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Heonik Kwon

PLAY THE BEAR: MYTH AND RITUAL IN EAST SIBERIA

This article deals with the tradition of ritualized bearhunting in East Siberia, which continued until the first half of this century. Commonly called "play the bear" or "bear play" in various native languages, this ritual hunting typically involved capturing new born bear cubs from the den and nurturing them for several years, and it culminated in the interclan festivity of slaying the animal, consuming its flesh and burying the remains.[1]

In ethnographic literature, the ritual tradition is introduced as the "bear feast" and is often considered a common denominator among the peoples of the region with otherwise diverse material cultures and languages.[2] In his book *The Golden Bough,* James Frazer points out "the apparent contradiction in the practice of these [Siberian] tribes, who venerate and

An early version of this article was presented at the Department of Cultural Anthropology, Leiden University, the Netherlands, in 1992. A part of it was also read at the London School of Economics in 1994. I thank Maurice Bloch, Alfred Gell, Peter Gow, Jarich Oosten, Joanna Overing, and Christina Toren for their comments and encouragement.

[1] On Sakhalin island, the last bear ritual took place in the late fifties. In this article, however, I employ the present tense in describing the ritual procedure. Chuner Mikhailovich Taksami, a distinguished native anthropologist who is well known in Russia for his studies of Nivkh religion and Tungus economy, attempted to revive the bear ceremonial in Sakhalin. In 1992, he presented the result at the Royal Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Leiden, where he received not only a warm reception from the audience but also an outright rejection from a few animal rights activists.

[2] A. I. Hallowell, "Bear Ceremonialism in the Northern Hemisphere," *American Anthropologist* 28 (1926): 36–43; H. Paproth, *Studien über das Bärenzeremoniell: 1. Bärenjagdriten und Bärenfest bei den Tungusischen Völkern* (Uppsala: Toflers Tryckeri, AB, 1976); B. A. Vasilev, "Medvezii prazdnik," *Sovetskaya Etnografiya* 4 (1948): 15–21.

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almost deify the animals which they habitually hunt, kill, and eat."[3] Reflecting on this "puzzle," he writes that for these peoples, nonhuman animals are conceptualized as "knit together, like men, by the ties of kin" and therefore "the act of killing and eating an animal must wear a very different aspect from that which the same act presents to us."[4] Throughout his work, Frazer maintains this tension between "we" who kill and eat animals because they are classified as different species unrelated to the human self and "they" who hunt wild animals because they are related to the human self by idioms of kinship and marriage.

The prominent feature of the Siberian bear feast, as Frazer indicates, is that human actors as a whole display the relation of predation between two species as a social relationship. The people who capture the bear cub construct an imaginary kinship with the animal by bringing it up as if it is their own child, and when it is grown up, they act out a marriage ceremony of this "child." The affinal kin of the captors, however, relate to the captive bear as if it is nothing more than game to be hunted. The rite presents both the imaginary world of kinship and the apparent reality of predation as coexisting in one context,[5] and it employs the boundary between the two performative realities as a device of social classification.

Rather than display an uncanny cultural world governed by kinship idioms as Frazer views, it then appears that the actors divide themselves between "we" and "they" to engage in a double dialogue of kinship and predation through the medium of the bear. In this sense, the ritual performance becomes a comparative and expository strategy between different self-definitions and roles, not entirely unlike the literary work of Frazer. In this article, my focus will be on this double dialogue as a frame for action in the given ritual performance.[6] Following an outline of the ritual procedure, I will approach the ritual actions as a dramatic debate with the mythic narrative,[7] in which hunting and marriage also appear as separate conversations, and I discuss some critical arguments emerging between the two cultural forms.

This article is written in preparation for a more extensive historical study of the indigenous cultures in East Siberia and deals with the cere-

[3] J. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (London: Macmillan, 1922), p. 517.

[4] Ibid., p. 528.

[5] In this sense, this performative reality of kinship corresponds to the notion of "spirit world" (Ch. M. Taksami, *Nivkhi: Sovremennoe khozyaistvo, kul'tura i byt* [Leningrad: Nauka, 1967]), "psycho-mental complex" (S. M. Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus* [Peking: Peking Press, 1935]), or "supernature" [R. Hamayon, *La chasse à l'âme: Esquisse d'une théorie du chamanisme Sibérien* [Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie, 1990]) conceptualized in opposition to "nature."

[6] G. Bateson, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 149.

[7] G. Gillison, *Between Culture and Fantasy: A New Guinea Highlands Mythology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 8–14.

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monial tradition of three Tungusic peoples in the region: the Orochon (Ulta) of Sakhalin in particular, the Ulcha of the Lower Amur, and the Oroch of the Maritime coast. All of these peoples belong to the so-called southern subgroup of Tungus languages within the current academic classification and are known to be closely related in their ethnogenesis.[8] Traditionally, they were organized by several exogamous patrilineal clans or lineage groups and considered matrilateral cross-cousin marriages as an ideal form of marriage.[9] They had seminomadic subsistence economies primarily based on hunting land animals and fishing, supplemented by maritime hunting and fur trading. They have inhabited the lower end of the Amur river and the northeastern coast of Sakhalin island, which are marked by the presence of numerous rivers and streams, in such a way that each lineage group was identified with a particular river and the use right of its surrounding hunting and trapping territory. This association between the rivers and social units will be important for understanding the ritual to the extent that the ritual bear nominally represents a tributary at the time of its death.

FROM THE DEN TO THE HOUSE

Siberian bear feasts, in their wide definition,[10] are initiated by the hunt of the bears' winter den (*xagdu,* in Orochon), occupied by the young cubs and their mother. The hibernating mother bear is awakened and killed, and the cubs are captured and brought back to the encampment (*du* or *duku*). Becoming then "house bears," the cubs are raised by their human captors for three to four years, and they are kept in a wooden cage when their paws become threatening.

When the cub is introduced into a human dwelling, the novice receives the so-called bear service, in which practically all the members of the community take turns milking and feeding the newcomer. While the cub is initially fed with reindeer milk and gruel before it is weaned, it is

[8] A. V. Smolyak, *Etnicheskie protsessy u naradov nizhnego amura i sakhalina* (Moscow: Nauka, 1975). For the Orochon bear feasts, the most detailed accounts by far are found in the works of the Polish ethnographer, Bronislav Pilsudskii. Although he worked largely with the Nivkh and the Ainu in southern Sakhalin, Pilsudskii also provides a short but insightful description of the Orochon activity, a Tungusic ethnic group settled mainly on the northeastern part of the island (B. O. Pilsudskii, *Iz poezdki k orokam o. Sakhalina v 1904 g.* [1907; reprint, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Sakhalimskii: Oblastnoi Kraevedcheskii Muzei, 1989]). In introducing the basic outline of their bear feast, I rely on his report, supporting it with the oral accounts of the Orochon elders when necessary. Cross-references are also made to the Ulcha and the Oroch practices.

[9] S. M. Skirokogoroff, *Social Organization of the Northern Tungus* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1933); C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon, 1969), pp. 376–79.

[10] In a narrower definition, the bear feast refers mainly to the final killing of the animal and the following consumption of its body. Most of the previous works on the subject subscribe to this narrow definition and subsequently underestimate the significance of bringing up the very object of hunting.

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also reported that women practice breast-feeding, and that when children show jealousy toward the cub being milked and cared for, they are scolded and persuaded to restrain themselves.[11] This process of "fostering" the bear, to borrow an expression from Shaeffer,[12] consequently introduces the cub bear into a common context of growth shared with the human children.

This passage of the house bear from its natal lair to the human dwelling space in fact reflects the process of human birth. The Orochon, like other indigenous peoples in East Siberia,[13] practiced a solitary birth. As soon as a woman has her first labor pains, she puts on her menstrual clothing and isolates herself in a separate hut called *yatau,* built on the outskirts of the camp. Men, especially the woman's agnatic relatives, are strictly forbidden from this place. In the event that it is her first child-bearing experience, the woman in labor has her elderly female relatives outside the hut waiting for the cry of the newborn, ready to provide assistance if necessary. If help is needed, an elderly kinswoman may be present in the hut, but, ideally, the woman giving birth is supposed to handle her task without any help or any contact with her relatives.[14] She gives birth, buries the placenta, and remains there until her postnatal bleeding stops. During the confinement, she has to observe certain food prohibitions such as cold water and salted food. When she emerges out of the birth hut, the new mother is purified on a bed of birch bark smoked by the clan fire.

This solitary birth detaches the act of parturition from the sphere of communal life. A human baby is brought into the community rather than born within it, and, in this respect, the forced detachment of the infant bear from the den becomes homologous to the exit of the human newborn from the birth hut. Both the human and ursine births take place in a secluded perinatal space that is commonly characterized by exclusive mother-child ties. In this sense, the birth hut and the den are an extension of the mother's uterus. Parturition remains hidden in the den as well as in the birth hut, whereas both types of "children," when they emerge into their postnatal life, are made to share food and care.

The Orochon classify the bear into seven age categories. *Siro* is the "one-year-old child of bear," and it also refers to all the hoofed wild an-

[11] T. Obayashi and H. Paproth, "Das Bärenfest der Oroken auf Sachalin," *Zeitschrift Für Ethnologie* 91 (1966): 218.

[12] C. Shaeffer, "The Bear Foster Parent Tale: A Kutenai Version," *Journal of American Folklore* 60 (1947): 286–88.

[13] E. A. Kreinovich, "Rozhdenie i smert' cheloveka po vozrenyam gilyakov," *Etnografiya* 9 (1930): 89–113; E. Gayer, "Traditional Customs and Rituals of the Nanai in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: Birth Rituals and Marriage Rituals," *Anthropology and Archaeology of Eurasia* 31 (1992): 40–87.

[14] J. Ikegami, ed., *Materials on the Languages and Folklore of the Peoples of Sakhalin* (Abashiri: Society for the Preservation of Northern Region Culture and Folklore, 1983), pp. 66–67.

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imals. This is followed by *batana siro* or *puriyesi,* "the weak," and subsequently by the third year, *xoyol,* identified with a liking to red currant. At the fourth year of *puyol,* there is a break between what comes before and after. The term *puyo* refers to the condition of a river dividing into two smaller ones when one moves upstream, and it means "tributary" or "partition."[15] Following this, comes *neudume jevisal,* "the younger one" of *jevisal,* the six-year-old "strong one." All the adult bears older than this are *agduma jevisal,* "the older one" of *jevisal.*

Notice that passing the point of "tributary," not only does the bear change from the weak to the strong, but also the partition between the younger (*neudu*) and the older (*agdu*) takes place. In this sense, the four-year-old bear is the combination of the two contradictory images of the tributary: the fission of a river path into two branches as well as the fusion of smaller streams into a stronger whole. In myth, this tributary often appears in a vertical form through the image of a bifurcated tree.[16] A two-forked tree also plays an important role when the four-year-old house bear is placed at the critical point of death.

Later on, I will suggest that this contradictory image of the tributary illustrates the concurrence in cross-cousin marriages between the fission of siblings into two collateral lines and the fusion of their descendants into a conjugal unity.[17] For now, it suffices to mention that the point of tributary in the Orochon bear classification corresponds to the timing of the animal's sexual maturity.[18] Biological studies of Siberian brown bears show that it takes five to six years for the female cubs and up to ten years for the males before they grow to their full stature, and that most of them are chased away from the den by the mother bears after three years, when they show signs of sexual maturity.[19] The Orochon bear classification generally conforms to this zoologist's observation, especially that of the females. The duration of captivity, ideally lasting three to four years, corresponds to the length of time required for the animal's sexual maturation. According to an Orochon elder, when a captive bear started playing with its genitals the people realized that the time to kill the animal was near.

[15] H. Magata, *A Dictionary of the Uilta Language* (Abashiri: Society for the Preservation of Northern Region Culture and Folklore, 1981), p. 172.

[16] In one such story, a boy rescues a bear threatened by a menacing giant seal. The thankful bear in return helps the hero escape through a two-forked tree so that the chasing monster is stuck between the two boughs and dies.

[17] Lévi-Strauss describes this partition of a whole into two parts as "the division of collateral lines into older and younger," which, according to him, is crucial for the regulation of sexual relations and marriage in the Tungus kinship system (Lévi-Strauss, p. 376).

[18] *Puyo* and its surrounding marshes are also where women often choose to go for collecting berries in late autumn and encounter the brown bears which come for fish and fruits.

[19] J. Sparks, *Realms of the Russian Bear: A Natural History of Russian and the Central Asian Republics* (London: BBC Books, 1992), pp. 27–28.

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Having the "biological" growth of the animal imposed on its temporal organization, the bear fosterage in turn imposes on the animal a "social" process of coming-of-age in the form of bear service. The captors endure the lengthy burden of feeding and caring for the cub until it matures, but by doing so, they force the animal into a collective domain of sociality with other children and adults. In this respect, as Ingold points out,[20] the bear's passage from the den to the human dwelling is radically different from, or almost antithetical to, the process of animal domestication. Rather than simply being incorporated into an existing environment and brought under control, the bear also incorporates the entire social body of its human captors into its image. Nurturing the animal as if it were a human child, the caregivers construct a performative, mimetic self-identity as an extension of the nurtured. This fusion between the bear "child" and the human captors develops to a dramatic perfection when the "child" grows to the temporal point of the tributary.

FROM THE HOUSE TO THE PLAYGROUND

The Ulcha in the Amur region call their bear ritual "play the bear" (*buyu hupu*), and the Orochon on Sakhalin island define their similar activity as *boyombo xuriazixani,* which they also translate to "playing the bear" in Russian (*igrat' medvedi*). The act of playing the bear is ascribed only to the group that fosters the captive bear; the others who will be invited to join this "play" are described as *boyombo xuriazixani xuriamaxani,* meaning "to go and achieve the bear play" or "gathering to play."

Drawing on the shamanic tradition of these peoples, Hamayon mentions that the idea of *jouer* is central to the religious culture of native Siberian peoples, and that their shamanic séance is also a form of interactive play between the shaman and his or her possessing spirits.[21] According to Hamayon, this shamanic play basically consists of two separate activities: "playing as" something (e.g., a spirit) and "playing with" the "player as." The idea of play in bear feasts corresponds to this characterization, for here, the host group acts as the bear in relation to the others, whereas the guests, particularly the affines, interact with the former, as if they are actually in the territory of the bear people.

Both the Ulcha and the Orochon prepare a special ground for the final killing, at a distance of less than a mile from the encampment. This ceremonial place is called *aracu* in Ulcha, and Zolotarev translates this

[20] T. Ingold, *The Appropriation of Nature: Essays on Human Ecology and Social Relations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 260.

[21] R. Hamayon, "Le 'jeu,' forme élémentaire de rituel," in *Rites and Ritualisation,* ed. G. Thinès and L. de Heusch (Louvain la Neuve: Publication de l'Institut Interdisciplinaire d'Etudes Epístémologiques, 1995), pp. 76–85.

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term as "playground."[22] This playground is cleared by the male members of the host's lineage group and is considered to be out-of-bounds to women.[23] According to Vasilev, the Oroch prepare this ground in the same way, and it is marked by the presence of a special two-forked tree adorned with wood shavings.[24]

Before the house bear is brought to the playground, it is taken out from the cage and escorted to visit each family of the foster kindred. It is then led to the residence of the host of the ritual, where it is fed and watered. This process occurs concurrently with the arrival of the *sengisil* (relatives by marriage), out of whom will be selected the bowman. The *sengisil* noose the bear, take it out of the host's residence, and "cleanse" the animal by poking and tipping it with a stick tipped with wood shavings. At this moment, the women come out of their houses, dressed in their ceremonial garments and ornaments, and beat the drum of a dry tree trunk.

After the cleansing, the bear is tied onto a sled, together with the ritual implements and the bearskins from previous feasts, and driven to the "playground" by the male agnates of the host clan. When the procession reaches the playground, the animal is tied between two tree trunks. After this, arrows are shot over the top of the bifurcated tree first and then into the bear's heart by a chosen bowman, who, according to Pilsudskii, is the host's sister's son (*gamasu*) or his daughter's husband.[25] Once the animal is identified as dead, the men of the host group skin the carcass, and their *sengisil* take seats on the spot and are served special ceremonial food called *mosi* made of red berries mixed with seal fat and fish. A bunch of willow tree branches are laid on the fire, which is set beside the head of the slain bear, and the eyes are then taken out of the bear's skull and thrown far away.

Then, the carcass is brought back to the encampment and boiled by the host men. The cooked meat is served to everyone present, and initially, men, women, and children all sit apart from one another and remain silent. The feast lasts fifteen to twenty days, and as it continues, the solemn atmosphere of the initial consumption gives way to festivity. Young men from the host and the guest groups organize reindeer races—dog races for the Ulcha—and shooting competitions.[26] For men, meat eating itself becomes a game in which members of different lineage groups compete with their strength to eat more. While these competitive games are taking place, Pilsudskii reports that a growing sexual tension is found

[22] Kreinovich, p. 116.
[23] Pilsudskii, *Iz poezdki k orokam o. Sakhalina v 1904 g.* (n. 8 above), p. 58.
[24] Vasilev, "Medvezii prazdnik" (n. 2 above).
[25] Pilsudskii, *Iz poezdki k orokam o. Sakhalina v 1904 g.*, p. 58.
[26] Obayashi and Paproth (n. 11 above), pp. 222–23.

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in the community and that some young people "disappear to the bush," in sharp contrast to the strict rule of physical purity emphasized before the killing event.[27]

When the flesh of the slain bear is thoroughly consumed, all the remaining bones are gathered and wrapped in the bark of a birch tree. Then, men of the host group move to a new campsite, which is selected for the next dwelling after the ceremony, and they build a separate hut, made only for this ceremonial purpose, and cook and eat the bear's head.[28] The tongue is given to the eldest man as a token of honor. After this, the skull is assembled into a skeleton with the other bones, smoked, and placed on a pile near the encampment. The smoking of the skull is reportedly done to "embody" the bear and to complete the entire ceremony.[29]

As Slawik points out, this whole ritual procedure, from the cleansing of the bear to the final killing, mediated by the bear's passage to the playground, is modeled on the hunt of the bear's den.[30] In den hunting, the hibernating bear is poked on its back with a pole introduced through a hole in the den, and the bear is forced to emerge through the exit on the opposite side. A noose is then placed around the bear's neck. The animal is held by the noose tightened from both ends by two men, and another man shoots at its heart while the man who poked the animal is ready to support the shooter. In the bear feast, this process is enacted in the order of poking (cleansing) the animal, noosing it, dragging it from the host's house to the playground, and the final killing. Throughout these actions, the male affines collaborate with the men of the host group, and this culminates in the division of labor between the guest (wife taker), who shoots the animal, and the host (wife givers), who skin the carcass.

BETWEEN MARRIAGE AND HUNTING

In her seminal work on Siberian religions, Hamayon elaborates on this division of labor between marriage partners in the bear feast. Among the Evenk in the western part of Siberia,[31] when a hunter finds a den, he brings his wife giver to the spot, lets him assist in the hunt by poking and noosing the animal, and finally hands over the right to skin the carcass to him. Their hunt is followed by a communal feast in which the one who

[27] B. O. Pilsudskii, "Na medvezem prazdnike ainov o. Sakhalina," *Zhivaya Strana* 23 (1914): 131.

[28] B. A. Vasilev, "Osnovnye cherty etnografiya orokov," *Etnografiya* 4 (1929): 19.

[29] Pilsudskii, "Na medvezem prazdnike ainov o. Sakhalina," p. 138; Vasilev, "Medvezii prazdnik," p. 102; A. Zolotarev, "The Bear Festival of the Olcha," *American Anthropologist* 39 (1937): 121.

[30] A. Slawik, "Zum Problem des Bärenfestes bei den Ainu und Giliaken," *Kultur und Sprache: Wiener Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte und Linguistik* 9 (1952): 189–203.

[31] Hamayon, *La chasse à l'âme* (n. 5 above), pp. 365–72. The Evenk are the most numerous and widely scattered ethnic group in northern Siberia.

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found the den remains passive while his wife giver does all the distribution of the meat.

Between these two hunters, according to Hamayon, there are two cycles of exchange—of women and of game—and these two circulate in the opposite trajectory. Since gift giving necessarily constructs a hierarchy, according to Hamayon, the wife taker mediates his inferiority to the wife giver by a counter act of game giving. Hamayon points out that the wife taker settles a part of his debt (the wife) by relegating the prestige of distributing the game to the wife giver, and she defines this ritual procedure as a substitutive marriage ceremony. Defining the bodies of hunted animals and the bodies of women as two principal objects of exchange, she concludes that the ritual is an enactment of the constitutive principle of Siberian hunting societies: "the double sharing of women and game between allies."[32]

For the ritual bear hunting described in this article, the coordination between marriage partners is also crucial. Here, the matrimonial domain of hunting is prepared in the following sequence: (1) the introduction of the bear to the house of the ritual host, the feeding of the animal there, (2) the detachment of the bear from the house with the arrival of the *sengisil,* the women's celebration of this act through their change of costumes and drumming, and (3) the dramatic encounter between the bear and the host's son-in-law.

Although Hamayon is absolutely right to indicate the close association between marriage and ritual hunting, it is doubtful whether the ritual prey is reducible to "game" as she sees it. This reductive perspective is certainly part of the ritual performance in that the ritual animal is acted upon as game by the wife takers. For the wife givers who fostered the animal, however, the bear is far from game but is a member of their group, which is undergoing a form of marriage. The wife taker's role is to relate to the bear as if it is prey and thus to drag it out of the den, whereas the wife giver's role is to relate to the same body as if it is a child to marry the chosen hunter and thus to chase it out of his home. Although their actions respond to one another and produce resonance, they are nevertheless situated in the separate performative realities of marriage and hunting.[33] In this context, the bear comes into being as either game or a woman, depending on what actions are taken on the ritual object and

[32] Ibid., p. 366.

[33] In this sense, the ritual bear corresponds to what Bateson calls the "meta-communicative signal" of "this is play" (G. Bateson, "Theory of Play and Fantasy," *Psychiatric Research Reports* 2 [1955]: 39–51). In the play activity (e.g., cops and robbers), according to Bateson, the players must have a double dialogue so that a statement like "hand over the money" can invoke both its literal and nonliteral meaning simultaneously (D. Cohen, *The Development of Play* [London: Routledge, 1933], p. 17).

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by whom, and the paradigmatic relationship between the two categories is internal to the given ritual performance.

When the chosen hunter, the host's son-in-law, shoots the body, which is apparently an animal, the hunter falls into an illusion of mistaking his bride for game. This action is purely predatory for the hunter and representative of the hunting dialogue conducted by his agnatic relatives, whereas for the host, the same act is a climax of their marriage dialogue and, as I will show shortly, is thus interpreted as an impregnation of the prey's body. The hunter's illusion in this context is neither a deception nor a false appearance, but rather a manifestation of the rite's double dialogic structure.

This double dialogue of hunting and marriage is also a dominant theme in the narrative tradition of *ningma* (myth or legends, in Orochon and Oroch) in East Siberia. Consider the following story:

A woman was captured by a bear man. She married him and had two children. This woman appeared as a bear to people. She met other berry-picking women in the forest and asked them to tell her brothers not to mistake her for a bear. One day, a hunter shot her by mistake, and despite the pain, she asked him that he should hold the bear play and told him how to do it. A few days later, the hunter killed her younger child too, and despite the pain, this child told the hunter what he had to follow in hunting.[34]

In this myth, hunting originates as an assault by a brother against his sister. Exogamy alters physical appearance and creates the illusion of taxonomic difference between siblings. The human hunter is exposed only to the affinal difference of the prey, being blind to their sameness of blood ties and deceived by his own perception, and his misled violence extends to the other's offspring. The hunter's visual deception runs counter to the verbal action of the prey. The dying victims reveal their consanguine identity through speech.

The antithesis between visuality and orality is manifested in the ritual in the way that the eyes and the tongue of the slain animal are treated differently. Before the body is knifed, the eyes of the dead, which probably symbolize the hunter's misled perception, are taken out from the sockets and discarded. The tongue, on the contrary, is highly considered and offered to the eldest man of the host group. The last words spoken by the mythic prey not only expose the hunter's illusion but also con-

[34] My translation. Sternberg considers this story to be a founding myth of the bear feast. The Orochon elder, Semyonova, who recited this story, used the term *puto* for the child bear and *nadakta* for the "brother." *Puto* is a genderless term equivalent to "child" in English, and *nadakta* refers to a male agnate of the same generation for a married woman. L. Ya. Shternberg discusses a similar tale in (Sternberg), "Die religion der Giliaken," *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 8 (1905), p. 460.

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nect the mythic episode to the ensuing ritual actions. First the mother bear, followed by her child, instructs the hunter verbally how to rectify the tragic consequence of his blind violence.

If we situate the narrative plot and the ritual process in a continuum as the myth calls for, we notice a full circle that begins and ends with a marriage. In the myth, the marriage of a woman to a bear man provides the background for its plot, and the obscure bear man plays the role of wife taker. In the rite, however, it is the wife givers who hold the event of *boyombo xurigazixani* (play the bear) and pretend that they are the bear people. If we consider, as Hamayon suggests, the transition from one marriage to another as a time lag between taking and giving in the exchange of women, this transition, as she mentions, seems to require the mediation of hunting. This mediatory step of hunting is divided into two types. In the first type, the prey is a woman with children, and the mythic bear woman and the adult female bear (the mother of the captive bear) in the initial den hunt of the bear feast fall into this category. In the second type, the prey is a child of the previous victim, and it includes the ritual bear as well as the mythic child bear. The transition between these two types of hunting also has a time lag. In the myth, the child bear is hunted down "a few days later" after its mother's death. Likewise, the ritual bear awaits a few years in captivity before it steps into the "playground" of hunting.

Thus far, the ritual process and the mythic plot seem to "imply" each other, as Leach suggests, the rite saying in action what the myth says in language.[35] A dramatic break takes place, however, in the ritual transition from one type of hunting to the other. During this time, the hunter (the mythic brother), having killed the mother bear, captures and nurtures her child and constructs filial ties with the animal. When the bear has spent time under foster care, the brother, rather than kill the animal himself as he did in mythic times, hands over the task to his sister's son.

Between the myth and the rite, therefore, prey and hunter swap positions along collateral lines. The death of the mother bear precedes a horizontal role exchange in that the position of hunter swings to her affinal side. Then a vertical role exchange takes place between the older (*agdu*) and younger (*neudu*) generation following the death of the mythic child bear, when the position of hunter shifts from the old (brother) to the young (sister's son), and likewise for prey, the young (brother's child) substitutes for the old (sister).[36] Through these role exchanges, the ritual hunter and his prey are no longer a brother and sister but become their collateral

[35] E. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (Boston: Beacon, 1954), p. 13.

[36] In this sense, each rhetoric of the mythic victims seems to be a promise of retaliation, an oath to reciprocate the violence.

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descendants who coincide with the categories of husband and wife in an ideal matrilateral cross-cousin marriage.

Compare the above myth, which concludes with the establishment of bear feast, to the following story which in turn has a bear feast in the very background of the plot.[37] The setting of this story is a family that consists of an elderly couple, their son and daughter, and the son's bride. They are keeping a house bear and are busy with preparations for an upcoming bear feast.

One day, the bride went out to pick berries for the feast. A handsome man came to her and said that he would visit her during the feast. When everyone except the bride and the groom's sister is away and the bride has finished her preparation of food, the man arrives and helps himself to the food. The bride, undressing and changing into her best clothes, enters a hut with the man. Curious, the groom's sister peeps at the two through a hole. Later, the bride asks the girl not to tell anyone of the family what happened, and leaves with the man. While they walk away, the man touches his cheeks and hers with his hand. Suddenly, they turn into bears and waddle towards the mountain. Later, the girl fails to keep the secret to herself and speaks to her brother. The groom, being furious, gathers his arms and goes out to find the bride. He spends a night deep in the mountain. In a dream, he is told by an old man where he can find the bear's house. The following day, he finds the bear's house. He pokes a hole in it with a stick to see the inside. There are an old man and woman, a young man, and his bride. The young man fears the groom and does not want to fight with him. The old man offers many gifts but the groom refuses to take them. Disappointed and angry, the bride comes out herself to confront the groom. The groom loses consciousness when he is confronted by the she-bear. When he wakes up, he finds that he was having a dream in a mountain.

The bridegroom's journey to the bear's place in this story also reflects the basic process of den hunting, following the steps of locating the shelter, poking a hole in it, and confronting the she bear. Both in this bear-bride story and in the bear-woman story introduced earlier, the two adult male characters (the bear man and the human hunter) commonly avoid any direct confrontation. One can notice, however, a crucial difference between the two stories. In the previous one, the hunter was a brother to the victim, and their confrontation preceded the establishment of the rite. In the above story, on the contrary, it is the bridegroom who plays the role of the hunter, and his confrontation with the bride is presented as the outcome of the rite. In this story, the bear hunting appears to be an intentional act to recover the bride, and it obviates the possibility of be-

[37] This story was recorded early this century from an Orochon group in the southern part of Sakhalin (Ikegami, pp. 62–63).

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coming such a brother-sister confrontation as in the former from the outset. This difference between the two narratives is closely tied to the fact that the rite comes at the conclusion in the bear-woman story, whereas in the following one, it stands as the very background of the plot. This narrative transformation entails that, with the intervention of the rite, the conjugal unit substitutes for the brother and sister in the symbolic relation of predation.

In this episode of the bride bear, the territory of bears comes into view as an extended family, being almost identical to the human family. It is noticeable, however, that the bear's place has a critical shortcoming compared to the hunter's family. Unlike the latter, the bear people are incapable of obtaining a bride within their own domain. In this sense, the bear's house may stand for an exogamous unit of human beings in the position of wife taker. This analogy, however, is deceptive. If the division between the bear and the human house in the narrative is a metaphor of two social units that exchange women, the "handsome" bear man should have seduced the other young woman of the human family, the sister of the bridegroom, rather than the bride. Had he done so, however, the narrative would have fallen back to the plot of the first myth, in which the chaser would be led to confront his own sister. Hence, the handsome bear man is driven to seduce one who is already married to someone. He plays the role of an abductor, in contrast to his counterpart in the previous myth, who married a woman. The narrative expresses his moral weakness through the hunter's rejection of the gift offered as a compensation. From the hunter's point of view, his action remains justified as a rightful revenge against the illicit extramarital affair and a legitimate claim for his lost bride.

In the everyday practice of hunting, it was in fact a widely observed custom for the Orochon and other Siberian hunters that before the hunt, men refrain from having intercourse with their wives, whereas during the hunt, their wives avoid extramarital affairs and remain in their domestic space. While the wife is menstruating, however, her husband should not hunt, and this taboo also applies to her postnatal period of about a month.[38] The bear's penis, as Pilsudskii points out, functioned as a principal talisman for a successful hunt among the Orochon,[39] and the knives used to skin the bear carcass were decorated with the animal's pubic hairs.[40] In their language, the word *geleni* means both "to look for game"

[38] Ikegami, ed. (n. 14 above), pp. 66–67.
[39] Pilsudskii, *Iz poezdki k orokam o. Sakhalina v 1904 g.* (n. 8 above), p. 56.
[40] Furthermore, the Orochon elders insist that having sex with a woman in dreams means that one will surely find a bear in the following hunting trip. There are many stories, however, that speak of hunters who come across women—including their wives—in the forest and are seduced and driven to death.

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and "to desire," applied to the contexts of hunting and sexual activity alike.

In this symbolic system of hunting, hunting and conjugality provide images for one another and "are one another's omen" as Devisch puts it in regard to the Yaka in Zaire.[41] The hunter is responsible for bringing home "life force" for the benefit of his family, and this in reality inevitably involves life-taking violence. In this context, the human hunter is both a life giver and a life taker. His identity as the life taker collapses to the other one of the life giver, however, through a shift of perspective. The hunter's life-taking violence is supposed to be seen as an act of sexual intercourse from the perspective of the prey. Here, the hunter employs his own body, assisted by the talisman of the bear's penis, as a decoy for the prey. The efficacy of this hunting technique, however, is dependent on the moral justification of his predatory action; the exclusive sexual rights of the hunter over his wife, which is enacted by the wife through her restraint from extramarital affairs during the hunt. The hunter desires game by restraining his sexual desire and not releasing it with his wife, and his wife desires the hunter's success by not wasting her sexual desire on other men. Here, the hunter and the wife operate in a double dialogue of marriage and hunting, and the idea of hunting, modeled on the conjugal relationship, becomes a collaborative life-bearing practice.

Rereading the mythic episode bearing in mind this semiotics of *geleni,* it seems that the preritual condition of hunting, as it is displayed in the bear-woman myth, is not regulated by a viable rule of marriage and thus embedded with the danger of incestuous confrontations between siblings. The mythic hunter's "desire" for his sister violates the life-giving meaning of *geleni* and consequently results in the exploitation of the victim's offspring. Predatory acts in this primordial condition are dangerous to the social order and lethal to its continuity.

When the ritual hunter shoots the living body standing in front of him, his action fecundates the prey's body in contrast to its mythic counterpart, which commits incest and results in a further assault on the victim's offspring. Once the body is identified as dead and the skin is taken off, the taxonomic alterity between the wife giver and the wife taker is made obsolete, and from this moment, the two groups of men perform as though they are in fact husband and wife. The wife givers cook the flesh and share the food with their affines. Subsequently, the former move to the ceremonial hut, consume the head, and stage the "embodiment" by smoking the skull. It is not difficult to notice that this ceremonial hut is

[41] R. Devisch, *Weaving the Threads of Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), p. 123.

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analogous to the solitary birth hut described earlier. Having been born socially with the death of its mother, the bear, with its own death, transforms to a birth giver and enters the uterine space of the ceremonial hut. As a new mother would be purified by smoked bark at her exit from the birth hut, the bear's skull is smoked and put back into its original order together with other bones.

In this way, what is a life-taking violence for one group of players is interpreted by their counterparts as a life-giving impregnation. The rite situates the players in two separate performative realities of marriage and hunting until the two realities merge in the act of killing the animal's body. In this double dialogue of play, the participants communicate with one another not only with their harmonious actions but also through the contradictory interpretations of each other's action. With the death of the bear, the duality of hunting and marriage collapses to a single sphere of communication. While the flesh of the dead animal is shared by everyone, competitive games of shooting and races are held among the young men from both the host and the guest group, and this concurs with a growing sexual liberty between young men and women. During this festivity, the two meanings of *geleni,* the desire for game and the desire for the opposite sex, are dramatized in a single context.

If the rite is invented in order to rectify the mythic violence, as the myth claims, its raison-d'être should be partly found in its capacity to construct a legitimate domain of relationship in which predatory desire can be safely unified with sexual desire. I suggest that the role exchange between prey and hunter is a key to the inversion of meaning between the mythic and ritual violence. This exchange has two dimensions. On the horizontal level, the hunter of the myth is assigned the role of child rearing from his prey, his sister whom he mistook for a bear. On the vertical dimension, the mythic hunter hands over the right to *geleni* to the victim's child in the rite, and lets him shoot a body that has become a part of himself.

Through these role exchanges, the ritual hunter and his prey become children from one womb, maternal siblings, and as such reenact what their mythic ancestors once did. When they confront each other, however, the prey is differentiated from the ritual hunter through its lineal ties with the hunter's mythic enemy (mother's brother), and their unity, being both a continuity and a discontinuity of the mythic union, is celebrated as the realization of a matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. Then, the confrontational desire of the mythic siblings is reenacted in the rite, and their desire is fulfilled in an equally violent but legitimate way.

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