

## Research Article

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# Tourism, Representation and Compensation among the Dukha Reindeer Herders of Mongolia

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**Abstract:** Increasingly, tourists come to northern Mongolia to visit the camps of the Dukha reindeer herders, a small group often characterized as primitive and disappearing. The year-round entry of tourists to Dukha camps is unregulated; the timing and context of these encounters, including compensation and accommodation, unpredictable. Some herders leverage dominant cultural and social capital, gaining more visitors and more opportunities to earn cash. However, while visits bolster the local economy, these cross-cultural contacts may disrupt traditional socio-cultural identities, migration patterns and egalitarian norms. This qualitative, interpretive study used guided, open-ended interviews (N=30), a modified pile sort and participant observation to examine reindeer herders' perceptions of tourist visits and gift giving. Results show Dukha most involved with tourists have a positive attitude toward their visits. As tourists generally stay only two to four days, negative outcomes vis-a-vis gifts, cultural misrepresentations and economic compensation currently appear minimized. However, as visits increase, taiga tourism would further benefit from Dukha owned and controlled economic and ethnographic initiatives.

**Keywords:** Mongolia; reindeer herding; nomads; indigenous capitalism; indigenous tourism

## 1 Introduction

Mongolia, the most sparsely populated country in the world, has 3.2 million citizens spread over a land mass one sixth the size of the United States. There are twenty distinct ethnic groups and nearly forty percent of this pop-

ulation continues to practice nomadic herding. Among these are the Dukha (known also as Tsaatan, or "reindeer people" in Mongolian), the most southerly located of the world's thirty reindeer herding groups. Remote and few in number, the migrating Dukha are the only human inhabitants of the taiga (boreal forests) of the Eastern Sayan Mountains. An undeveloped region on Russia's border, it includes the Tengis-Shishged Protected Area conservation zone, established in 2011 to protect endangered species. This community of 280 people, spread among 55 families, is not untouched by current trends in tourism. Visits by off-the-beaten-track adventurers have increased in recent years, raising questions about the impact foreigners may have on Dukha lifestyle and culture.

Travel to traditional peoples in remote areas of natural beauty is increasing. "Indigenous tourism" refers to these travelers' experiences with small rural communities, drawn by their exotic differences, handicrafts and unique cultural expressions and environments (van den Berghe 1994; Viken 2006). "Indigenous controlled tourism" means indigenous tourism that is not only connected to culture, values, traditions and knowledge, but is based on indigenous land and cultural identity, all owned and operated by indigenous families or tribes (Zeppel 2006). Included in indigenous tourism are concerns regarding sustainable development and natural resource management (Carr et al. 2016). Research shows local peoples to have mixed attitudes regarding indigenous tourism: while social and economic benefits are welcomed, lack of control over visitor schedules and changes to the natural habitat are negatively viewed. Further, a group's or individual's social network greatly influences both the scope and success of interactions with tourists (Foley and O'Connor 2013; Zhao et al. 2011), with empowered communities and those members of the group most knowledgeable about the business of tourism seeing the greatest benefits from tourist activities (Andereck et al. 2005; Scheyvens 1999).

The interaction of indigenous peoples with outsiders may also produce outcomes perceived by some locals as harmful, such as the commodification of cultural norms, lost authenticity and community adaptations to tourist needs and desires (Hunter 2011; Kelley-Holmes and Pie-

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tikainen 2014; UNEP 2012). For example, tourists arrive with expectations about the lifestyle of a local community, their habits, dress and behaviors, shaped by books, film and social media. Whether true or not, local members of indigenous communities may find it economically beneficial to exploit these assumptions (Salazar 2009: 62). This may lead to a circulation by tourists of images, goods and interpretations of local knowledge and behaviors that reinforce and/or recreate local identities (Salazar 2009).

Along with indigenous tourism, ecotourism and sustainable tourism are current trends. For stakeholders, ecotourism and sustainable tourism embrace principles that contribute to rich cultural experiences for tourists that empower and sustain indigenous peoples, respecting their spirituality and cultural beliefs, and support efforts towards nature conservation and environmental protection (UNEP 2012). In sustainable ecotourism, local communities contribute to and maintain control over tourism, sharing financial and social benefits with members (Scheyvens 1999; McIntosh et al. 2002).

The Dukha originate from Tuva, located in southern Siberia. Unlike other reindeer herders, the Dukha seldom slaughter their animals for food. Instead, they are milked and used for transportation and for hauling wood and household goods during migration. Today about 2000 reindeer graze in the taiga. An average herd numbers 20 to 30, though some families own more than 100. The Dukha are close knit, egalitarian and rely on a network of kin in times of need. They practice shamanism, tengrism and animism; the earth, sky and ever-present spirits of the landscape and ancestors are honored and respected as they watch over human activities. From shaman ceremonies welcoming the new moon to everyday norms guiding the retrieval of river water, daily and seasonal routines maintain harmony between man and nature. Importantly, reindeer are at the core of these herders' identity and Dukha movements revolve around their needs (Kristensen 2007; Walker 2009). One hears often in the taiga that "without reindeer, there would be no Dukha."

In 1921, Tuva became an independent satellite of the Soviet Union. At that time, the reindeer herders moved their animals freely back and forth between Tuva and Mongolia; however, fear of Soviet collectivization of their reindeer, WWII induced food shortages and good relations with other pastoral peoples living in the steppe drew some families to settle permanently in Mongolia. In 1944, Tuva was appropriated by the Soviet Union and the border with Mongolia was closed. The Dukha, most of whom had been

born in Tuva, became involuntary immigrants, separated from their extended family members in the north. Those entering from the northeast located to the east taiga, north of the Shishgid River, while those who came from the southeast settled in the west, south of the Shishgid River (Wheeler 2000; Inamura 2005).

Under Soviet-influenced Mongolian socialism, the Dukha faced significant cultural, social and lifestyle changes. Shamanism was forbidden and Mongolian started to replace the Tuvan language. Reindeer herding became collectivized and state run; herders received feed supplements and the reindeer benefited from regular veterinary care (Wheeler, 2000; Inamura, 2005; Solnoi et al. 2003). Some families, particularly in the east, gave up herding for wage labor employment. In the 1990s, the Dukha suffered economically in the transition from the socialist economy to privatization. As jobs vanished, many urbanized Dukha returned to reindeer herding. For herders, government subsidies for feed and regular veterinary care for reindeer disappeared. Some Dukha cut blood antlers for sale, while others slaughtered animals to eat or sell (Solnoi et al. 2003). Maintaining a healthy herd became difficult.

The arrival of adventure tourists to the taiga in the mid-1990s brought limited but much needed extra income to some reindeer herding families. Two decades later, tourism is growing, but remains loosely organized. The wild taiga landscape, the reindeer, iconicurts (canvas and birch pole teepees), and colorful deels (traditional Mongolian costume) present a living tableau of nomadic life. Visitors traveling on organized tours pay outside agencies in advance for tours. Clients in this case are often advised to bring gifts and may or may not spend cash in the community. Budget travelers, backpackers and unorganized tourists (those organizing their own trips) pay cash directly to horse wranglers and other vendors after services are rendered. They may purchase food and sundry items to give as gifts, but are more likely to bring their own tent and supplies for personal use. Often no souvenirs are bought and no money earned by the families. Questions remain as to how these gifts and visits may impact Dukha culture and lifestyle, including changes to migration patterns. Using grounded theory (Glasser and Strauss 1967) and a symbolic-interpretive approach (Geertz 1973), and keeping in mind the role of social, economic, and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977), this exploratory qualitative study examines Dukha reindeer herders' perceptions of tourist visits.

## 2 Methods

Using grounded theory, this exploratory, interpretive research study examines reindeer herders' perspectives regarding the impact of tourism, compensation and gift giving on Dukha culture, keeping in mind principles of indigenous and sustainable tourism as outlined above. While many studies examine indigenous people's perceptions of tourists in their midst (Carr et al. 2016; Nault and Stapleton 2011), grounded theory is inductively derived from data and allows the researcher to continuously review the research, coding and analyzing the texts, in order to explain and theorize the social processes that emerge (Glasser and Strauss 1967). By using participant observation, a modified pile sort (Bernard 1988) and interviews conducted in situ, a thick description of Dukha ethos, the "tone, character and quality of their life" and worldview, described by Geertz as the "concept of nature, of self, of society," was observed and recorded (1973: 127). Their remote, difficult to access location and small population provided myriad opportunities for casual interactions and the scheduling of open-ended interviews. Data were collected using structured and open-ended interviews, a modified pile sort (N=16 individuals) and participant observation (N=30 families). Pile sorts, or card sorting, presented informants a chance to classify and rank tourist gifts in order of importance (Bernard 1988).

By reviewing tour agency websites and by questioning tour guides, a non-governmental representative and tourists, a list of gifts and compensation generally brought to the reindeer herders was compiled. This included: money from carvings; noodles; candles; flour; hair clips; clothes for adults; clothes for children; candy; vodka; cigarettes; twill; cash; rice; sun lotion; matches; vitamins; fly paper; toothpaste and toothbrushes. These 18 items were written on small cards in English and Mongolian. Participants were first asked to rank the items in order of importance, then to put aside in two piles the most and least useful items. Participants were then asked if they would add anything. This research method also provided an opportunity to observe the informants in a casual way while stimulating informal conversation regarding tourism. Notes were taken as the interviewees pointed to and discussed their choices. The interviews and ethnographic data were transcribed, reviewed, coded thematically and analyzed using grounded theory.

In the field, more than 50% of the reindeer herding families were visited in early June in their spring camps: 15 of the 30urts were in the east taiga and 15 of the 25urts in the west taiga. In the east taiga, the largest single camp consisted of 13urts. There were several clans in this

group, with multigenerational, affine and consanguineous ties, whose members ranged in age from two to 67. The 16 adult participants ranged in age from 29 to 67. As interviews took place inside the familyurts, children were often present. Structured questions provided basic demographic information. Unstructured questions included feelings about various aspects of tourist visits, compensation and gifts. Field interviews were also conducted in situ with a convenience sample of eight international tourist groups totaling 30 people from the United States, Switzerland, Canada, Singapore, France, Belgium, Austria and Australia. A structured questionnaire and open-ended questions were used to solicit reasons for and technicalities of arranging a visit, information on compensation, gift giving and perceptions of the Dukha,

## 3 Results

Many tourists arrive to the taiga having passed through Tsagaannuur sum (a second level administrative center). Anecdotal evidence suggests that fewer than 300 tourists visit per year. With 2,000 inhabitants (a Darkhad majority and both reindeer herding and urbanized Dukha), the sum is located over 200 kilometers from a paved road. Other than a white reindeer statue gracing the entry of a small grocer and a stuffed reindeer in the lobby of the elementary school, there is little evidence around town that reindeer herders live nearby. Tsagaannuur continues to lack both development and infrastructure, with spotty internet and electricity and no ATM's, hotels, souvenirs shops, travel agencies or formal restaurants. Though temperatures in winter are well below zero, there is no indoor plumbing and buildings are heated with wood burning stoves in summer and coal in winter. There are a few small grocery stores with limited food options. The Dukha, like other Mongolians, typically cook at home, favoring tsuiven (dried meat and home-made noodles), boortsog (fried dough) and salted milk tea. It is a difficult destination for people on special diets. For tourists, there is one bank that will exchange foreign currency and a few guesthouses and rental gers (yurts) with pit latrines. Accommodation is also available at a poorly maintained community center where Dukha can stay for free. This facility has detailed cultural information regarding taiga visits displayed on the first floor, but it is often locked and unattended. Guesthouse owners are in touch with Dukha families and can arrange visits to the taiga for unorganized tourists. Travel to the herders is by foot, horse, or some times of year, by motorcycle or 4X4.

Tourists visit the taiga year-round, but the high season is mid-summer. School ends the first week in June and by month's end most reindeer herding families have migrated from Tsagaannuur to their summer camps in the mountains. School starts September 1 and by mid-August families are migrating back to their winter camps and homes in Tsagaannuur. Overall, the Dukha have positive attitudes towards tourism. More than one herder noted that it was good to see tourists having fun, "joking and laughing among themselves." As the Dukha value generosity and hospitality, their urts are always open to others. One hears repeatedly, "it is our way, we cannot say 'no'." Perhaps drawing upon a custom found worldwide of bringing one's host a gift, this personal, intimate aspect of taiga visits compels many foreign visitors to bring something to share with the families. Though the Dukha do not ask for or expect gifts, one 67-year-old female herder spoke for all when she said, "If they bring gifts, we accept them happily," especially those seen as "useful." When asked which gifts were most useful during the pile sort, participants quickly selected cards marked "money from carvings" and "cash." They seemed not quite comfortable choosing different items of importance from the other cards. Indeed, of the 15 interviews using pile sorts, 100% of the reindeer herders preferred that tourists bring money to pay for goods and services.

There are several ways the community can earn money. In 1995, reindeer antler carving was introduced as an alternative to the cutting of blood antlers that were sold to foreigners, a practice that made the reindeer sick. Carving is done by men and most families have, or could have, carvings for sale. Tourists can also rent a specially erected tourist urts, stay in a family's urts, pay to ride a reindeer or purchase home-made food. Unfortunately, it was reported that some guests accept a meal or an overnight stay and do not pay for these services. Other tourists arrive with tour companies, some on specialty 'spiritual' or 'shaman' tours. During the research period, a 57-year-old shaman donned his costume for tourists and was compensated with vodka, though he did not perform a ceremony. To this point, there is much discussion among the Dukha about 'real' vs. 'fake' shamans. Shamans perform ceremonies for healing or spiritual reasons; there is much disdain among the Dukha for those who appear to perform for money or gifts.

The second most useful item was a 'saw' for carving ("a good one"), then 'matches' and 'flypaper.' A 39-year-old father of three said tourists are important because "we make money," adding a 'file' and 'chisels' to the list. A man in his thirties with a three-year old daughter, brought out his collection of saws and other tools while

his daughter drew and flipped through her small collection of children's books. Families with small children selected 'clothing,' 'pens,' 'pencils' and 'books.' Other useful items included 'flour,' 'rice,' and 'vitamins.' When asked, "What should tourists not bring?" 100% of the herders chose 'vodka,' saying it is "useless." Most also selected 'cigarettes' as unnecessary, though two male participants felt this was appropriate. Children actively participated in the pile sorts, pointing to and picking up and putting back various cards, particularly the one marked 'candy.' While visiting one family with four children, the 15-year-old daughter very quickly selected 'vodka' and 'cigarettes' as useless, placing these cards far to the side of the urts. When asked, "what would you add to the list?" items such as laundry detergent, a solar headlamp, Bogs (warm, waterproof boots), raincoats, and blood pressure medication were mentioned. (High blood pressure is a chronic problem among older Dukha, with stroke and heart disease a leading cause of death.)

The herders appreciate when tourists bring something to share about themselves. They like to tell tourists about their culture, but are also curious of others' lifestyles. They do not like tourists arriving without a translator. This places a burden on the community and inhibits social interaction. Men did not seem to mind as much as women when tourists took photographs without asking. Several women said that it made them feel "embarrassed" and one 40-year-old female participant added, "We are women and we need to change clothes and fix our hair." Another female in her 30s noted it is better if people make a little conversation, explaining that it would be good for tourists to "ask about our lives and tell us what their interests are before taking photographs." The families were not offended by tourists taking photos of children, even when informed these were posted on travelers' blogs, with one 39-year-old male stating, "because people come from far away we can't say 'no'."

Many, but not all, in east taiga had been most urbanized during the socialist era and appeared very interested in developing ways to capitalize on tourism. Their 13 urts were arranged as a large circular community, providing many opportunities for interaction with families. Their winter and spring camps are reached both by horse and vehicle. Some Mongolian outsiders have suggested these Dukha are staying longer in the spring camp to draw more tourists, though when asked they responded "we move when the reindeer move." Families in the west taiga also erect tourist urts and welcome home stays. However, in this community extended families live in camps of three to five urts many hours horse or reindeer ride from each other, limiting tourist interaction to fewer families. More-



over, in the east taiga, every family visited had reindeer antler carvings, necklaces and small reindeer hide purses for sale. In the west, during the research period many families had no items, saying they were “too busy to carve.”

Tourists were interviewed either in Tsagaannuur or the taiga. Questions included: how did you hear about the Dukha? How was your trip arranged? What are your expectations? What gifts did you bring, if any? How did you know what to bring? Half of the groups interviewed had completed their visit to the Dukha and were further asked whether or not the experience met their expectations. When asked about gifts, 50% of the tourists were bringing vodka to the reindeer herders. Other items included cigarettes, candy, hair clips, lollipops, soap, noodles, pens and pencils. In one case, a tour group brought nothing, but their guide brought flour.

When queried about their expectations, most tourists envisioned a disappearing culture, a primitive, “different” tribe living in the forest. For all tourists, the journey was part of the trip’s appeal. For most, this included a 300 kilometer, 10-hour off-road drive, stretching to two days if camping, to Tsagaannuur through the countryside, past grazing herds of yak, sheep, goats, cows and horses. One group rode horseback for several days while another hiked a week during a spring snow. Depending on seasonal migration, camps were then reached by vehicle or horseback, taking another day or two. Discomfort and fatigue added authenticity to travelers’ experiences.

Organized tourists expressed sensitivity towards and were most informed about the Dukha. They had teams of horse guides with interpreters and cooks. However, having paid in advance for services, some did not spend money on site. For example, a foreign tourist in the east taiga was asked if he would purchase anything during the make-shift market. He and others in his group of five were taking close-up photos of the women and their wares. They had been seen the day before visiting each urts by turn. He answered that he would not buy anything as the quality of the carvings was not good. Unorganized travelers and backpackers seemed unclear as to their expectations: they were excited to see the reindeer, but did not exactly know what the herders would be like. Informed by guidebooks and other sources, they wished for “legitimate,” “authentic” interpersonal interactions with the Dukha, hoping to cook, chop wood, or herd. They were also more likely to be disappointed when observing modern conveniences such as motorbikes parked next to urts, solar panels, and satellite television, and were less likely to bring extra cash or buy gifts. One traveler described his visit as “an awkward experience;” he walked from Tsagaannuur to a winter camp, shared a bottle of vodka with his host family,

chopped wood, gifted his ax and left. Citing their experience with a guesthouse that did not measure up to its guidebook recommendation, an Australian couple muttered, “*Lonely Planet* is rubbish.”

As the data were reviewed, coded and analyzed using grounded theory, the following themes emerged regarding Dukha perceptions of tourist visits and gift giving:

- Tourist visits are good for the local economy and for cross cultural learning experiences. They do seek control over the tourist experience to improve cross-cultural outcomes and guarantee compensation. Those with the most social and cultural skills (i.e., items for sale, urts to rent, knowledge to share, networks to utilize) see more income. Shamans have additional cultural capital that may or may not be commodified depending on the individual.
- Gifts are appreciated, but not expected. The Dukha prefer tourists bring cash to pay for goods and services. Useful items for children are appreciated. Unless visiting a shaman, do not bring cigarettes or vodka.
- Though some urbanized Dukha disagree, herders interviewed in the taiga do not believe that tourist visits impact migration patterns. They assert that the restricted conservation areas impact their grazing patterns more.
- Tourists may leave the taiga with their stereotyped views of a disappearing tribe intact, but the Dukha are unconcerned. Misrepresentation has no effect on their daily lives. Tourists with translators are best; tourists without translators make communication with the Dukha problematic, compensation complicated, and allow for more socio-cultural misunderstandings. For example, so as not to symbolically pollute a natural water source, it is culturally normative to use a dipper to put water into a container. Some Dukha were mildly upset when tourists were observed bathing and washing clothing directly in the river.

With regard to Dukha ethos and cultural and social capital, the following emerged:

- The Dukha practice a modern form of nomadism where the community concurrently migrates: seasonally with their reindeer within the taiga; from the taiga to town and back; and to other cities in Mongolia or abroad for work, education and healthcare throughout a lifetime. They also continue to practice interdependency, emphasizing and upholding values of generosity, hospitality and reciprocity, in this way renewing and refreshing their ethos by reinforcing

relationships with nature, their reindeer, and each other.

- In terms of cultural capital, the Dukha symbolically value: skill with horses and reindeer; skill with card games; knowledge of healing, medicinal plants and cooking; and egalitarianism, hospitality and generosity. Children's education is prioritized and learning English is encouraged. Socially, one's network can influence opportunities for tourism and compensation, but the Dukha appear careful to uphold their values while doing so.
- Despite myriad concurrent migration patterns, the spiritual home of the Dukha remains the taiga. The Dukha worldview embraces this "sacred geography," where wild spaces can be found inside a camp and tame spaces without (Pedersen 2009:138). The reindeer sleep each night among the urts, wolves raid the camp, and herders travel through rivers and over mountains traversing the wilderness. There is little distinction between home/birch covered teepees and the forest, between domesticated and uninhabited spheres. As one female Dukha herder, a veterinarian, interviewed in the west taiga spring camp said, "Everyone returns to the taiga."

Interviews with international tourists suggest the following themes:

- Seeing the Dukha and the reindeer, experiencing adventure and hardship, and undertaking the long and somewhat difficult journey to visit the taiga authenticated the tourist experience, often as something akin to a pilgrimage.
- Tourists expect a unique encounter, envisioning the iconic deels, reindeer, urts, and shamanic traditions. Though they found it difficult to articulate, having garnered their information from myriad sources, they imagine the Dukha as a small group of primitive tribal peoples living in the forest, untethered to modern communications, untouched by modern conveniences.
- Groups traveling with established tour agencies and a guide/translator appeared better informed, or at least their experiences in the taiga better met their expectations. In contrast, backpackers and unorganized travelers were most reflective of and self-conscious about their encounters, whether interviewed before or after their taiga visit. These tourists gathered information from guidebooks, the internet and word of mouth. They were confused and somewhat disappointed when observing modern amenities at the camps.

- Those on organized tours brought gifts, but having already paid their guides/agencies for the holiday some spent more money in the community and some did not. Backpackers and unorganized travelers desired a more personal connection with the herders, hoping for reciprocating activities. Perhaps viewing the handing over of goods as a type of charity, not all distributed gifts. Some of these tourists saw visiting the herders as "voyeuristic" or resembling "neocolonialism."

## 4 Discussion

Tourism to the Dukha has both similarities and differences when compared to indigenous tourism studies conducted among other reindeer herders. Unlike visiting the Sami in Norway, for instance, there is no infrastructure to manage large scale tourism and there are no reindeer farms or fixed facilities where tourists can be educated, fed and entertained. Other than costumes specific to Dukha shamans, there is no present-day unique cultural clothing to be observed as the deel is worn by every person in the countryside throughout Mongolia. However, there are similarities in that tourism, though often managed by outsiders, is more or less welcomed and can create space for "cultural renewal and identity negotiations" (Viken 2006: 21).

When further analyzing the data, differences in social capital between the east and west taiga herders emerged. Research conducted in rural, indigenous and agrarian communities supports an overall positive correlation between social capital and entrepreneurship (Zhao et al. 2011; Shayaka 2014; Foley and O'Connor 2013). In Foley and O'Connor's research examining networking practices of Native Hawaiian, Aboriginal Australian and Maori business owners, social capital was defined as "the stock of resources for entrepreneurship perceived available to an individual through the strength of normative and structural ties within the group" (2013: 277). Further research in rural communities showed that not only social capital, but specifically human capital, "educational attainment, previous management experience, and tourism/hospitality experience are all positively associated with an individual's ability to enterprise" (Zhao et al. 2011:1586). The west taiga Dukha continued herding reindeer during socialist times, camping in small, extended family groups. Both Dukha and non-Dukha interviewees remarked that they are "the true reindeer herders." In the east, many Dukha left herding and took wage labor jobs. One senior female

herder interviewed took pride in having been a manager at the now defunct fish factory in Tsagaannuur and hoped to receive grant money from the local government to build a tourist urts, one with a pit latrine and quality amenities such as sheets and towels. As noted earlier, east taiga camps can be reached more easily in spring and winter than those in the west. In summer, all 23 families camp together, making visits more appealing to tourists. One east taiga herder speaks fluent English and often serves as a culture interpreter as well, explaining Dukha norms and values to tourists. She and her husband also have a rental urts in the summer camp. By utilizing her social and cultural capital, she exploits more income opportunities from tourism but is careful not to accept money or favors that would violate the values of her community. With regard to cultural capital, fewer distinctions existed. In the east and west taiga, symbolic, objectified and institutionalized aspects of cultural capital, as noted previously, appear shared.

Within the Dukha community are a few rumblings of resentment, what my translator considered ‘gossip,’ toward enterprising individuals who use their cultural and social capital to actively seek tourist funds. As one senior urbanized Dukha from the east taiga stated, “They just want to make money. Since tourism came in people are jealous of [those] with urts.” This could be a limited opinion and further research would be necessary to validate this information. However, these kinds of heterogeneous attitudes regarding tourism development have been shown to exist in other indigenous communities (Hillmer-Pegram 2016). A study of Australian Aboriginal, native Hawaiian, and Maori participants found that while social capital maintains identity, culture defines what is and is not acceptable and that “culture – through identity and the need to be socially accepted – moderates how entrepreneurial networking can and is carried out” (Foley and O’Connor 2013: 290). It may be that overall Dukha adherence to normative values helps keeps those involved in tourism modest, generous and egalitarian while still obtaining culturally sanctioned economic gains.

In interviews conducted among Inupiat stakeholders in Barrow, a small, remote town in northern Alaska with limited tourist traffic, mixed views were elicited regarding tourism. Echoing sentiments expressed by the Dukha, Native leaders were frustrated that people brought to town by tour companies utilized community resources, sometimes even violated residents’ privacy by looking into their homes, and then left, with no benefit to the community. This behavior exemplified “how the profit seeking imperative of the global tourism system conflicts with Inupiaq values as far as it drives external entrepreneurs to capital-

ize on the resources that indigenous residents view as their own” and causes tension (Hillmer-Pegram 2016: 1204). The author puts forth that “When capitalistic tourism is thoroughly enmeshed in community-oriented values, its exploitative nature is reduced, social-ecological alienation is minimized and positive change (i.e. sustainable development) can occur” (Hillmer-Pegram 2016: 1206). To this point, Alexis Celeste Bunten introduces the concept of “Indigenous capitalism” as a “distinct strategy to achieve ethical, culturally appropriate, and successful indigenous participation within the global economy” (2010: 285). That is, in Bunten’s experience as a former native tour guide, if visitors experience “Indigenous value-based tourism,” coming from “a position of cross-cultural sharing and mutual understanding,” they “ask insightful questions” and “leave the tours commenting on the humanity of their hosts” (Bunten 2010: 305). This clearly resembles comments made by backpackers and unorganized tourists to the taiga who sought a reciprocal encounter of shared knowledge with the Dukha instead of a tour that hinted at neocolonialism. Noting that indigenous people are “inherently” hospitable, indigenous capitalism therefore encourages indigenous peoples to take back power from the outside dominant society and not only to define themselves, but to be “more like themselves” by embedding local values in their business models (Bunten 2010: 306). Repeated responses of “it is our way” or “we cannot say no” by the reindeer herders speak to their adherence to cultural values even when tourists sometimes misunderstand or unwittingly violate their hospitality and norms.

Beyond the scope of this research is the long-term effect on the preservation of Dukha cultural norms of conservation rules that limit traditional grazing areas and forbid hunting. So too is the influence of global warming on the reindeer – the soul of Dukha identity – as summer temperatures rise, permafrost melts and the delicate lichen and other plants on which the reindeer feed suffer. However, right now there are more Dukha families and more reindeer living in the taiga than there were twenty years ago. As more tourists visit the taiga, more stories are told and global interest is further piqued. For the Dukha, encounters with outsiders offer a window onto the world that continues when members maintain contact with international friends through social media. Through these exchanges, Dukha acquire social and cultural skills allowing them to manage and share their own story. As one Mongolian tour guide commented regarding his many years visiting the taiga, “The herders take what is good from the outside and throw the rest away.” The intrinsic core of Dukha identity remains intact and strong despite legal, social and economic changes brought on histori-

cally by border closures, religious intolerance, socialism, collectivism and now, by conservation and privatization. What the Dukha own within themselves cannot be seen, bought, or impacted by tourist visits alone at this time; on the contrary, it may be empowered.

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