

## ANTHROPOLOGY

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### Brief Sketch of the Racial History of Selected Ethnic Groups of Siberia

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Soviet and American anthropologists share a number of related research problems. One of these is the continuing search for possible ancestral populations for the aboriginal mongoloid populations of native North America and Siberia. Most physical anthropologists accept as an article of faith the belief that the Palaeo-Amerind arrived in the New World by way of Siberia. Unfortunately skeletal remains of the Palaeo-Amerind have proved to be most elusive. Soviet physical anthropologists and archaeologists are equally concerned with discovering racial clues as to the identity of the most ancient forms of man in Siberia, sometimes referred to as the pre-Tungus, Palaeo-Asiatic population of Siberia. The New World and Siberia share a number of common characteristics in terms of the problem of their respective original peopling. No higher forms of primates in a direct evolutionary line to *Homo sapiens* have been discovered in either area. Secondly, all the most ancient skeletal remains from the New World and from northeastern Siberia are mongoloid, *Homo sapiens* and Upper Pleistocene in age. Some exciting new Pleistocene skeletal finds from mainland China have been reported since 1949 but await further description, analysis and publication of results outside that country. Very tentatively, it would seem that the ultimate ancestral populations to both the first New World and Siberian mongoloids must be sought in the Pleistocene of mainland China. This paper supports the hypothesis that when such a Chinese Pleistocene population is available for description and analysis, that it will consist of large, rugged relief generalized mongoloid crania very similar to the famous Old Man of Choukoutien, skull No. 101, described by the late Franz Weidenreich (7).

This paper supports the position that the Old Man of Choukoutien, despite the generalized resemblance to Upper Palaeolithic Europoid populations noted by so many writers, already exhibited mongoloid facial specializations as advanced by Weidenreich. Assuming that in Late Palaeolithic times a group of generalized mongoloids resembling to some extent the Old Man of Choukoutien existed as bands of continental hunters, it is further postulated that some of these more generalized mongoloids, perhaps in pursuit of game, wandered from their more southerly and warmer areas of origin in eastern Asia to the taiga and tundra areas of northeastern Siberia.

A recent Soviet geological map shows the glaciation of northeastern Siberia from approximately Yakutsk to the Chukchi peninsula during Pleistocene times. It is possible that many of these generalized mongoloids migrated over Bering Strait, contributing genes to the earliest known Palaeo-Amerinds. Others, despite tailored clothing adapted for the new Arctic ecology, stayed behind and those who did not succumb to the rigors of climate became trapped in unglaciated pockets, such as the area along the Middle Kolyma River. This ordeal may have lasted as long as some 10,000 years, some 400 to 500 generations, and is sufficient time for mutations and selection. The severe climate, partial isolation and the selective nature of the Arctic environment probably kept the mongoloid population of northeastern Siberia greatly reduced, enabling genetic drift to operate, as is well-known, in small groups. A detailed analysis of how such factors may have operated to produce the modern Tungus, Chukchi and possibly other living and facially specialized mongoloid ethnic groups of Siberia is contained in the work of Coon, Garn and Birdsell (2).

One of the largest, most exhaustively described and best-known pre-historic populations of southern Siberia is the so-called Neolithic Baikal type A, described as early as 1930 by G. F. Debetz in *Russkii Antropologicheskii Zhurnal* and later by A. P. Okladnikov and M. G. Levin. The slight differences of opinion among these authors as to the interpretation of these finds exceeds the scope of this paper. Basically the opinion of Debetz and archaeologist A. P. Okladnikov are similar, in that both see in this prehistoric mongoloid population a direct genetic link to the living Evenk (Tungus) of northeastern Siberia. This Neolithic mongoloid population is characterized by low-vaultedness and extremely sloping foreheads and represents a direction away from the more generalized possible ancestral group, the Old Man of

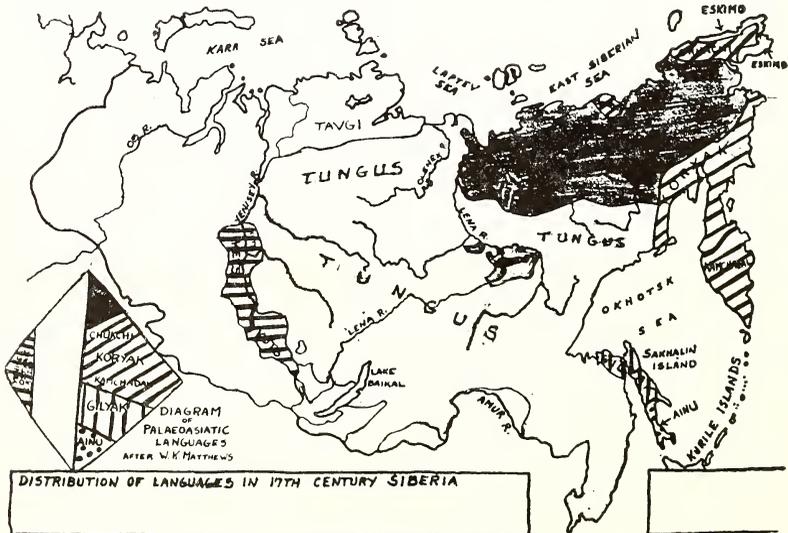


Figure 1.

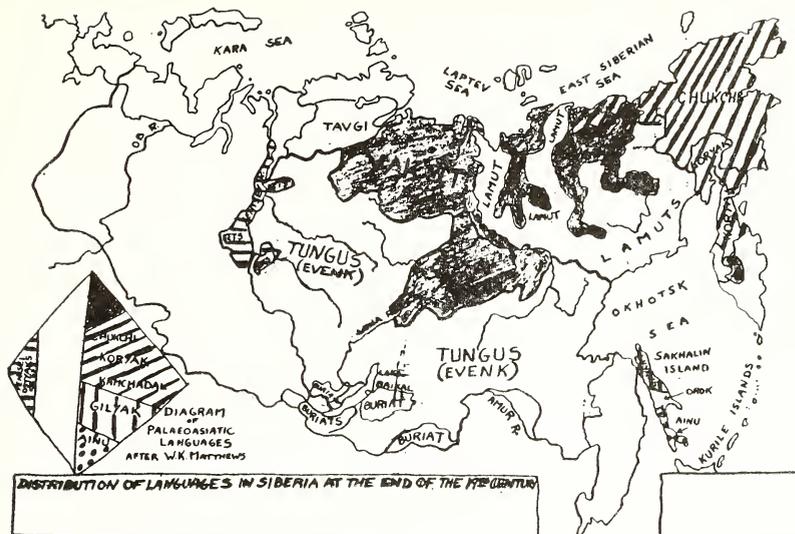


Figure 2.

Choukoutien and his contemporaries in Upper Pleistocene East Asia. In Fig. 1 the ethnic groups of 17th century Siberia are shown. This map represents the ethnological present, that is the distribution of non-Russian peoples of northeastern Siberia at the time of the first Russian penetration into the area. The Central Asiatic physical type found mainly among the then small group of Yakuts, represents a very recent intrusion of Turkic-speaking cattle-breeders who may have arrived in northeastern Siberia as late as the era of Ghenghis Khan. Most of the Evenks and the ancient continental hunters, the Yukagirs, are of the Baikal physical type. It is believed that as recently as the seventeenth century of our era that the interior of the Chukchi peninsula was inhabited by the Yukagir, bearers of the Baikal physical type. In Fig. 2 it can be seen that the Yakut have expanded enormously in absolute numbers and in the very widespread territory they occupied by the end of the nineteenth century, while the once widely distributed Yukagir have all but disappeared by the turn of the 20th century, various population estimates placing them at somewhere between 400 and perhaps a 1,000 survivors. Most American anthropologists attempting to map aboriginal Siberia for purposes of comparison with native North America fail to specify the time period involved and further confuse their audiences by implying commonly held racial traits for what are really linguistic groupings.

It has been suggested that isolation, genetic drift and the adaptation of the generalized mongoloids to prolonged exposure to the severe cold of Upper Pleistocene Siberia may account for the so-called highly specialized morphology of the Evenks, and Lamuts and that this type was probably superimposed upon the possibly pre-Tungus Palaeo-Asiatic hunters. An instance of this process may be represented among the vanishing Yukagir, whose less-specialized mongoloid appearance has been

commented upon by a variety of writers. This does not mean that the Yukagir can be derived from some imaginary ancient Europoid or proto-Europoid population in northeastern Siberia. Some years ago Birdsell proposed that an Amurian element may have been present in this area of the Old World and that it was sufficiently old to have entered into the racial composition of the earliest groups of American Indians migrating out of Asia in terminal or post-Pleistocene times across Bering Strait. It should be mentioned at this point that no evidence for a widespread distribution of ancient Caucasoids in eastern or northeastern Siberia exists based on the exhaustive and most recent investigations of Soviet anthropologists (1).

That some non-mongoloid racial component did exist in northwestern and southwestern Siberia in pre-historic times is undeniable, but the distribution of such ancient representatives of what the Soviets call the Great Europoid Race was limited to these areas and to the earliest stratigraphic levels investigated by Soviet archaeologists in the Kazakh and Kirghiz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics. Europoid skeletal remains date from about 4000 B.C. and occur in association with the Afanasyev and Andronovo cultures of westernmost Siberia.

G. F. Debetz has confirmed the presence of an ancient Cro-Magon-like Europoid population in the Minusinsk district and in the Altai Mountains during the Afanasyev and Andronovo periods of culture. A useful summary of the findings is contained in English in the 1948 article by Debetz (3), long recognized as one of the outstanding physical anthropologists in the U.S.S.R. Evidently these prehistoric Europoids constituted the earliest known population in Central Asia, specifically the Kazakh and Kirghiz republics, and tended to be replaced by expanding mongoloids only at a much later date. A brief discussion in Russian and some illustrations of prehistoric Europoid crania from Kazakhstan can be found in Russian in a 1963 collection of articles published by the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. (4).

What apparently happened in northwestern and southwestern Siberia during Neolithic times is that the Europoids had reached the area between the Ural Mountains and the Yenisei River and somewhere in this vast area met the rapidly expanding groups of mongoloids. As a result in part of interbreeding between these representatives of different racial stock, the so-called Uralian physical type arose. Even today this type is found between the Ural Mountains and its eastern limit is the Yenisei River. Typical representative groups bearing this physical type include the Mansi, Khanty and to some extent the Sel'kups and Nentsy. Thus, there is some correlation between speakers of the Ugrian and Samoyedic languages and the Uralian physical type. The Kets, commonly referred to as the Yenisei Ostyaks because of their location, are thought to represent a language isolate, although many older, non-Soviet writers included them in with a so-called West Siberian branch of the Palaeo-Asiatic languages. There has been a long-standing discussion as to whether or not the Kets are "Americanoid" because of their sometimes distinctively high nasal bridges, but this exceeds the scope of this paper.

In the indigenous population of the lower Amur River and Sakhalin Island two physical types can be distinguished, namely, the Baikal type, already mentioned above briefly, and another type known as the Amur-Sakhalin type. The Baikal type is found among the Negidals and Oroks, as well as among the Ul'ches, Nanays and Orochs, all speakers of Tungusic languages. The most comprehensive single published work available in English on the ethnogenesis of the peoples of Siberia is that of the late and reknowned M. G. Levin (5, 6). Except when otherwise indicated, this portion of the paper dealing with the Gilyak (Nivkh) as representative of the Amur-Sakhalin type is based on the work of M. G. Levin. To some extent this type can be found as a component among the Ul'ches and is part among the Orochs, along with the Baikal type. Levin regards the Nivkh or Gilyak as the early indigenous population of the territory they now inhabit and cites Soviet linguists who feel that Gilyak also is a language isolate. In terms of culture, Levin believes that the archaeological evidence as to the possible ethnogenesis of the Nivkh points to a great degree of continuity with the Neolithic culture of the Amur area. Levin further supports the position that the Gilyak do not resemble any Amerind groups of the Northwest Coast of North America either physically, linguistically or culturally. Levin does not reject the possibility of physical proximity between the Gilyak and the Aleut, but simply regards this hypothesis as remaining unconfirmed (6).

Space limitations prevent an adequate discussion of the complex issue of the Chukchi, Koryak and Kamchadal (Itel'meni) of extreme northeast Siberia. It has been shown that the expansion of the Tungus (Evenk) languages and culture tended to coincide with the spread of the Baikal physical type to the Yukagir and the ancient Nivkh possibly occupied the Amur-Sakhalin area before this Tungusic expansion took place. The advent of the Turkic-speaking Yakut, and a few centuries later, the Russians, radically changed the racial picture of historical Siberia.

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