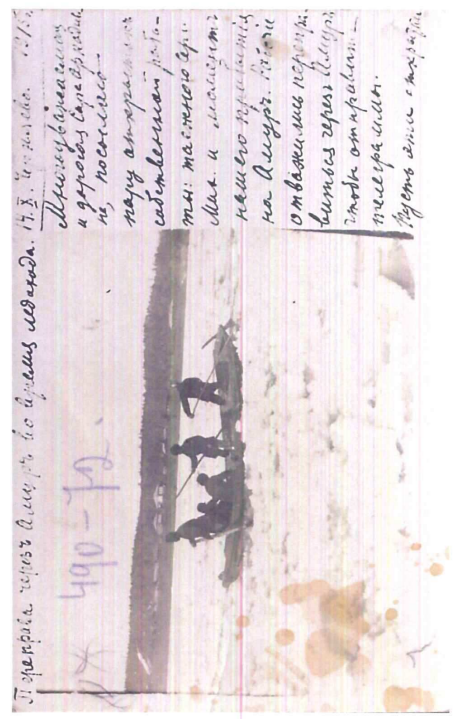


“Orochen with reindeer before the crossing of the Amur.”

The Amur and its great tributary, the Argun, must indeed be central figures in any study of the country, forming a frontier of unusual significance, political, commercial, and ethnographic. ...

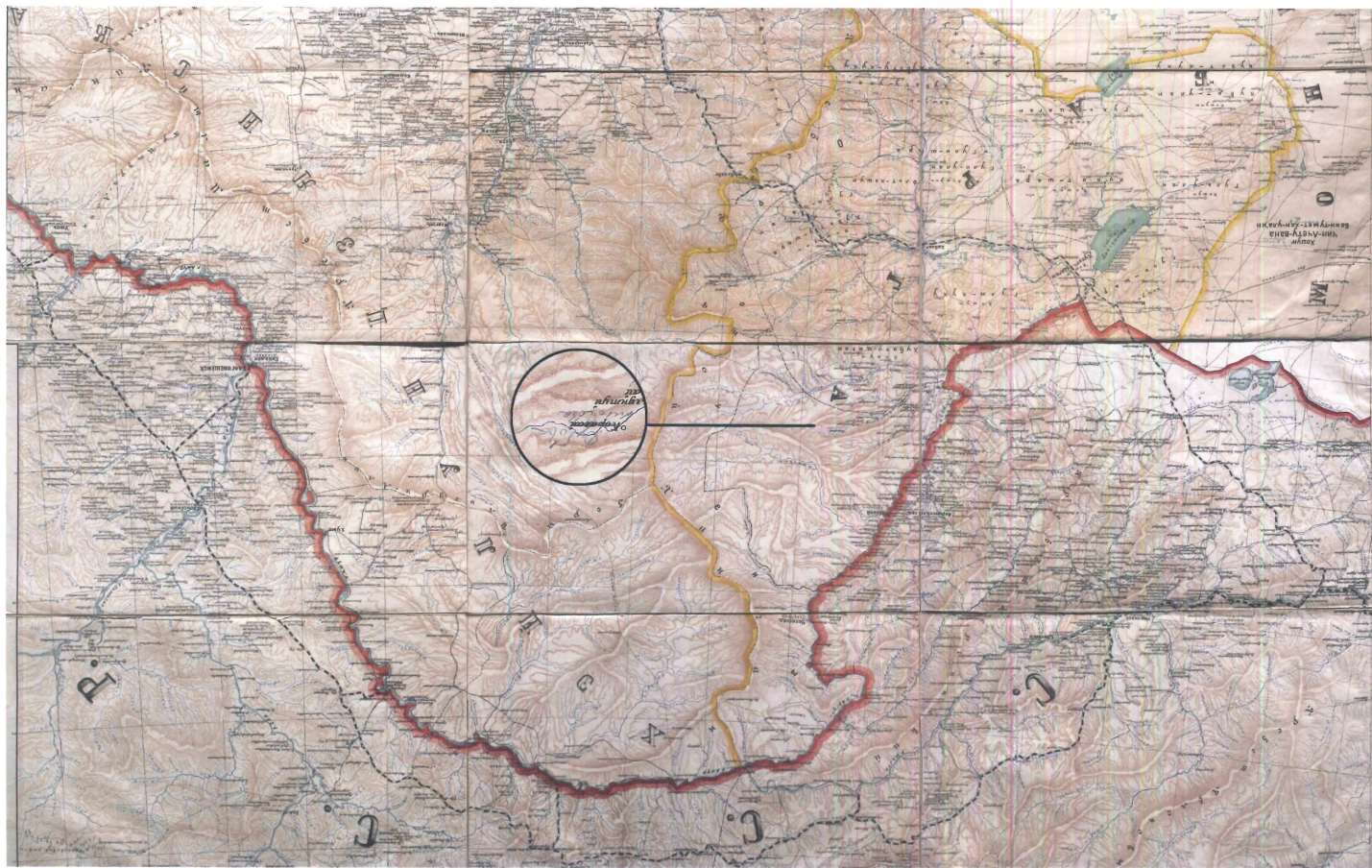
Only during the winter, when travel by sledge over the frozen Argun becomes possible, do the scattered outposts come within reach of each other.

Ethel Lindgren, 1930: 518-9



Dearest Sarah Akadievna,  
I am sending to you a  
hand-made postcard:  
Here is Sergei Mikhailovich  
[Shirokogoroff] in his  
taiga life at the moment  
of our arrival at the  
Amur river. The workers  
dared to cross the Amur  
in order to send off  
telegrams [from the  
Russian side].  
Elizabeth Shirokogoroff,  
14 October 1915





Map of Northern Manchuria with Lindgren's annotation in blue pencil (example magnified)  
 Economic Bureau of the Chinese Eastern Railway, 1926 | Courtesy of Royal Geographical Society | rgs535561

## Foreword

One hundred years ago the Russian ethnographer, Sergei Shirokogoroff and his wife Elizabeth, travelled the mountains along the Amur River to study the indigenous Evenki and Orochen peoples. In 1929 Cambridge's own graduate, Ethel John Lindgren and her soon to be husband Oscar Mamen, went in search of these 'little-known tribes' as they were considered to be 'fast dying-out'. Together Shirokogoroff and Lindgren amassed an impressive collection of over 18,000 culturally and historically important photographs during their expeditions, the majority of which have not been seen, until now.

Over the last three years an international research team has been searching multiple sources for Shirokogoroff's diaries, letters, photographs and unknown manuscripts, thus enabling them to be connected with the similar ethnographic collections of Lindgren, one of the many scholars that Shirokogoroff influenced.

This work has been supported by three projects. A Leverhulme Trust International Network project allowed us to create links between the British, Russian, and Chinese institutions who participated in this exhibit. An ESRC project supported the intellectual work on building the 'life histories' of the Russian and Chinese concepts of *etnos* and *minzu*, and their links to Euro-American concepts of nation, nationality and ethnicity. It also sponsored the digitisation of the Shirokogoroff archive. The third project has been the digitisation and research of Lindgren's extensive collections of photographs, ciné film, and papers held at MAA, Cambridge, sponsored by Inner Mongolia University, Hohhot, and the Mongolian Ethnic Origin Project, Hailar.

A key outcome of these projects has been the growing recognition of the importance of Shirokogoroff and Lindgren's photographs and related information for today's descendants. Therefore, in collaboration with Evenki and Orochen communities and scholars, MAA, Cambridge, and MAE RAS (Kunstkamera), Saint Petersburg, as caretakers of Shirokogoroff and Lindgren's photographic collections, are working together to share these photographs with the people of Inner Mongolia and Siberia. They equally wish to share their images and stories with the wider world.

From the excitement of recognising faces, to the beauty of the reindeer, or the heated debates about what is happening in the photographs, *River Stars Reindeer* is about the reconnection of these communities with their images, their histories, and their stories.

David Anderson  
 Department of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen  
 Uradyn Bulag  
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## The Man in Boots

### The Lady with Dogs

#### Sergei and Elizabeth Shirokogoroff

Invited to carry out fieldwork research at the border of the Russian Empire and China, Sergei M. Shirokogoroff (史祿國, 1887-1939) and his wife, Elizabeth, spent the years between 1912-1917 documenting the lives of people on both sides of the Amur River, known today as Evenkis and Orochenes. This fieldwork would come to define their lives.

After the 1917 Russian Revolution the territories of their field site was plunged into political chaos governed by temporary chiefs and provisional governments. The Shirokogoroffs decided to move into exile among the Russian community in China, where they remained for the rest of their lives. As political events unfolded, parts of their field archive became scattered between Petrograd (now St. Petersburg), Vladivostok, Blagoveshensk, Kanawaga University in Japan, Paris, and likely some as yet unknown archives in China. The Shirokogoroffs' fieldwork was supported by local residents, including the telegraph worker, Aleksandr Yakovlev, who gave his photographs to Shirokogoroff.

Sergei Shirokogoroff, after his death at age 52, left many now well-known books on shamanism, the theory of 'etnos', and on physical anthropology. These are still being discussed and have inspired new generations of anthropologists to understand Evenki and Orochen practices as well as the thoughts of the scholar himself. His intellectual biography is a winding road with many unexpected turns ranging from an early interest in an egalitarian society, to a society without "Western" models of governance, to representing social relations in a very strict hierarchy. These philosophical turns can be observed in Sergei Shirokogoroff's photo collection. Having trained in Paris and Petrograd as a physical anthropologist he strove to document the "physical characteristics" of



**"A shaman, shamaness & Achinsk Lama with helpers."**

*"Aside from figures of animals one can find amulets of boats, fangs, bows & arrows, male and female faces of the spirits Savaki, stars and lightning."*

*There are also discs representing the sun, moon (if semi-circular), rainbow (a ring) or the sky. The sky is represented as a four-sided figure with the same shape cut-out within, and representations of stars along its sides. The shaman goes to the Upper World through this hole.*

*The entire collection makes such a loud noise ..."*

Sergei Shirokogoroff, 1912-14: folio 227 (abridged)

Sergei Shirokogoroff, June 1912 | Orochens | Deljun ulus, Urul'chin volost', Siberia | MAE 2002-055



**"Sergei Shirokogoroff writing up fieldnotes."**  
Elizabeth Shirokogoroff, 1915 | Russian | Priamurskii Krai, Siberia | MAE 2500-006

different Evenki and Orochen groups and to capture the differences between them and other groups. However, many aspects of Sergei's life remain a mystery – perhaps symbolized by the most-often commented upon detail of his photographic collection: "He had nice boots."

Less is known about the biography and fate of Elizabeth, but using her training as a concert pianist she left behind a set of works on Evenki musical culture as well as an unanalysed archive of Evenki-Orochen sound recordings.



**"Elizabeth Shirokogoroff feeding their dogs."**  
Sergei Shirokogoroff, 1915 | Russian | Priamurskii Krai, Siberia | MAE 2500-008

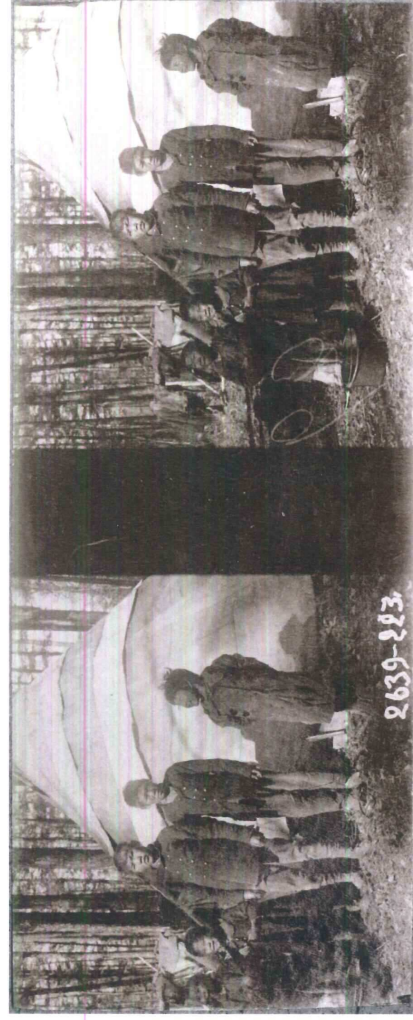


The history of anthropology, as a rule, tends to be thought of as being divided into "traditions" or "schools". However, the biographies of anthropologists are presented as lines within a web of academic genealogies, and are primarily based on the history of ideas. The Shirokogoroffs occupy a very special place in the history of Soviet / Russian and Chinese anthropology. Sergei Shirokogoroff is known as one of the co-founders of the theory of ethnicity and the "psychomental complex." These ideas now occupy a special place in both political and ethnological discourses in China as well as in the revival of study of shamanism. On the other hand, his concepts were born during his field research among different groups of Evenki and Orochen reindeer herders and to him at that time as the Tungus. Through his discussions with Orochen reindeer herders and Cossack guides, he brought indigenous epistemologies into general circulation. His idea of the "Tungus hypothesis" can be read today as an early critique of European positivist science.

Sergei Shirokogoroff, perhaps unlike other Eurasian intellectuals of his era, invested a lot of energy in writing for an international audience. His primary works were published in English, French and German making Evenki-Tunguses a well-known "case" in Western Europe and the Americas. Selected works were posthumously translated into Chinese and Japanese. Ironically, and perhaps tragically, his work is only now being translated into Russian. Unfortunately, most of Shirokogoroff's field data, and many of his small print publications, were fragmented and lost during the civil wars and Japanese occupation of Manchuria. During this project we searched through twenty archives in ten countries in order to compile what is left of the scientific and epistolary heritage of this anthropologist and his wife; locating several field diaries, various manuscripts, more than 150 letters and collections of field photographs, artefacts and wax recordings.

In these yellowed prints, miraculously-surviving glass negatives and hissing sound recordings, we can view and hear the intelligent searches of Sergei and Elizabeth Shirokogoroff to portray the Tungus world, as they encountered and connected it to anthropology, the academic debates they heard in Paris and Petrograd, and their extensive correspondence with scholars around the world. Perhaps most importantly, we can glimpse the Evenki and Orochen peoples of Manchuria participating in their everyday life before geo-political changes would break their communities apart.

Dmitry Arzyutov and David Anderson  
MAE RAS (Kunstkamera), St Petersburg and University of Aberdeen



*"Types of Amur Orochen."*

Sergei and Elizabeth Shirokogoroff, Autumn 1915 | Orochens: Bystraya River Valley, Northeastern Manchuria | MAE 2639-228



*"Selezneev & his companion dressed in winter clothing."*

Sergei and Elizabeth Shirokogoroff, June 1912 | Orochens | Povarniskii ulus, Zabaikalskaia oblast, Siberia | MAE 2002-0087, MAE 2002-93



*"Three Orochens hunters."*

Sergei and Elizabeth Shirokogoroff, June 1912 | Orochens | Torchakon Ulus, Uru'lginskaiia volost', Siberia | MAE 2002-083





*"Shamaness Olga Dmitrievna riding reindeer."*

*"The picture of Orochens travelling with their reindeer has a fantastic, theatrical, and play-like quality to it. These impressions are created no doubt by the beauty of the animals which are saddled and loaded down with brightly decorated saddlebags and saddles. The leads and bits are made of very well-tanned leather which is brightly decorated with blue, black, white and red striped flags made of the same leather. ...*

*Women travel mainly on reindeer, and caring for them is the responsibility of women."*

Elizabeth Shirokogoroff, 1919: 19, 29

Oscar Mamen, 29 November 1931 | Evenkis | Ochilda, Upper Bystraya River, Inner Mongolia | MAA N.23654.LIN



*"An Orochen man with a horse."*

*Orochens consider the best quality of horse to be a robust horse ...*

*Since their hunting lifestyle does not allow them to put up hay, the horses are trained to go without fodder for 2-3 days. They also train horses to eat berries, brush, and meat. First they give the horse some boiled highly salted meat, then they give him meat without salt, and then they give him raw meat. The normal ration is given once per day in the morning – 8 funty [3 kg] of meat per horse. These "non vegetarian" horses survive to age 25 in the taiga and are very robust and strong.*

Elizabeth Shirokogoroff, 1919: 29

Sergei Shirokogoroff, July-August 1912 | Orochens | Tyksyr Village, Akim River, Upper Nercha River Basin, Siberia | MAE 2002-103





"Khavan examines movie."

Oscar Mamen with his Bell & Howell Co. ciné camera

Ethel Lindgren, 27 August 1931 | Evenkis | Elingui, Inner Mongolia | MAA N.40453.LIN



"Nekersi milking deer.

Little girl of 10 milking deer while her 4-yr old brother holds it. Taken at sunset on one of the very last days (Nov. 24th) that milk could still be obtained."

Ethel Lindgren, 24 November 1931 | Evenkis | Martelkoy II camp, Inner Mongolia | MAA N.24478.LIN

## 'Shortie' and the 'Giant'

Ethel Lindgren and Oscar Mamen's fieldwork in Inner Mongolia

Ethel John Lindgren (1905-1988) was a Cambridge anthropologist best known for her work with Evenkis and Orochens of Inner Mongolia. Between 1929 and 1932, Lindgren conducted fieldwork in the region then called Northern Manchuria, with her guide, photographer, and later husband, Oscar Mamen. Together they amassed 17,000 photographs, 12 ciné films and 138 artefacts. In 1992, John Lindgren, their son, donated this collection to the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA), University of Cambridge.

Lindgren initially conceived her photographs as analytical tools to study social groups. Through subsequent accessioning, labelling and display at MAA, they were used to present anthropological concepts such as race, occupation, and ceremonies. Yet photographs have the ability to lead multiple lives, within which they record parallel realities. As such, Lindgren also recognised the social importance of the photographs to the people she worked with, writing:

[Evenkis] were most anxious for copies of their photographs, which I trust have since reached them safely through the trading station. (1930: 534)

It is not known whether any of the prints that Lindgren sent in 1929 still exist.

A small selection of Lindgren's photographs were shown in Genhe, Inner Mongolia, during the 5<sup>th</sup> World Reindeer Herders Congress, 2013. Tilly Smith, Director of the Cairngorm Reindeer Herd, originally established by Lindgren in 1952, noted that the reindeer herders at Genhe:

were fascinated by our story and old photos, indeed some of the older people recognised themselves and their relatives in the photos.

## "Evenki family & E.J.L.

A nomadizing unit; the households of Apollon Gavrilovich and Nikolay Ivanovich (with the exception of Dagdanga). L. to r., at back: Ivan Apollonovich, Pётr Vladimirovich, Lindgren, Nikolay, his wife holding baby Ariya, Apollon's wife, Apollon, Marusa, Katerina; in front: Tamara, Anna, Valentina."

Oscar Mamen, 27 July 1929 | Evenkis | Baramakan camp, Inner Mongolia | MAA N.21689.LIN

There were even 'stories' told of a westerner in these remote parts a long time ago - maybe this was Dr Lindgren. (Smith, Dec 2013)

At 6 ft. 1" tall with ginger hair, Lindgren was called 'Avarga tom' or 'Juren' (Mongolian for 'Titan, and Chinese for 'Giant'), and Oscar Mamen at 6 ft. 4" was known by family and friends as 'Shortie' - it is therefore unsurprising that they remain a feature in oral histories. Today's Evenkis and Orochens are equally intrigued by Lindgren's height, but consider the title 'Juren' to be as much a reference to Lindgren's stature as a foreign woman undertaking fieldwork in Manchuria in the 1920s-30s.

Thus a photograph's social set of meanings or 'other realities' continue to be important to originating communities. It is for this reason that the Inner Mongolia University and the Mongolian Ethnic Origin Project, Hailar, have generously funded the digitisation of Ethel Lindgren's photographic collection. This has enabled the digital sharing of her photographs with the originating communities, and in particular to Evenki and Orochen people.

With a growing interest in the social psychology of cultural groups, Lindgren relocated to Inner

Mongolia in 1929 (after a doomed research sojourn in the Mongolian People's Republic in 1928), where, with Mamen as her guide, she went in search of what was deemed "a little-known tribe of Reindeer-Tungus", writing:

It was with incomplete and largely misleading information about the Northern Barga, its modes of communication, and where and how the Reindeer Tungus were to be found, that I set out to investigate this remote tribe in June [1929]. (1930: 527)

Lindgren went to the region unaware of the earlier work of the Shirokogoroff's. Discovering Elizabeth's geographical sketch in a bookshop in Hailar, she noted her surprise that the Evenki and Orochen had been studied before (1936: xxi). Sergei Shirokogoroff's volume *Social Organisation of the Northern Tungus* was published in 1929 between her first and second expedition. Of this Lindgren was not so flattering (1936: xxi-xxii).

Lindgren's fieldwork was conducted during a transition from the classical practice of exploration and ethnographic collecting to the new modes of immersive field research. During her first expedition, Lindgren met and





became friends with Olga Dmitrievna, an Evenki shamaness, and returned by Olga's invitation to stay with her clan during her second and third expeditions. This time with Olga provided invaluable information that was to become the basis of Lindgren's doctoral thesis on the 'Reindeer Tungus of Manchuria'. Lindgren's thesis is significant for its early analysis on shamanic functions as well as for her own psychological assessment as an author, a precursor to later reflexive methodologies.



*"Reindeer are good swimmers. They can easily cross a swift river or broad lake."*

Ethel Lindgren, 17 June 1932 | Evenkis | Bystraya Ford, Barga Region, Inner Mongolia | MAA N.24481.LIN



*"Aleksandr Kudrin & Nikolai canoe building."*

Oscar Mamen, 15 June 1932 | Evenkis | Listvannaya Camp, Inner Mongolia | MAA N.23982.LIN

Opposite Page:

*"Shamaness Olga Dmitrievna, Stepan with drum, & Nik."*

Ethel Lindgren, 26 November 1931 | Evenkis | Martelkoy II, Barga Region, Inner Mongolia | MAA N.41026.LIN

Notable in Lindgren's photographs, and related papers, is her attribution of individuals' names and their biographical and genealogical knowledge. The gathering of this information was driven by her ideas of historical particularism in human development, but it is also clear from her original photographic captions that Lindgren was recording the names and deeds of friends and assistants. This identification allows individuals to be placed within their social group and retain connection within local histories, thus enabling self-identification and cultural preservation, particularly after periods of government assimilation policies.

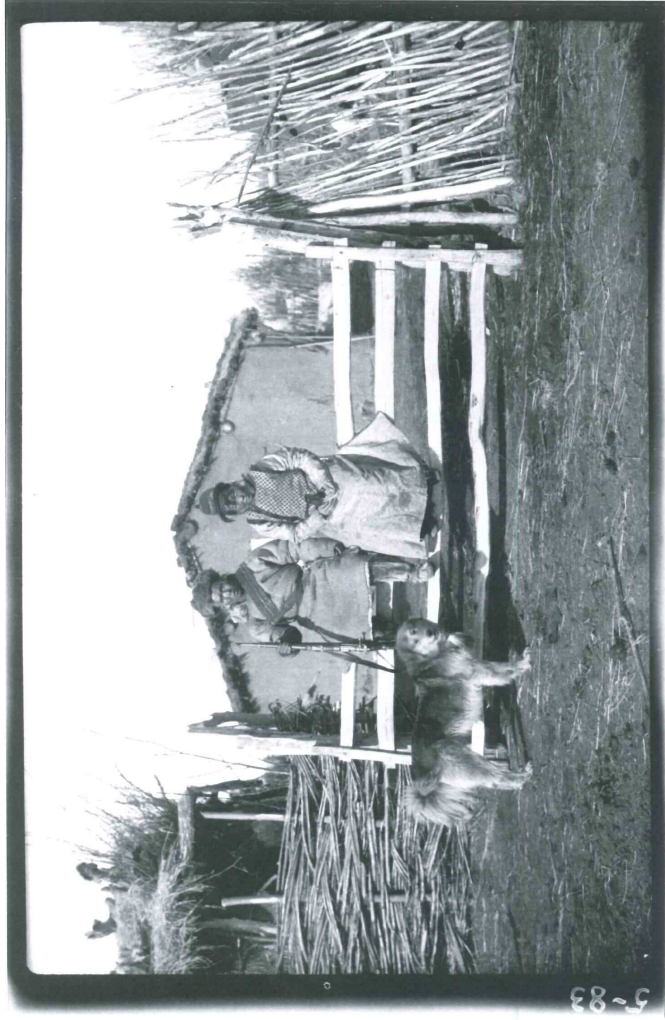
Conversely, due to territorial conflict and political instability in the region at the time, Lindgren wrote of individuals not wanting their portrait or name to be recorded (Chol River field book, August 1931: 83). Lindgren also deliberately concealed specific individuals' names and details, and rather than it being an attempt at achieving scientific objectivity, it was to ensure the safety of her informants (see cover photograph, which was published with Kudrin's name replaced with 'Trader F').

The worsening political situation (she was in Harbin when the Japanese invaded Manchuria in 1931), followed by the outbreak of World War II, prohibited Lindgren from returning to Inner Mongolia. It also contributed to her separation from Oscar Mamen. Lindgren thereafter turned her research focus to reindeer nomadism in Swedish Lappland. These factors combined resulted in Lindgren publishing little of her research and few of her photographs of Evenkis and Orochens. It was only after her son donated her photographs and objects to MAA in 1992, and the subsequent developments in digital technologies, that their potential has begun to be recognised. Eighty years after they were made, many of the possibilities that Lindgren originally hoped for her photographs are now being realised.

Jocelyne Dudding  
MAA, University of Cambridge





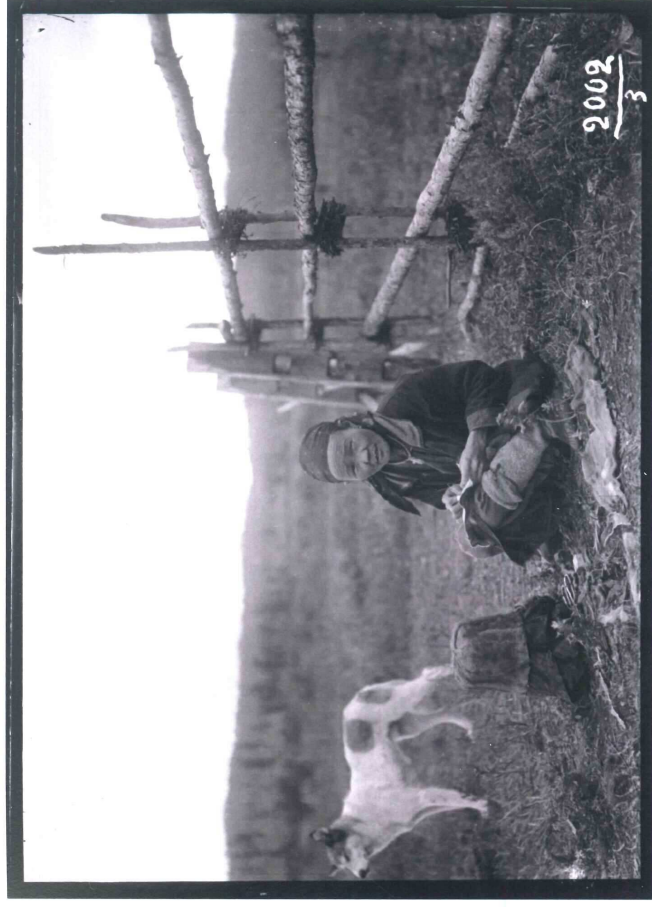


*"Golmito and Chula on their gate."*

*"Hunting is highly valued amongst Orochens and is an essential way through which traditional skills and knowledge are passed from fathers to sons."*

*In 1996, all hunting was banned by the Chinese state on the grounds of animal preservation. As part of this, we were ordered to hand in our hunting guns, which for us is the symbol of our identity. While many recognise the need for the ban, the loss of hunting has had a huge social impact on us."*

Nirin Yunbo and Zhang Rongde, February 2015



*"Orochen woman sewing."*

*"The preparation of clothing – be it coverings, sewing, or preparing leather – is completely the responsibility of women. Every woman learns to sew from childhood ... some women specialize in footwear, others in making mats, and others do ornaments. ... They sew well to impress the men. Orochens love displaying their work and an aesthetic sense lies deeply in their psyche. Often one can see a women spending time assembling some small items when other more important work waits"*

Sergei Shirokogoroff, 1912-14; folio 73



## Politics, Memory and the Personalisation of Photography amongst Evenkis and Orochens

Perhaps more than any other, the medium of photography allows for the most personal and intimate recording of people, times, and places. It is why Shirokogoroff and Lindgren's photographs of northeast China and Siberia have been so enthusiastically received by Evenkis and Orochens today. For them, the photographs represent an invaluable visual record, documenting the early 20<sup>th</sup> century lives, practices, and cultural lifeworlds of their own recent ancestors, much of which has been irretrievably lost due to great social and political changes. They also present still familiar and everyday scenes of camp life, hunting, and working with reindeer.

Taken individually, the photographs represent something more. Thanks to digitisation and distribution via fieldwork, local museums and cultural initiatives, local people have been able to engage with Shirokogoroff and Lindgren's photographs, often recognising family members and friends – or identifying them in a photograph for the first time. This inevitably evokes stories and personal memories, and sparks discussions, not only about the past but the present and future of the communities as well.

Sitting one afternoon with Maria Suo – the respected matriarch of Evenkis in China – she opened a drawer to reveal hundreds of Lindgren's photographs recently printed and given to community leaders by the local government as part of the Lindgren Digitisation Project sponsored by Inner Mongolia University and the Mongolian Ethnic Origin Project, Hailar. As she flicked through them she muttered the names of numerous friends and relatives, including "Vladimir, Natasha, Igor ... They are all my family. This is how we all used to live". For 84 year-old Maria, the people in these photographs are not distant objects but close personal relations, people with whom she has grown up, learnt from, and whom she remembers well.

On another occasion near the Orochen settlement of Tuohe, Nirin Yunbo was eagerly staring at one of Shirokogoroff's photographs of an old spirit-tree. "This looks very powerful but is from a different region to us; our carvings have longer faces and are more red. But today you cannot find these spirit-trees anymore because hunting is illegal now. How can we be Orochen if we cannot hunt?" Nirin's own father and grandfather were highly-respected hunters and before the hunting-ban introduced in 1996 Nirin himself spent many hours out in the forest. For him as for



2500-137.

*"Anta Bu with her father,  
Piotr Buldorovsky."*

*"That is my father, I recognise his  
name. He died when I was young  
and I have never seen a picture  
of him."*

*Do you have a photo of mum as  
well? It's been a long time since  
I met with her."*

Anta Bu, 2 April 2015

Baohua, 2 April 2015 | Evenkis | Aoluguya, Inner Mongolia



so many Orochens, the photograph of the spirit-tree not only has important historical value but carries with it great contemporary significance in the ongoing politics of ethnic representation.

The significance of the digital sharing of Shirokogoroff and Lindgren's photographs amongst Evenki and Orochen lies ultimately with Evenkis and Orochens themselves. After only a few short months of distributing and making available the first set of digitised Lindgren photographs to local communities, there has been a widespread sharing of images through numerous visual mediums, including through smartphones, social medias, and printed hard copies. At the same time, new initiatives are being proposed for utilising the photographs, including exhibitions at local museums, as teaching tools within classrooms, within language re-generation apps, as well as inviting elders to speak about the value and meaning of individual photographs. While it has been nearly 100 years since Shirokogoroff and Lindgren visited Siberia and Inner Mongolia and made these important photographs, it is very much hoped that this project and the process of digital sharing will be of lasting social and cultural value to the descendants of Evenkis and Orochens today.

Richard Fraser  
MIASU, University of Cambridge

Opposite Page:

*"Bainača (Master Spirit) & his wife carved on trees."*

Sergei Shirokogoroff, September, 1915 | Orochens | likely Kumara River region, Manchuria | MAE 2500-131



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## Published on the occasion of the exhibition

*River Stars Reindeer*  
Imaging Evenki & Orochen communities of Inner Mongolia & Siberia  
23<sup>rd</sup> June – 27<sup>th</sup> September 2015  
Curated by Jocelyne Dudding, David Anderson and Uradyn Bulag

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ISBN: 978-0-947595-21-0

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Designed by Jocelyne Dudding

## Research Sponsors

*River Stars Reindeer* is part of three larger projects, namely a Leverhulme Trust and a ESRC research grant to examine the life histories of the Russian and Chinese concepts of *etnos* and *minzu*. The Inner Mongolia University, Hohhot, and the Mongolian Ethnic Origin Project, Hailar, has sponsored the digitisation and research of Lindgren's Collections at MAA, Cambridge.

MAA is supported by the University of Cambridge, Arts Council England and the Higher Education Funding Council of England.

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Chinese National Museum of Ethnology, Beijing  
Aoluguya Evenki Reindeer Culture Museum, Genhe

Orochen Museum, Alihe  
Community Elders and Scholars  
Bai Lan  
Bai Ying  
Erdenegua  
Gu Xinjun

## Acknowledgements

John Lindgren, Cambridgeshire  
Hu Linping (Film Maker), Beijing  
Cairngorm Reindeer, Glenmore  
Haddon Library, University of Cambridge  
Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge  
Orochen Foundation, Hong Kong  
Royal Geographical Society, London



*River Stars Reindeer* would not have been possible without the support of the Evenki and Orochen leaders, elders and scholars. We learnt an enormous amount from our visits to these communities, and hope that the photographs and information we were able to share goes some way in reciprocating their hospitality and enthusiasm.

Above:

"An evening sharing photos and stories."  
l. to r., back: Bai Ying, Wu Xiujuan, Guan Hongying, Bayari  
front: Jocelyne Dudding, A Fang, Richard Fraser  
Hu Linping, 10 September 2014 | Orochens | Alihe, Inner Mongolia

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