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Places of Significance in Itelmen Country

Abstract:

Colonization and Western presence enormously influenced the traditions and beliefs of the Itelmen people who live on Kamchatka peninsula in the Russian Far East. Native settlements were relocated into larger villages, which caused a great sense of loss among the indigenous population. This thesis presents a historical and contemporary study of Itelmen worldview, particularly as it relates to places in the landscape that are “sacred” or otherwise of special significance. Itelmen perceptions are primarily based on the sense of loss of the villages resulting from the relocations of 1950s-60s, a sense of admiration of nature, a sense of respect for ancestral knowledge associated with home territories, senses of fear and respect for the spirits inhabiting the places and other aspects by which the landscape is animated and appreciated. Examples of indigenous peoples’ initiatives in other parts of the world provide a framework for understanding how the study of places of significance and sacred sites can be helpful in policy and rights discussions concerning Itelmen native lands.