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The “Shamanic Disease” in Uzbek Folk Beliefs

V. N. BASILOV

The Uzbeks believed that the shaman’s career began with a special disease caused by the spirits. The case study of an Uzbek woman, Ochil, reveals that she was haunted by spirits, went mad and, finally, on the advice of a Muslim holy person (išan), became a shamaness (qušnač). Later she was visited several times and instructed in divination and healing by a helping spirit that appeared in the form of an old man. In Central Asia the “shamanic disease” sometimes manifested not as mental but as physical illness. Such ailments might strike not only the shaman but also members of his or her family. The nature of the “shamanic disease” is determined by the traditions of the given society and its culture.

“Shamanic disease” is one of the most interesting manifestations of the complicated and intense psychical life of a shaman. For a long time this disease was viewed as evidence that a shaman was an “abnormal” person—as evidence of a psychomental malady. This view is rejected by contemporary science. However, new data that throw light on the nature of “shamanic disease” are drawn to the attention of students of shamanism in this paper. These data were obtained in the course of anthropological fieldwork among the Uzbeks of Central Asia. Although Islam began to spread in Central Asia in the 7th century, remnants of shamanic practice and experience have survived in the region, especially among the Uzbeks and Tajiks.

Like many other peoples who preserved shamanism in their cultures, the Uzbeks believed that the beginning of shamanic activity was related to a special disease caused by the spirits. Of course, the influence of Islam over a period of more than one thousand years destroyed or significantly modified the ancient concept of this strange disease, and in folk beliefs it was often considered to be a punishment meted out by the spirits to a person who refused to obey their command to become a shaman. The descriptions of the “shamanic disease” given by some Siberian
peoples suggest that the type of illness suffered by a person predestined to be a shaman was determined by the traditions of the culture of his/her society. The significance of the event was that, during the illness, the spirits stole a person’s soul and transported it to another world.

The aim of the spirits was to change the shaman’s nature and make him or her into a new person. To this end they cut his body into pieces, cut his head off, boiled and ate his flesh and later resurrected him. In the course of these operations a shaman was endowed with supernatural knowledge and capacities.

In fact, the hallucinations which a shaman experienced during his “shamanic disease” reproduced the actions that in time immemorial were performed really or symbolically during a rite of initiation (rite of passage).1

Experiencing these operations in a realm of hallucinations, a shaman, naturally, felt torment. Thus, the painful visions seen by initiates at the very outset of their assumption of the role of shaman were suggested by the ancient beliefs of their societies.

That the nature of the “shamanic disease” was socially determined can be proved by an analysis not only of the hallucinations (which, in general, have a clear logic based on the archaic worldview), but also of the development of folk beliefs concerning the reasons for and manifestations of the disease. The purpose of this paper is to draw the attention of scholars to Uzbek ethnographic data that help us to trace this evolution.

The traditions of the peoples of Central Asia and Kazakhstan have preserved some vestiges of the concepts that underlie the archaic forms of the “shamanic disease.” For instance, in folk stories about the illness one can find survivals of the belief in the death and resurrection of the shaman (Basilov 1984b: 237), although this motif is now rare. Other ideas are represented much more widely, namely: (1) the necessity for a shaman to suffer; (2) the kidnapping of a shaman by the spirits and his/her isolation for a period; (3) indications that a shaman must receive instruction. All three motifs are illustrated in the story told by an Uzbek shamaness, Ochil, who was born about 1910 and lived in the Nur-ata district of Samarkand oblast’ (now viloyat), Uzbekistan. I interviewed her in 1976, together with B. Kh. Karmysheva and K. K. Kubakov. The conversations were recorded on tape.

1 See Eliade 1974; Basilov 1984a and Balzer (ed.) 1990.

Ochil’s son, born in 1936 and a school teacher by profession, stated that Ochil became a shamaness in 1944–1945. One day she went to an underground storeroom to fetch some wood. There, to her surprise, she saw a group of dancing girls. One of them resembled her elder brother’s wife (yanga), who lived about 30 km away. “What are you doing here?” Ochil asked. The sister-in-law made an abrupt reply and the two women quarreled. Ochil tore out one of her sister-in-law’s hairs, ran back to the house and threw the hair into a fire. As she did so, she felt someone kick her shoulder. After this she went mad. Ochil’s son remembered that during this period of temporary insanity she once threw his small brother, a baby, to the ground from the roof of the house. Because of her violent behavior her husband bound her hands and legs. He fixed a pole in an earth floor in the middle of the house and tied her to it, locked the door and windows and left her for the night. When he returned the next morning, all he could see was the pole and the rope; a large hole had been made in the earthen wall. When Ochil was found she was taken to a famous išan (holy person), who read prayers to heal her. Although these helped and her mind became normal, she would often sit in a corner of the house, immersed in her visions and summoning various saints and spirits (parī). On being taken once more to the išan, he said it would be better if she became a shamaness (qušnač in the local Uzbek dialect). From that time on Ochil told fortunes and cured the sick. She did not use a drum, her ritual object being a whip.

Ochil’s own recollection of the beginning of her shamanic activity was as follows. She was already the mother of two children. One day she was sitting outside the house when she suddenly realized that she was not alone: there was an old man by her. “My grandfather, who are you?” Ochil asked. The reply was: “My name is Gadoy-Selkin-bowa. The whole country is now in difficult circumstances.2 I ask God the same as the people of the country ask (ǰurtding tilagini tilab ǰuribman). I want to promote you to a high position (seni bir amalga čiqaray).” On another occasion the old man said: “I am a defender of the people (mamlakatding qoriqčisi).” Ochil was afraid to tell anyone of the old man’s visits. Finally Gadoy-Selkin-bowa said to her outright: “You too should be a defender of the people. You will pray for the people.” Ochil agreed to this.

2 World War 2 was still in progress.
A week or more passed. While busy cooking food for her sick son she went to the cellar, where she saw a girl with golden hair. Ochil returned to the house and began to feed her son, but her heart was pounding and she was consumed with a desire to return to the cellar. She did so and grasped the girl’s hair. Suddenly many girls appeared in front of her. Ochil tore out a lock of the girl’s hair and left the cellar. As she continued to feed her son, she threw the hair into the fire. At that very moment the girl came into the house and exclaimed: “You have burnt my hair!” She kicked Ochil’s shoulder and disappeared. After this Ochil lost her reason. She recalls that she could not see well: it was as if there was a black dust in her eyes.

At this point a brief comment is called for. From her description it is clear that Ochil met a spirit known in Uzbek beliefs as “the yellow girl” (sarı qız) or albastï (Basilov 1980: 58). As my field material shows, it is a well-known situation in both Uzbek and Kazakh folk beliefs that a shaman’s disease begins with an encounter with the albastï. Ochil calls the girl she saw “my grandmother sarï kïz,” but at the same time relates that the girl said to her: “I am your Nurgul-mama.” This suggests that Ochil met a saint whose venerated grave is located in the vicinity of Nur-ata city. Clearly, two different images were combined in her visions.

Ochil followed all the instructions of Gadoy-Selkin-bowa. She recalled: “He says to me: ‘Tell this,’ and I tell. He says: ‘Tell that,’ and I tell.” One day Ochil, obedient to his suggestions (or, possibly, to those of the sarï qïz—it did not become clear), threw her younger son to the ground from the roof of the house. The boy was dangerously ill for forty days. “My brother’s wife always cried when she washed the kettle and ate it.” On another occasion he said that her husband had taken the children to his place of work in the fields and that they had slept there. “I have seen such troubles (şuytib azob kürdik-da),” the shamaness concluded, describing this period of her life.

Ochil tried to protest. “I shall not tramp around like a beggar (šu duvonačilikdi kilmayman),” she said to the saint, but he paid no attention to her words (u qoymaydi-da). When Ochil addressed her complaints to God, crying, Gadoy-Selkin-bowa persuaded her: “Do not cry. Nobody will place you at once on the roof of a house.³ Let us be the people’s defenders. Ask God to send good for both worlds (u dunyonining ham mobatini tila, bu dunyonining ham). Request from Him happiness, longevity, wealth and prosperity for people. People will live as long, as much you ask. Say, my child: let our padišah rule; say, my child: let young people be happy. Ask God what these young people ask; ask what the padišah asks. Ask for longevity, be a supplicant on behalf of the people. It is a very hard time for the country now. I am also a supplicant for the people (mamlakatding tilavēisi man). Do not foster any violence.”

³ Here a position of honour is implied.
The “Shamanic Disease” in Uzbek Folk Beliefs

V. N. Basilov

With its many details, Ochil's story is interesting. For instance, it is unusual to find the concept that shaman's role bestows a high and noble social position reflected so clearly. This is an echo of the ancient, pre-Islamic beliefs. Today, with the total dominance of Islam, shamanism is a marginal, non-official religious cult. But, centuries ago, as some medieval narrative sources report, the shamans occupied an important position in the local societies of Central Asia (Boyle 1972; Potapov 1978). Furthermore, Ochil's story throws light on a phenomenon of the shaman's training—how a shaman obtains the knowledge necessary for his or her professional activity. There are some indications in the ethnographic literature on Central Asia and Kazakhstan that a novice has to be taught by an experienced shaman (A-ov 1894; Zhiltsov 1894). Thus, a Kirghiz shaman called Sharmat lived for fifteen days in the house of an elder shaman, Mamitkan. During this period he became able to see not only good spirits but evil spirits also (Iliasov 1945: 183). A Kirghiz shamaness, Kokulay, lived for one month with a well-known and respected old shamaness named Ayimkan and “participated in her séances” (oyun ‘game, play’ in Kirghiz) learned the shamanic profession” Batalieva 1972: 127). Among the Uzbeks of the Khorezm oasis “a young shaman accompanied an old, experienced shaman for a period, learning his traditional methods” (Snasaer 1969: 48). Among the Uzbeks of Afghanistan, where the shaman’s profession lost its hereditary character, a neophyte who showed a predisposition to shamanic practice had to obtain his instructions from another baqšï (Cenlivedres and Slobin 1971: 168). Information of this kind is scarce and superficial, and one may doubt whether the tradition of a “shaman's education” really existed in Central Asia and Kazakhstan. For the most part the available data do not support the idea that a shaman had to undergo a special education: a shaman is given his/her knowledge by the tutelary or helping spirits. For instance, Oken, a Kazakh shaman, reported that he had never taken a gobiş (a musical instrument) in his hands until he was chosen by the spirits (Nevol'nik 1896). The story of a Kazakh shamaness, Dzhumagul, tells us that a shamanic séance was performed to cure her when she had fallen ill and that in the course of this ceremony she recovered and began to shamanize herself (Basilov 1975: 117). My field material collected among the Uzbeks living in the Dzhizak and Samarkand oblast’ of Uzbekistan in the 1970s shows that an old and experienced shaman or shamaness gives a blessing to a novice in a ritual way. After this ceremony a novice must live in

The saint told Ochil to divine and heal, in particular, with a method that was widely practised in Central Asia in the past: a shaman or other kind of healer recites prayers and spits on the sick. It was believed that spittle conveys the sacred strength of prayer to a sick person. Gadoy-Selkin-bowa used to say to Ochil: “If you cure people with spittle, you yourself will be healthy (upirsang, jan topasang). Go, give the light of your eyes to people (kæzingning nurini sal).” He taught her to help women who were about to give birth but for whom the evil spirits made obstacles (qora bosqan khotinga bor, dedi). “If you support those pregnant women who are harmed by the [spirits known as] black devs, your health will be good (qora dæwlarning bosqaniga borsang, sen jon topasang, dedi). Be equally merciful to both Muslims and Russians (momin bûlsin, urus bûlsin, hammosini yak dey).”

Another teaching of the saint was “When visiting patients, avoid mean-spirited conversations.” He stressed that payment for her help was not an important consideration: “My child, even if people give you only a piece of bread or one small coin for your help, do tell fortunes, was not an important consideration: “My child, even if people give you

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4 And prayers.
ritual isolation for a period. Isolation is believed to be an essential part of the rite. If a shaman does not observe the rules and, especially, the prescribed period of isolation, everything will be spoiled and alliance between the shaman and the spirits will not be achieved. There is no evidence, however, that an old shaman visits the novice and gives instruction during this period of isolation. It should not be concluded that information on the “shaman’s education” is scarce because such education was kept secret. This would be impossible to conceal under the conditions of a local way of life, where a person’s private affairs are completely open to his/her numerous relatives. If the custom of the “shaman’s education” really existed it would be a matter of common knowledge, and even an outsider would be able to obtain information on the matter without difficulty.

The fact is that a formal education is not a requirement for a shaman. With no intervention by other parties, a person who is by his or her nature attracted to the shamanic profession accumulates the knowledge that will be useful when they become a shaman—the folk beliefs, the customs, the legends, the order of ceremonies and so on. Later, when a decision is made—or the impulse is felt—to become a shaman, that person summons to memory all that is required for their new profession. At the very beginning of assuming the role, ritual isolation was important. In seclusion, the novice shaman concentrated on his visions, mobilized his knowledge and spoke to the spirits who appeared to him and gave instruction. It is possible and natural that some neophytes felt the need to be present at ceremonies performed by long standing practitioners in order to acquire some of their experience, but “education” of this kind was not the rule. Everything depended on the talent of a novice, on his capacity to assume the new role of shaman. In any case, an ancient belief that a shaman’s skill is given to him/her by the spirits persisted. That is why Ochil’s story reflects initial, archaic beliefs related to “shamanic disease.”

Let us consider the fact that Ochil’s illness, or temporary madness, did not disappear immediately after she had agreed to become a shamaness. Moreover, the saint’s remark that “Nobody will place you at once on the roof of a house,” demonstrates that a neophyte’s sufferings are to be considered an inevitable precondition of a person’s induction into shamanic activity and not as a punishment. Only a person who has suffered can be recognized as a shaman. But Ochil’s story does not explain why a shaman must suffer. The archaic beliefs that make clear the logic of a shaman’s sufferings are forgotten. It is not without reason that Ochil does not suffer alone; her small children suffer with her, too.

The manifestations of “shamanic disease” in Central Asia and Kazakhstan are very diverse. The illness often displays itself in forms other than mental disorder. A shaman could be struck by paralysis, by temporary blindness or by pains of a rheumatic nature. It is likely that this diversity in the forms of “shamanic disease” only became possible once the ancient stereotype—which determined the specifics of the neophyte’s hallucinatory experience and behavior—had been forgotten. Such diversity is perhaps characteristic of a late historical epoch, when shamanism was in decline and becoming a cultural survival. In Central Asia the degradation of shamanism was promoted by Islam.

Our material shows that the idea that it is not the shaman alone who must experience the disease gained prominence during the process of degradation of shamanism. Ochil became ill, but her sickness brought suffering to her children also. Another shamaness, Momokhal, was ill herself—but this did not satisfy the spirits, who brought about the death of her children (Basilov 1986). Instances of a woman becoming a shamaness only because of the death of her children were not rare in Central Asia. For example, an Uzbek shamaness called Ayday (born sometime between 1900 and 1905), who lived in the Galla-Árall district of the Dzhizak oblast’ (viloyat), Uzbekistan, received the blessing for the start of her shamanic activity at the age of 26 after the death of two of her children. Ayday hoped that her service to the spirits would preserve the lives of her surviving children. There are many other examples of this kind. The idea that a person must suffer to become a shaman is still strongly held in Uzbek folk beliefs, although in many cases this suffering is caused not by the shaman’s own illness but by his/her children’s sickness or even death.

Thus, the manifestations of “shamanic disease” are determined by the traditions of a society, by the specificity of its culture. It should be noted that in the 19th and 20th centuries the shamans in Kazakh and Turkmen societies were, as a rule, men. This does not mean that the women of these peoples had some immunity to “shamanic disease.” Another phenomenon was responsible: with their patriarchal traditions, the Kazakhs and Turkmen considered shamanism to be a masculine profession. In contrast, at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century shamanic practice among the Tajiks and Uzbeks was rapidly becoming a sphere of predominantly female activity. Correspondingly,
the manifestations of “shamanic disease” among men were rare. The reason for this peculiarity is to be found in the changes in traditional views. Under the lasting influence of Islam shamanism was coming to be considered as an occupation that was not prestigious for a man.

It is not sufficient to say that the visions experienced by a shaman during a period of “shamanic disease” represent a cultural stereotype or reproduce ancient social norms. These visions show that the shamanic traditions, although based on views common to a whole society or culture, continue to preserve ideas and images that have already disappeared from folk beliefs. An example is seen in the story told by the Uzbek shamaness, Momokhal: her patroness, the Universal midwife (enaga), who lives in heaven and can be easily identified as Umay (or Ayïïsït), the Turkic pagan goddess of fertility, is already forgotten by the people. In Ochil’s story we can find another relic of the pre-Islamic epoch in the appearance of her saintly patron, whose body is half white and half yellow. None of the numerous Muslim saints venerated in Central Asia today is associated with such an image, and one might think that this description of the saint was inspired by the personal imagination of the shamaness. However, it may be significant that similar depictions are seen in certain deities of Hindu iconography in which two different deities are combined in a very similar fashion, one half representing one deity and the other half another deity (Guseva 1971: 78). This tradition, which possibly has its roots in the Aryan epoch, could have existed in Pre-Islamic times among the peoples of Central Asia.

References


Vladimir Nikolaevich BASILOV (1937–1998) was a Russian ethnographer, Head of the Section of Central Asian and Kazakhstan Research in the Mikhulko-Maklaï Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences. His main interest was Central Asian shamanism and its parallels in Kazakhstan and Siberia.
Some Animal Representations in Mongolian Shaman Invocations and Folklore

ÁGNES BIRTALAN

Wolf, dog, crow, raven, snake, deer, owl, swan, eagle and lynx are some of the most important animals to feature in the Mongolian shaman’s performance and are mentioned in the invocations of Darkhat1 shamans among others and in Mongolian folklore texts. This paper is devoted to the problem of animals as the mounts (wolf and deer) and helping spirits (raven and dog) of shamans.2

1 As a member of the Hungarian–Mongolian Joint Expedition for Collecting Mongolian Linguistic and Folklore Material I did fieldwork among the Darkhats, who live in the northernmost Khöwsgöl district (Khöwsgöl aimag) of Mongolia, in 1992, 1993, 1997 and 1998. The research is still an ongoing project sponsored by a series of supports of the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA K 62501 among others) and also by the British Academy (small research grants).

2 After the appearance of the original version of the present article in 1995 the author published an elaborate study on the mythology of the Mongolian folk religion, where all the here mentioned subjects are discussed in details (Birtalan 2001).
The Mounts of the Shaman

The different roles of the animal phenomena present in the shaman’s world and their historical and cultural background must be specified and clearly distinguished. It is not correct to state that all the animals mentioned in the texts, whether acted by shamans during their performances, represented as protective spirits (ongons), kept in the sacred place in a dwelling or symbolized by feathers, paws, bones, etc., on the shaman’s garments or anywhere in his world of objects where their magic power is needed, must be totems. Some totemic animals, like the swan or eagle, figure in the invocations as totems *par excellence*:

*Xun cayaan šowuun exetee*

*Xürin ereem bürghiš šowuun*

*Ecegeexen . . .*

You who have a white swan as mother,
You who have as father a brown-striped eagle . . .

In other cases, however, such well-known totemic phenomena as the wolf and deer, late manifestations of originally totemic animals of Mongolian and other (Turkic, Indo-European) tribes, play quite different roles.

The she-deer and her fight with the beast of prey, known throughout almost all of northern Eurasia (or in “cultural Inner Asia” in a wider sense), found early representation on cultic objects, furniture and grave monuments. Artefacts decorated with details in animal style, sometimes called the Scythian animal style, may represent the first “narration” of the ancient legend of tribes of deer (figs. 1, 2).

The until recently little-known deer-steles, which probably symbolize warriors with tattooed
deer on their chests, are also common in the territory of Mongolia, and the genealogical myth of the Mongolian khan’s lineage refers to the possibility that some Mongolian tribes may have belonged to the Inner Asian tribal confederation, which worshipped the she-deer (see below).

How important a phenomenon the deer is even nowadays is demonstrated by data from Mongolian folklore. In the usual starting formula of Mongolian myths, heroic epics, etc., describing the beginning of the World, when all natural things and living beings had just come into existence, the grey deer (Khalkha Mongolian *jagal buga*) is included among the most important entities present at the very beginning, such as Mount Sümerü, the Milk Ocean, the World Tree, the almighty Khan and in the buddhicized versions the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama. This type of epical beginning gives a clear indication of the importance of the deer. The following example is chosen from a shaman invocation to Čangkilang xatan, a female protector spirit, that was collected in the Khöwsgöl district of Mongolia:

*Sümbar uulig giwee waexudu,
Sün dalae čalčag [sic!] baexudu,
Jaxiim modiig juljaga waexudu,
Jayal buryig tuyul waexudu.*

When Mount Sümerü was a hill,
When the Milk Ocean was a pool,
When the tree on the horizon was a young plant,
When the grey deer was a deer calf . . .

This early importance of the she-deer, a tribal totem and in existence from the moment of creation, survived in myths and later shaman invocations, as did the beast of prey (panther, gryphon, etc.) that attacked her. The two may represent different tribal totems, and a later variant of the panther or gryphon is probably the wolf (cf. the fact that the ancestor of some Turkic tribes, explicitly in the khan’s lineage, was a wolf).

_The Secret History of the Mongols_, a chronicle from the beginning of the 13th century, preserved the tradition of the probable uniting of the two tribes or tribal unions with different traditions—that of deer worship and that of wolf worship. The union is represented in the ancient history of the khan’s clan of the Mongols as follows:

There was a bluish wolf which was born having (his) destiny from heaven above. His spouse was a fallow doe. They came, passing over the Tenggis. (Cleaves 1982: 1. §1)

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5 Other folkloric texts refer to the World Tree under its Sanskrit name _Kalpavṛkṣa_:

Galwāragši sandum modīg  
bot wēhō uyid . . .

“quand l’arbre santal Galwāragš 
n’était qu’un buisson . . .” (Kura 1970: 55, 103–104)

6 See “Invocation de la reine Cangqulang” in Rintchen 1975: 84. Another example from _Gurvan nastai gunan ulaan baatar_, “The three-year-old Gunan Ulaanbaatar,” a Khalkha Mongolian epos:

_Naran saya jargaj baisad_
_Nawč ceceg delgerč baisad_
_Jaxiin modig juljaga baisad_
_Jagal bugiig yanjaga baisad . . ._

When the Sun was just rising
When leaf and flower were just spreading
When the tree on the horizon was a young plant
When the grey deer was a calf . . . (Mongol ardīk batarlag tuulī 1982: 50)

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This laconic initial paragraph from _The Secret History of the Mongols_ could refer to an ancient confederation of two previously hostile tribes (the tribe of the she-deer and the tribe of the wolf, in this case a male). After the establishment of the confederacy there are no more representations of the fight of the deer and the beast of prey (later, the wolf). Both the deer and the wolf survived in Mongolian shaman tradition as mounts of shamans and those of their protector spirits alike. As was mentioned at the outset, the differing roles of the various animal representations in Mongolian shaman invocations must be clearly distinguished; thus, on the basis of the examples that will be considered here, the deer and the wolf appear to be regarded as riding animals (Mongolian böge-yin külig). For example, in a Mongolian shaman invocation published by Haltold:

_Dalan deeree saran tamgataixan_
_Magnai deeree naran tamgataixan_
_Xöö xaljan bugan xölögteixen_
_Xaa xöö,
_Bal büxii Šarai nuruu buudaltaixan_
_Ariin Xambuu tolgoi güidelteixen_
. . . . xongio taniig_
_Urin jalan duudya._

You who have as a mount a blue deer with a blaze,
With Moon-tamga on his shoulder,
With Sun-tamga on his forehead,
Khaa, khöö,
You who have a dwelling on the honeyed Sharai ridge,
You who run on the northern Khambuu hill,
You . . . . Khongio,
I will invite, call you. (Haltold 1966: 75–76)

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7 An elaborate study of this phenomenon is Uray-Kőhalmi 1987.
8 The cessation of animal representation on ornament may be explained by the replacement of the rule of Indo-European tribes by Turkic and Mongolian tribes. Jettmar (1980: 240–241) suggested that animal motifs remained as the tribal symbols of ruling clans. It could be stated that originally they were also tribal symbols.
9 The tamga is the “cattle-brand” used to indicate the ownership of the nomads.
I would add to the phenomenon of the deer the representation of the antelope as a possible variant; instead of küülüg ‘mount’, the synonymous unaši ‘id.’ is used in the following invocation:

Xeei . . . Buxal xara görööse unaši mini,
Xeei . . . Xajar xara bawgää xölborgö mini,
Xeei . . . Xara erüün moyää loo janggiralta mini,
Xeei . . . Xotää xara börögö delgel mini
Xeei . . . Xon’in šara čubuun [sic!] nööccolöge mini,
Xeei . . . Xon’in cooxor sülüs xandlag mini.

The black antelope bull is my mount,
The vulture (?) black bear is my cart,
The black-striped snake is my tie (i.e. my reins),
The xotää-black¹⁰ eagle is my flight,
The sheep-yellow owl is my companion,
The lynx, spotted as sheep, is my trustee.¹¹

The wolf, another mount of the spirits, appears in the invocations either with a rabid character or distinguished by its color, which is mostly xöx (‘blue’ in Khalkha Mongolian), and börte (probably ‘grey’ in Middle Mongolian), which is mentioned in The Secret History of the Mongols. Compare the examples given below:

Xünii maxxan künestengüüid,
Xürel čuluun juurstengüüid,
Γal mogää tašuurtanγuud,
Γaljuu čonon küülügengüüid . . .

You who have human meat as provision,
You who have a heart of bronze and stone,
You who have a fire snake for a whip,
You who have rabid wolves as a mount . . . ¹²

¹⁰ The expression xotää is undeciphered.
¹² “Invocation de Dayan degereki par le chaman Damdine” in Rintchen 1975: 94.
On the distant territory of Altai
With [his] thirteen she-deer
Grazes he together . . . (Buriatskiĭ geroicheskiĭ ēpos 1991: 86)

When the hero calls his mount the horse and she-deers exchange advice and bless each other before the horse’s departure. An example from the Buriat heroic epos Alamži mergen of the blessing given by the she-deer to the horse:

\begin{quote}
Yabaha-lan gazartaa
Yargaltai yabaaraai,
Zorihon gazartaa
Zoltoi yabaaraai!
Xüxü ulaan xadadaa
Xüxü büriin dolyooxo
Zoltoyoor yabaaraai!
\end{quote}

On your way
Go happy,
Your destination
Attain luckily!
On the red rock of Mount Khökhii
Lick the saline soil on whole Mount Khökhii
Go luckily! (Buriatskiĭ geroicheskiĭ ēpos 1991: 92)

The group of deer in the distant mountain fastness of Altai symbolizes a mythical, bygone world, the ancient home of nomads and the hunting society. This ancient world might have passed away but it could still be the source of exhortation and advice, as in the comments for the horse to heed on its return.\footnote{Lőrincz (1986: 46–47) suggested an origin for the role of the deer and the horse based on astral myths. The number of deer is usually 13, the horse forming the 14th member of the group, and Lőrincz attempted to relate this to the myth of the lunar eclipse.}
The Helping Spirits of the Shaman

The phenomena of the raven and the crow have numerous aspects in mythology, and it is thought that the raven (Mongolian *qon keri-e*, Khalkha *xon xeree*) may have been a totem for the Kereyits (Dalai 1959: 12), a well-known western Mongolo-Turkic tribe. However, this cannot be convincingly established, and this kind of interpretation—based probably on popular etymology—requires further research. Nevertheless, the raven is one of the shaman’s assistants, most often the messenger (*kelemürči*, ‘interpreter’ in Mongolian), an aspect that is also seen in Mongolian folklore.

Xeree šuuuun xelmerčitee,  
Šajjae šuuuun šakšalaytae,  
Šar šuuuun daµultae,  
Doloon čonon dowtolytoe . . .

You who have a raven as an interpreter,  
You who have a magpie as a cackler,  
You who have an owl as a companion,  
You who have seven wolves as attackers18 . . .

Among the Darkhat shamans the number of ravens possessed by a shaman or represented on his *gariin ongon* (‘hand idol’, a magical object used for calling spirits by holding it in the hand during the ritual or attaching it to the lattice wall of the yurt above the shamanic altar) indicates his power, one who has nine ravens being the most powerful. Diószegi (1963: 68, fig. 17a, pl. 1) mentions a deceased Darkhat shaman represented as a bird-headed figure as well as a similar representation of a spirit among the Tuva living on the western shore of Lake Khöwsgöl, northern Mongolia (1963: 68, fig. 17b, pl. 2). According to my fieldwork material, it seems that shamans with nine ravens existed in the legends, but the *ongons* I saw had only one raven head, made of wood or copper. The invocation to a powerful protector spirit quoted earlier speaks of the protector spirits as having nine or seven ravens. This might be taken to mean that the legendary shamans, having more

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According to both published material and our collected material, the dog played as important a role in Mongolian and Inner Asian mythology as the wolf, and it is wrong to consider the former merely as a variant of the latter. The dog has its own mythological background and role, which can be clearly distinguished from those of the wolf discussed above. In most cases the dog does not feature as a totem among the Mongols (apart from the data concerning the Xianbei).

The dog’s role is rooted in hunting society; it was domesticated at an early stage in Inner Asia and played an important role in sacral activity. The Mongolian hunting custom of severing the head from the quarry together with the tongue, lower jaw, throat, lungs and heart, which the hunter responsible for the kill can take and does not have to share, is preserved in a shaman invocation. The invited spirit obtained a black dog as booty and took its jüld (Khalkha form, Written Mongolian jülde) part for himself (this black dog could be the protector spirit of another shaman):

{Arwan yurwan owaa sandal’tae, Arxan Xangγae güideltee, Xara noxae dzüldelen iredek Xan Tömörlen baatar Tənɪyaan uryaa!}

You who have seats on the thirteen oboos, You who run on Northern Khangai, You who come disemboweling a black dog, Khan Tömörlen baatar I invite you!

Data on the place of the dog in Inner Asian mythology and sacral sphere published by Tryjarski (1979), Sinor (1992) and Sárközi (1993) are an exhaustive mine of information on this topic. Nevertheless, some new aspects can be added to these sources on the basis of Mongolian shaman invocations and Mongolian folklore.

Of interest is the role of the dog in The Secret History of the Mongols, which also contains elements of folklore. The ancestors of the Mongols were a tribe with deer and wolf totems, as discussed above, but a dog features in an intervention by the world of spirits whereby Alan Qo’a, an ancestress of Jingis khan, was conceived by a spirit that made its appearance as a light and departed in the form of a yellow dog. When Belgünütei and Bügünütei, two earlier-born sons of Alan Qo’a, asked their mother why she bore children after the death of their father, she spoke of the supernatural origin of her last three sons:

Every night, a bright yellow man entered by the light of the hole at the top or (by that) of the door top of the tent and rubbed my belly. His light was wont to sink into my belly. When he went out, like a yellow dog he was wont to crawl out by the beams of the sun or moon. (Cleaves 1982: 4. §21)

It is remarkable that a dog figures in this passage and not a wolf, which, being originally a totem, must be the symbol of procreative power. The role of the dog may be explained by considering the analogy of the supernatural spirit of the “sky-dog” that appears in Chinese Mongolian and Tibetan mythology. A detailed description of the Tibetan sky-dogs has been given by Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956: 295–296):

There are two black sky-dogs (gnam kh yi nag po), a male and a female. The male has the body of a dog, the wings of a bird, the hump of a pig and the tail of a snake, with a human head in its coils.

The possible connections between these Mongolian and Chinese or Tibetan phenomena require further investigation and confirmation.

M. N. Khangalov published numerous data concerning the role of the dog in Buriat folk beliefs, including some information on the concept of the relationship of the dog to fertility:

A dog running into a house or a yurt and urinating there is considered to be very lucky: a son will be born into that family, or they will receive money from some
unexpected source. A dog urinating on a sitting or standing person is likewise a very good omen: that person will have a child. (Khangalov 1960: 66–67)

These data confirm the tradition of a possible connection between the dog and fertility represented in *The Secret History of the Mongols*. N. M. Khangalov also mentioned the so-called “shaman dogs” that are able to foresee the future of their owner and defend him against evil spirits.

Conclusions

The animals of totemic and non-totemic origin that have been discussed play an important role in Mongolian shamanic invocations and folklore genres. Those which were totems *par excellence*, such as the wolf and the deer, become mounts in shamanic invocations and also act as mounts for the spirits (most of whom were also former shamans of the clan) or for those shamans who serve as representatives of their clan in the other world, and it is obvious that the totem mounts help their clan’s descendants to fly between the worlds. As regards the helping spirits, the raven and the dog are the two most important. The raven assumes almost the same role in both folklore and shamanic invocations inasmuch as it is the messenger and represents the shaman’s power and, together with the dog, is an executor of his wishes. In folklore the dog is connected, among other things, with fertility and it protects the shaman from evil spirits. It can be concluded that the wolf and the dog are not simple alternatives either in folklore or in the invocations, although there are instances—for example in a Darkhat invocation—of the wolf assuming the role of helping spirit and follower rather than the dog:

Xaǰar xara bawγää xürxerelt-mni,
Xara erüün moyüü ončiralta-mni,
Örbe xara börgöt debelge-mni,
Ölön caγaan čono dayuul-mni,
Xaltar zar’i unaa-mni . . .

The vulture (?) black bear is my growl,
The black-spotted snake is my entanglement,

Some Animal Representations...

The örbe-like black eagle is my flight,
The hungry white wolf is my companion,
The gelded reindeer with white muzzle and breast is my mount . . .

The importance of other animals that have been mentioned in the course of the paper and of other aspects of the animal phenomenon in the symbolical background of shamanism will form the subject of a further study.

References


23 The expression örbe cannot be explained.

In Korean shaman rituals, worship and lively theater become one to form a rich, sometimes sophisticated body of drama. Rites dramatize a Spirit’s presence and power by means of costumes, role-playing, and feats of wonder that strengthen believers’ faith in a Spirit’s words as proclaimed by the shaman. Many rites use role-playing and humor that, with the believed aid of deceased ancestors, provide family healing. Dramatically the richest rites present theatrical symbols and comic scenes of daily life in a way that draws believers and non-believers alike into a typically Korean sense of the mystery, complexity, and humor of human life.

In “Urdrama,” E. T. Kirby (1975: 2) has argued that the world’s theater has its origins in shaman ritual séances. He conceives shaman ritual in the broadly defined sense as typified by “possession in a trance by a spirit who speaks from within the medium and determines his action”; and he stresses that such ritual is inherently dramatic in that it “depends upon the immediate and direct manifestation to the audience of supernatural presence.” Kirby touches on Korean shaman ritual only briefly (1975: 31); and his definition applies only to those rites performed by initiatory shamans, or mudang, in and north of Seoul, not to the hereditary mudang of other areas. But both kinds of Korean shamanism, initiatory and hereditary, provide instances of vivid theatrical ritual that give evidence for his argument.

Spirit Drama

Theater and religious worship become one in a full shaman ritual, or kut, which is a highly theatrical event consisting of a series of episodes
that may last several hours or days, take account of natural setting and social context, employ colorful costumes and props, demand the services of a band of mudang and musicians, and include the whole neighborhood for an audience. In a typical segment of a Seoul-area kut, the initiatory mudang, usually a woman, begins with a dance, first slow then fast, to induce a trance-like state. While in this state, she is believed to serve as the medium for a Spirit, such as the Mountain Spirit, the Spirit of the Big Dipper, the Abandoned Princess Spirit, the Spirit of an illustrious general of Korean history, or the soul of a deceased relative of those sponsoring the kut. An old-style military uniform, weapons, and a fierce demeanor on the part of the mudang exhibit the authority of the General Spirit. A whining voice and peevish gestures give theatrical life to the Spirit of an ancestor who died as a young girl. In the role of the Mountain Spirit in a new shaman’s initiation rite, the officiating senior shaman may shed tears of sympathy for the hard life the new mudang is entering. As the soul of a deceased father in a rite for the dead, she may give the son a big hug and then comically upbraid him and his wife for not yet providing the family with a son. Costumes and mimetic gestures give the presence of the Spirit theatrical life so that when the Spirit gives advice and encouragement to the kut sponsors through the mediumship of the shaman, they take the advice as, indeed, coming from the Spirit’s own mouth.

In evoking the presence and power of the Spirits, initiatory mudang employ not only mimetic gestures, but feats of wonder. Since a kut conveys no body of abstract doctrine, it may seem not to qualify as religious activity in the sense of the Korean term, Chonggyo (宗教), which includes associations of teaching in its root meaning. It is religious, however, in that it arouses what Rudolf Otto identifies as the primal reaction in the face of the sacred: “blank wonder, an astonishment that strikes us dumb, amazement absolute” (1950: 26). Such wonder cannot be taught; it can only be “induced, incited, and aroused” (1950: 60). As Korean shamans well know, the theater is admirably suited to induce such wonder.

Mircea Eliade has noted that a shaman séance ends in a wondrous “spectacle unequal in the world of daily experience,” a spectacle revelatory of “another world—the fabulous world of the gods and magicians, the world in which everything seems possible . . . where the ‘laws of nature’ are abolished, and a certain superhuman ‘freedom’ is exemplified and made dazzlingly present” (1964: 551). Initiatory mudang from the northern province of Hwanghae-do are most adept at such wondrous displays. They bedazzle spectators as they precariously balance large pots of rice cake on the edge of a liquor bottle, or a newly slain pig’s carcass on a huge trident. They do a lightning-swift knife dance or, in the feat most awaited as a display of a newly initiated shaman’s freedom from the ordinary laws of nature, stand barefoot perched on high raised straw-chopper blades (fig. 1). To a shamanist believer, this theatrical gesture amounts to a wondrous sacramental sign of the freedom and power that marks contact with the Godhead.

Of course, a theatrical feat in itself does not constitute a sacramental sign. The acrobats of Beijing Opera do more astounding feats than a Korean shaman, without any pretension to divine power. Robert R. Wilson, in Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel, has stressed that shamans and other intermediaries with supernatural powers have a role only within a society or sector of society that believes “that those powers can influence earthly affairs and can in turn be directly influenced by human agents” (1980: 29). A Korean mudang’s feats may arouse wonder in anyone; but they constitute a sacred sign of the Spirits’ presence only for the group of believers who expect such a sign.

Believers expect a sign, moreover, because they stand in awe of the greater wonder of the mudang’s own life. Marked out by the destiny of a Spirit’s call, an initiatory mudang has died to the ordinary patterns of human life and lives anew in the service of the Spirits and of human beings in distress. A hereditary mudang becomes a shaman simply by being born into a shaman family and learning the shaman’s trade; but an initiatory mudang in or north of Seoul acquires shamanic powers through a long initiatory process of visionary dreams, psychic disturbance, and social alienation. This painful process leads through a prolonged period of suffering to final reintegration into a new state marked by bondage to a Spirit, with believed Spirit-given powers of divination and healing.

From the point of view of drama, ritual displays of the Spirits’ presence and power through mimetic gestures and spectacular feats remain at a naive level of “Urdrama” that has no significance for non-believers. A kut demonstrates its mature power as drama only when it goes beyond inciting “blank wonder” in a small band of believers to objectify a broader spectrum of human emotions in a way that has more universal appeal.
Psycho-Drama

Sometimes, a kūt clarifies and objectifies complex feelings in the form of lively psycho-drama. Theater and religious worship become one with psycho-therapy as the mudang employs the dramatized presence of the Spirit, comic banter, and the sympathetic audience of the client’s friends and neighbors to bring a family’s troubles, pain, and grief out in the open, provide objectifying perspectives on the problem at hand, and encourage release from pent-up feelings in tears and laughter. It is not uncommon for psychotherapists to use dramatic techniques to allow clients to work out emotional problems and conflicts in a group forum. Psychotherapists could profit from the mudang’s centuries of expertise. Of course, belief in the physical presence of the Spirits plays an essential role in the healing process. But theatrical techniques are also important. In particular, the public use of the stage comedian’s humor provides a liberating and objectifying perspective on the client’s problems. It gives one relief to be able to laugh at one’s pains and insufficiencies out in the open in the presence of a sympathetic audience.

A kūt for the dead includes a ritual episode in which the soul of the deceased is believed to address bereaved family members, work out with them any lingering resentments or ill feelings he or she may have, and say final words of farewell. One who has died an untimely or violent death is believed to have a particular need of the mudang’s services in this rite to ease resentment he may hold against his family and rid himself of bitterness he may have about the limitations of his life or about death itself. Only then can he or she attain peace in the next world; and only then can those left in this world be free from the anxiety of threats from an unsettled ghost. Whatever this rite may be believed to achieve for the deceased, moreover, it surely provides an opportunity for the easing of pent-up grief, anger, and regrets on the part of the bereaved family. Family members work out in the presence of the deceased whatever burdensome feelings they, themselves, have with regard to the dead person and the event of death.

In a Seoul kūt for the dead, or Chinogwi-kūt, an elderly man who had died at home the year before had his presence dramatized through the mediumship of an initiatory mudang, who wore the stylized garb of a dead person. With a big hug, the dead man greets his son, whom he has not seen for a year, and is overjoyed at the opportunity for reunion. But he then suddenly falls on the floor and begins writhing around in
what appeared to be an enactment of the moment of death. Frightening though this sudden, vivid enactment was, it also left room for humor; and it gave way to a festive mood as father, son, and American daughter-in-law sat down for a subdued, but lengthy, family conference. In this case, with no mutual resentments or burdensome feelings to be resolved, the father merely chided his son for not yet having a child. He suggested that perhaps the son should not have married a foreigner and said that, no doubt, the two were making too frequent use of contraceptives. The father assured his son, however, that, no matter what, the son is his, and is as good as gold.

A Chinogwi-kut offered by a widow for her recently deceased husband gives a taste of the humorous turn that the encounter between the deceased and the bereaved family can take (Yi 1988: 167–168): The deceased husband “weeps over the death and falls into a faint.” Then he “grasps his wife” and sympathetically asks, “What will become of you alone in the future?” For her part, “the widow weeps bitterly, grasping the deceased,” and then screams in irritation, “I said I wanted to die first. Why did you die first?” Husband and wife accuse each other of getting “hot-tempered” and get embroiled in a quarrel; but “they are then parted, drink together, and smoking cigarettes, are reconciled.” The deceased then turns to his daughters-in-law, wishes them a happy life, and tells them to “have affection for each other.” He tells his wife, “Please take good care of the housekeeping in my absence,” at which the members of the family “embrace each other and weep.” As the episode continues,

dramatic characteristics of korean shaman ritual

the deceased claims his possessions (his watch, his hat, and clothes) but is irritated by the fact that the clothes are winter-clothes stuffed with cotton, and not summer-clothes. The deceased cries, “Where can I go on this sultry summer day with these cotton clothes on?” Then a comic skit with the clothes takes place. At last, he asks for a digestive aid for his stomach pain. His wife answers, “You’ve already died. Isn’t that enough? Why do you, a dead person, want some medicine?”

The relatives ask the deceased to leave in peace, saying, “Why don’t you stop complaining?” and “Please give help to your son and daughters.” To this, he replies, “I’ll give you no more grief. Don’t worry (about me), but take good care of your lives. . . . Now I’m leaving.”

In another Seoul kut that I once chanced to witness, a wife was offering the kut for her husband who had been murdered by his mistress. In this instance, the spectacle became quite terrifying in its vividness and, no doubt, served a grave therapeutic need on the part of the wife.

Essential to the healing process throughout a kut for the dead is belief in the immediate presence of the dead person’s soul. In and north of Seoul, as has just been seen, this presence takes dramatic form in the person of the initiatory mudang herself as spirit-medium. In kut in other areas, it may acquire dramatic focus in a physical object, such as a “Spirit basket” or small staff tipped with paper flowers. Held by a family member or other participant, the object shakes in response to questions asked by the mudang. Interpreting the meaning of the shaking, the mudang is said in such cases to serve as spokesman, but not medium, for the soul of the deceased (Yi 1988: 169; T. Kim 1983: 268). In the drama of the moment, however, one wonders whether participants recognize the distinction. Granted the tendency on the part of kut believers to accept the chanted words of a shaman as, in any case, communication from the deceased, the distinction between mediumship and role-playing seems rather academic.

In the case of the deceased son of a widow woman, a young Mr. Kim who drowned while fishing in the East Sea, the presence of the deceased took dramatic form in words chanted by an assistant mudang seated opposite the mother before a small, unadorned table of offerings set up in a room of the family home. The dead son assured his mother that as he was drowning he thought of her and called out, “Mother, Mother,” like any person who dies at sea. He went on to complain, “Money is the enemy. If we had money, I could have gone on to study and got a good job like others. I would not have become food for fish.” He recalls poignantly that at the time he set out to sea he said, “It would be better if I did not go.”

It does not take much to imagine that, if Mr. Kim’s mother had urged him to go out on his first fishing expedition even though he himself did not think he should go, her heart must now be filled with a burden of guilt and regret that complicate the ordinary sense of sorrow and loss. Whatever this quiet dramatic encounter between mother and son may be thought to accomplish for the deceased, it surely has a therapeutic effect on the mother. During the course of the encounter, the mudang sympathetically commented on the mother’s need for this kind of
therapy: “Some say this is just superstition, but this woman wants to hear the words of her son’s spirit.”

In this particular instance, the mudang did not seem, strictly speaking, to speak as a medium for the deceased son, but simply to give a first-person rendition of what anyone might guess he wanted to say to his grieving mother at this moment. What took place seems not all that different from what happens in a Byzantine Christian Burial Rite, when a spokesperson for the deceased addresses participants in set first-person form:

Brethren, friends, relatives and neighbors, weep for me as you see me here speechless and lifeless. Yesterday I spoke with you and suddenly there came upon me the awesome hour of death. Come, all you that love me and bid me farewell; for I shall no longer walk with you or speak with you. (Office of the Christian Burial According to the Byzantine Rite 1975: 20)

Kut believers tend to accept words spoken in the name of the dead as, indeed, communication from the dead; Christians do not. But in both a kut and a Byzantine Christian rite, the basic belief that empowers words spoken in the name of the deceased is the same: a belief that the soul of the deceased still exists and is somehow present to those offering the rite.

It is not only in kut for the dead that deceased family members are believed to communicate with the living. Many kut seek the source of inexplicable illness or family adversity in an unsettled ancestor Spirit that has intruded into the family’s peace and needs to be consoled or appeased. Perhaps the grave of the ancestor is seeping water or has been otherwise disturbed. Perhaps the Confucian rites due to the dead have not been properly performed. A shaman summons, entertains, cajoles, and pacifies the Spirit, giving him or her a forum in which to vent ill feelings and tell the family how to correct an affront.

As with most works of dramatic literature, the roots of present conflicts lie in the past. The past that a kut brings to dramatic life is primarily that of the distressed family. But as Kim Seong-Nae has so captivatingly shown, in Cheju-do, the linguistically and historically distinct island province at the southern tip of Korea, the past that a kut brings to life can include the violent history of Cheju-do itself; and the kut drama of any one family can turn out to be the drama of the whole Cheju People (1989b: 251–256). In first-person ritual laments of deceased ancestors, Cheju-do shamans, or “shimbang,” usually male and acting as “helpers” of the Spirits, not mediums, arouse sobs and tears on the part of family members present. These laments regularly uncover not only areas of a family’s past, but “deep layers of popular experience and understanding of a violent history” (1989b: 260).

In one healing ritual, two days of laments formed a family saga that brought to life a social history spanning a hundred years (1989a: 256–271). The kut was held to honor the ancestors, seek healing for chronic headaches of the host’s wife, and divine whether a family member who had disappeared after going to North Korea years before was still alive. The lamentations included a vivid, personalized image of the tragic division between South and North Korea:

Although this land is the same land, there is no way we can go and come between the two halves. Trying to kill, we hold guns in our hands toward each other. (1989b: 262)

The rite evoked another poignant image when the shimbang prayed at the end for the soul of the lost family member, who was divined to have died:

Please be reborn . . . into the body of a blue butterfly or red butterfly. You pitiful soul! Wherever you go in the other world, please take away the iron net around the head of the wife. (1989b: 263)

Whatever peace Cheju-do healing rites may be believed to achieve for the ancestral victims of history, they have a cathartic effect on the living that entails more than simple weeping. The laments ease the burden of history by situating images that haunt family dreams in “a collective memory” and by activating the “iconic power” of these images. Performed, moreover, as “first-person narration by the victims,” they create “a powerful counter-discourse of death itself by dramatizing the experience of being killed.” At the same time, “like Brecht’s epic theater,” the rites alienate participants from “the tragic feeling of the dead.” They do so “by making the extraordinary reality of the historical violence the ordinary matter of personal cure” (1989b: 277–278).
The rites also create an alienation effect by provoking “almost senseless laughter” in the midst of sorrow, in “conscious defiance of tragic emotion” (1989b: 278). At one point in the kut just mentioned, the hostess suddenly fell flat on the floor, struck by a Spirit, who turned out to be her dead sister-in-law and wept loudly in the voice of the hostess for twenty minutes. Then the chief shimbang, who was sitting at a distance, suddenly called upon the woman shimbang who was attending on the possessed hostess. He started to interrupt her act by saying filthy words and making fun of her personal life. The woman was finally disturbed so that she gave up the patient and ran to the chief shimbang. The shimbangs’ playful games among themselves successfully drew the attention of the audience. In the midst of this noisy display by the shimbang at a distance, the possessed hostess gathered herself up and left the floor. (1989a: 299)

In his provocative essay “On the Essence of Laughter,” the poet Baudelaire has said that laughter and tears “are both equally the children of woe,” the woe of the limitations of life depicted in myths of the loss of paradise (1981: 313). The laughter that springs up in the midst of Cheju-do laments, and kut laughter in general, has its roots in woe, in a feeling for the bitter limitations of life that in Korean is termed “han” (恨). Rooted in woe, kut laughter provides, nonetheless, a healthy distancing, cathartic release, bold defiance, and at times even joy in the face of woe.

The Dramatic Illusion

Family and social history takes on a mythic dimension in Cheju-do laments when it is grafted onto the story of the ancestral Maiden Spirit, a mythic figure that resonates at the same time with historical realities (S. Kim 1989a: 248–256). More purely mythic is the tale of the Abandoned Princess told in kut for the dead in the Seoul area and on the East Coast. As a myth, the tale unfolds in an atmosphere of miracle and establishes the credentials of the mudang, as the Abandoned Princess Spirit, to lead human beings through the rigors of death. At the same time, however, the tale unfolds as a colorful drama of human feelings, choices, actions, and events.

The tale goes as follows: When the seventh daughter was born to a king who as yet had no male offspring, the king had her cast out. Through the aid of the Dragon Spirit or the Buddha, however, this Abandoned Princess does not die, but is entrusted to the care of an elderly couple across the sea. Many years later, she comes back to her father’s palace at a time when he is dying of a disease. A magic remedy can save him, but only a person willing to undertake a long and arduous journey can seek this remedy. Though her father had tossed her out as a baby, the Princess now undertakes the arduous journey out of filial devotion to her father.

After numerous hardships and adventures, some quite humorous, the Princess finally arrives at the place where a Spirit guards the magic remedy. The Guardian Spirit says he will give her the magic remedy, but weds her first. After giving birth to several sons, she eventually returns home with the magic remedy, but only to find that her royal father has just died. Using the magic remedy, however, she revives him. Sorrow and hardship thus changed into joy, the story ends in wonder as she returns to her Spirit husband and they take their places in the heavens. The Princess is believed to be the archetypal mudang Spirit, with powers to lead persons through death and assuage death’s hardships.

Other kut tales are the bawdy comic myth of the Maiden Tangum that is chanted in rites honoring the Grandmother Spirit of Childbirth and the moving tale of the Blind Man and his Daughter that rouses the audience to tears far into the night in a village Pyŏlshin-kut. Though employed in kut to honor the Spirits, such tales move spectators to laughter and tears because of their intrinsic human interest. They project, moreover, the gripping sense of inevitable forward movement that the literary critic Susanne Langer finds essential to the “dramatic illusion” (1953: 307). Drama, she says, imitates that fundamental aspect of experience “which distinguishes human life from animal existence: the sense of past and future as parts of one continuum, and therefore of life as a single reality” (1953: 311). Drama presents “the ominous forward movement of consequential action”; its mode “is the mode of Destiny” (1953: 307). Langer refers to masterpieces of stage drama, not oral folk tales; but her words highlight an aspect of kut drama that we have not yet seen, but that the myth of the Abandoned Princess admirably exemplifies.
In a Seoul *kut* for the dead, the Chinogwi-*kut*, the *mudang* chants this myth, seated at her drum and dressed in the elegant robes of the Abandoned Princess. The chant lasts about an hour, but can take only five minutes when time is short. Though merely chanted, not enacted, the tale is inherently dramatic in Langer’s sense; and it forms, moreover, a part of the larger dramatic movement of the Chinogwi-*kut* as a whole. Many *kut* include moments of dramatically vivid theater, but remain on the whole episodic medleys with little sense of the inevitable forward movement that constitutes true drama. A *mudang*’s initiation *kut*, however, and especially *kut* for the dead create a unified dramatic illusion of movement toward a destined end. This end may be pre-figured from the very beginning in symbolic props on view in the background—in the case of the Chinogwi-*kut*, a papercraft flower-bedecked “gate of thorns” to the other world and pictures of the Buddhisic Ten Kings of the World of Darkness, rulers and judges of the underworld. From the beginning, these props point to the destined end of the deceased. The chanting of the tale of the Abandoned Princess just before the climax of the rite sets the stage for the attainment of this end by authenticating the Princess’ power over death and providing the immediate imaginative context for the climax.

Once the *mudang* has concluded the tale, she ritually fulfills the Abandoned Princess’ role of guide to the next world. Still dressed in her elegant royal robes, she activates the symbol of the flower-covered “gate of thorns” in the background. In a slow-paced, graceful dance around the tables of offerings and before the gate, she leads the deceased, symbolized by white funeral clothes carried on a small table by a member of the family, to his or her destined end. Moving now forward, now back, and then slowly around in a solemn trance-like dance, the shaman, as the Abandoned Princess Spirit, processes twelve times around the tables to the accompaniment of the stately music of the drum, cymbals, and pipe—three rounds as a butterfly, three rounds displaying long flowing sleeves in a gesture of leading, three displaying a fan to sweep away evil spirits that stand in the way, and finally three rounds displaying a knife imaginatively to cut away obstacles, tossing it back and forth to an assistant over the offerings and through the flower-covered gate (pl. 3 a).

The deceased then takes final leave through the voice of the *mudang*; and the *mudang* ends the *kut* as she splits a long white cloth held out lengthwise by assistants. Running through the tough cloth with abandon, and at times with a touch of humor, she tears it with her whole body. It is not at all easy to do this; and by so doing, she is believed to demonstrate her Spirit-given powers. At the same time, she gives dramatic ritual expression to prayers for the deceased’s final departure for the other world and seeks magically to effect such departure in peace.

In an East Coast *kut* for the dead, the Ogwi-*kut*, the *mudang* chanting the myth of the Abandoned Princess has no special costume; but she enlivens the chant with a partial enactment, lasting several hours, of various incidents in the narrative. In this case, the symbolic props prefiguring the deceased’s destined end include colorful Buddhist paper lanterns, a paper boat that the deceased takes to reach the “other shore” (彼岸, nirvana or the other world), and a long white cloth that symbolizes in this case the path over water to the “other shore.” Whenever events in the myth bear association with these props, the shaman makes use of them by way of theatrical illustration; and whenever the events bear a resemblance to the situation of the deceased, she makes reference to the deceased and brings the family into the action.

In an Ogwi-*kut* performed for a Mr. Kim, who drowned at sea, leaving a young widow and grade-school son, the shaman tells us that, just as the Abandoned Princess was cast out to die, so Mr. Kim has been cast out in death, and we weep for him. Just as the Princess had to cross over to the other shore to seek the magical remedy, so Mr. Kim must now pass over to the “other shore.” The shaman at this point draws out the long white cloth and calls attention to the colorful paper boat. She does not fail to elicit financial assistance from the spectators in the form of actual money to help pay the boatman, using the opportunity to hike up *kut* fees while providing an occasion for comic banter.

Once the shaman has concluded the narration, she proceeds to the climax of the *kut* in two ritual actions that activate the symbolic props in the background. The first action centers on a large colored paper lantern that seems to symbolize a heavenly mansion for the dead man’s soul. The shaman raises the lantern high above the altar and, dancing a slow, mournful dance, tells Mr. Kim, “Now ride the lantern and ascend to the skies.”

The second action focuses on the cloth symbolizing the path over water to the “other shore” and on a staff tipped with paper flowers, which represents the deceased. The *mudang* stretches out the cloth and sadly tells Mr. Kim, “Now we must load the boat and you must go.”
As an assistant takes down the paper flowers, lanterns, and decorations from the table of offerings, the mudang does a slow-motion dance with two of the small paper lanterns, imaginatively loading them onto the boat. She then holds the flower-covered staff to the heads of the wife and son and speaks Mr. Kim's words of farewell. An assistant passes the paper boat and small paper lanterns slowly over the length of the cloth; and, saying for the final time, “Now let’s go,” the mudang slowly but firmly splits the white cloth lengthwise by means of the staff. With the cloth split, Mr. Kim is believed to have gone indeed to the other world; and except for a brief rite to chase away unsettled spirits who have come to watch, the kut is over.

A great deal of the force of the dance before the flower-covered “gate of thorns” in the Seoul kut and of the splitting of the cloth with the flower-tipped staff in the East Coast kut derives from the position of these actions at the climax of a dramatic symbolic movement that has been progressing toward the deceased’s destined end from the very beginning. Though only kut believers may believe that the mudang actually accomplishes this end for the deceased, the kut dramatizes the wonder and mystery of an individual’s entry into his or her final destiny in a way that can move a non-believer as well.

Of course, a kut for the dead does not have the carefully plotted, tightly structured movement of literary drama. Nor does it trace the realistic progress of a great tragic figure determining his or her own destiny. Like the Medieval English play Everyman, it dramatizes symbolically our common human destiny. It has the force, moreover, of being not just playacting, but for real. It expends a huge amount of time, effort, and expense to insure the actual destiny of an ordinary human being.

Comic Play

One cannot think of kut drama, even in rites honoring the dead, without laughter. We saw how a shimbang uses laughter to keep woe at a distance in Cheju-do ancestral laments. In a lighter vein, a mudang may add spice to an East Coast Ogwi-kut with a comic interlude in which she describes the building of the mansion for the deceased in the sky. First she fashions tools, mimicking a blacksmith in stylized gestures employed in other kut as well. She gets injured in the process, however, and raises peals of laughter with a comic grotesquerie of a crippled person’s deformities.

A Seoul-area Chinogwi-kut regularly includes a lively episode of comic psycho-drama in which the Messenger Spirit from the Ten Kings of the World of Darkness comes to snatch away the deceased to judgement for sin. In some instances, the wildly flailing Messenger evokes the terror of death in a way that threatens all present. In others, he evokes billows of healing laughter. Mouth grotesquely stuffed with rice cake, he makes his appearance as a rapacious villain who tries to lasso the soul of the deceased, symbolized by white papers attached to paper-craft flowers on the table of offerings. The family of the deceased gleefully fend the Messenger off in mock battle. In one instance, the deceased is portrayed as wryly complaining, “I have a wife, son, and large family, but no one to go in my place. I have a lot of close friends, but no one goes in my stead” (T. Kim 1971: 59). His words are reminiscent of the words spoken by Everyman in the Medieval morality play when, with unconscious self-irony, Everyman desperately tries to avoid Death’s call and begs Fellowship, “Bear me company... in this journey” (ll. 246–247).

Just as Medieval Christians could fear death and the Devil and yet treat them comically because of their faith in Christ’s power, kut participants can both fear and make fun of the Messenger Spirit because of their trust in the power of the mudang. Actually, the Chinogwi-kut borrows the motif of judgement from Buddhism; it seems to manifest little intrinsic concern about guilt or personal responsibility for the evil of our lives that may call for judgement. In any case, believers and non-believers alike can shudder with fear at the approach of the Messenger of Death, laugh at his antics, and appreciate the episode as a vivid dramatization of a typically Korean, zestful challenge in the face of danger and risk.

These two episodes from kut for the dead are not just decorative interludes of comic relief. Like the humor surrounding the Cheju-do laments, they have an integral role in the healing force of the rite; and they are integral to the vision of life embodied in kut ritual in general—a vision that invites us to taste life’s bitterness to the full while braving the worst with laughter and play.

This vision takes full comic form in the Kōri-kut, a lengthy series of one-man vaudeville skits performed by a hereditary male mudang on the last morning of an East Coast village Pyŏlshin-kut. These skits have

The medley begins by making fun of a Confucian schoolmaster trying to educate unruly village youngsters, who trip him up at every chance. It then moves on to a parody of the traditional Confucian Civil Service Exam. The shaman has us imagine the Schoolmaster abandoning his charges and heading for Seoul in hopes of passing this difficult exam for a more solid position in Confucian officialdom. Taking over the trickster’s role from his former students, he makes chaotic nonsense of the established Confucian order. He passes the exam with a bit of verse that is perfect nonsense (C. Ch’oe 1982: 294–295); but he refuses the position of Ch’ambong, saying it is the job of a blind man (in Kyongsang-do dialect, “Ch’ambong”); and he rejects the position of Chwasu because it amounts to just sitting sleepily (“chwasu”) on a chamber pot (1982: 295–296). The officials toss him out, exclaiming, “the likes of you won’t be able to take charge of a heap of dog dung” (1982: 296).

Our hapless hero then turns to suicide. He takes poison, but, as chance has it, not enough to kill himself. Instead, in a trance induced by the poison, he meets the Ten Kings of the World of Darkness, who give him a chance to take the Civil Service Exam in their realm. He passes the exam with a bit of verse that is perfect nonsense (C. Ch’oe 1982: 294–295); but he refuses the position of Ch’ambong, saying it is the job of a blind man (in Kyongsang-do dialect, “Ch’ambong”); and he rejects the position of Chwasu because it amounts to just sitting sleepily (“chwasu”) on a chamber pot (1982: 295–296). The officials toss him out, exclaiming, “the likes of you won’t be able to take charge of a heap of dog dung” (1982: 296).

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Did you fall from heaven, sprout up from the earth?
Have you come wrapped in the summer clouds that hide steep peaks?
(1982: 350)

In one version, the skits end here; but in the darker version, as was often the case in the days before modern medicine, the help of the Spirits is of little avail. The child abruptly takes sick and dies (1982: 352).

As is said of all comedy, the Kŏri-kut has its comic wellsprings in fertility ritual; but the death of the child at the end distances the final skit from traditional comedy’s celebration of life. Closer, rather, to the Theater of the Absurd, the skit expresses simply and brutally what the Absurdist Harold Pinter does in more introverted fashion in The Birthday Party, where the celebration of birth becomes a ritual of disintegration dominated ironically by death. In accord with what we expect of both traditional comic drama and fertility ritual, the Kŏri-kut should find its climax in a harmonious, joyful celebration of life. But beginning with the episode of the Fisherman, a cloud has been cast over the action by the danger of being brought to an early death through the malevolent influence of restless ghosts who themselves suffered such a fate. Comic wit and fancy are not strong enough to dissipate death’s shadow, and the power of the Spirits seems more and more likely to turn destructive than providential. With both comic and religious expectancies turned topsy-turvy, we leave the kut site cruelly plunged in a bleak, ironic world.

The Kŏri-kut takes us back to the evolution of theatrical entertainment out of religious ritual. Far from primitive, however, its mimetic skits constitute a sophisticated example of the theater as serious play. Like the Cheju-do laments, they reveal a subtle mastery of comedy, irony, and alienation effects. In fact, the dark version of the skits distances participants from the very trust in the Spirits that the Pyŏlshin-kut as a whole aims to nurture.

Kut do not preach abstract doctrine; but their dramatic play implies, nonetheless, serious attitudes and judgements regarding human life. Kim In-whoe sees traditional kut activity as embodying the ancient Korean ideal of the actualization in this world of an orderly harmony between the Gods, human beings, and nature (1982: 11; 1987: 87, 103, 113, 132). On the whole, a village Pyŏlshin-kut clearly nurtures such harmony. No general theory, however, can account for the full import of any particular kut performance, just as no theory of tragedy can exhaust the meaning or effect of a particular drama of Sophocles, Shakespeare, or Ibsen. A Pyŏlshin-kut nurtures harmonious union, but in a manner more playfully chaotic than orderly; and in this dark version of the Kŏri-kut, its final skits jar the atmosphere of harmonious play with a disruptive note of stark skepticism.

The shaman sends us away from the Pyŏlshin-kut with a typically Korean vision of life that is seemingly naive, but richly ambivalent. He has created comic situations that allow the villagers to play with social and ritual structures which they take, nonetheless, quite seriously. He has manipulated the emotions of the spectators to make them feel the challenges of life, now with witty self-confidence, now with anxious helplessness. He has shown life’s fortunes as surprising us with both unexpected joy and sudden fear. Throughout much of the medley, he has shown his skill in using laughter’s power to transmute life’s woe into joy. And now, at the end, far from resolving the tensions and ambivalence of the world he has fashioned, he disrupts our expectancies by taking the medley’s comic-religious movement toward a future enlivened by hope and turning it into a movement toward death.

In From Ritual to Theater, the anthropologist Victor Turner discusses continuities and differences between traditional ritual performances and those of the modern theater. He points out that both provide arenas of communal anarchic play that serve as “seedbeds of cultural creativity” (1982: 28). But he stresses that the creative play of a modern theatrical performance is more radically disruptive than that of traditional shamanist or tribal rituals. Traditional rituals “invert but do not usually subvert the status quo,” whereas modern theatrical entertainment is often subversive, satirizing, lampooning, burlesquing, or subtly putting down the central values of society (1982: 41). Historical records suggest that Korean religious ritual fused prayer with play as far back as two-thousand years ago, when new year’s rites honoring Heaven inverted the normal order with days on end of song, dance, eating, and drinking (I. Kim 1987: 72–73; Cho 1990: 71–73). The Pyŏlshin-kut on the whole continues this tradition, but the present concluding skits go much further. Quite modern by Turner’s scale, they actually subvert the status quo. They provide a put-down for the Confucian values of scholarly order that govern Korean society; and in the darker version, they subvert the shamanist values of trust in the Spirits that the Pyŏlshin-kut otherwise seeks to maintain. Like the Cheju-do laments, these East Coast skits use alienation effects reminiscent of Bert Brecht; and they
mix laughter and woe in a way that we expect of Charlie Chaplin or the Theater of the Absurd.

Mircea Eliade has stressed that shaman séances recapture a paradisical world of freedom and harmony (1964: 99, 117, 551); and he maintains that primitive seasonal rites recapture an archetypal state of paradisaic wholeness, harmony, and freedom “uncontaminated by time and becoming” (1954: 89). We have seen that displays of the Spirits’ power in kut around Seoul manifest a freedom that can be termed paradisaic; and we shall shortly see that the beginning of a Pyŏlshin-kut evokes an experience of wholeness and harmony that likewise can said to be paradisaical. Kut laughter, however, free and liberating though it be, has its roots, rather, in the disharmony, cruelty, woe, and bondage of the world identified by Eliade as that in which paradise has been lost, a world that shows that man’s “wholeness is only apparent, that in reality the very constitution of his being is a consequence of its dividedness” (1960: 98).

However well kut drama may fit Eliade’s notions of primitive, archetypal ritual, its comedy aptly exemplifies the “archetypal, primitive theater” that the French drama critic Antonin Artaud, writing in the 1930’s, urged playwrights to return to in order to revitalize western drama (1958: 50; Kister 1994: 133–145). In the comic chaos that they arouse, the mimetic vaudeville skits of the Kŏri-kut draw their power from what Artaud has identified as the wellsprings of all primal theatrical activity: “laughter’s power of physical and anarchic dissociation” (1958: 42). In the fear of unpredictable Spirits that the grim version of the final skits evokes, they tap into the “great metaphysical fear” that he finds “at the roots of all ancient theater” (1958: 44). In the sudden disruption of our expectancies, they evoke what all theater should evoke: the “terrible and necessary cruelty which things can exercise against us,” “the underlying menace of a chaos as decisive as it is dangerous” (1958: 79, 51).

In his investigations into the origin of Greek drama, Nietzsche has stated that the Greeks, keenly aware as they were of life’s cruelty, were “in danger of craving a Buddhistic denial of the will” (1956: 51). He says that, far from shunning life, however, their tragedies present life’s horrors while at the same time drawing the audience into a Dionysian sense of oneness with life in “the metaphysical solace . . . that, despite every phenomenal change, life is at bottom indestructibly joyful and powerful” (1956: 50). In its keen awareness of the worst that life has to give, the Korean character bears comparison with that of the ancient Greeks; and in its ability to transform this awareness into a creative, cathartic experience, Korean kut drama, naive though it be, bears comparison with Greek drama. The farcical skits at the end of the Pyŏlshin-kut imply a stark awareness of the precarious risks of life in a traditional Korean fishing village; but even in the darker version, these skits provide solace. They celebrate a typically Korean irrepressible zest for life in all its chaotic risks and fears; and they bless these risks and fears with contact with the Godhead.

The Dramatization of Symbols

Nietzsche classifies the healing power of Greek drama into “the comic spirit, which releases us, through art, from the tedium of absurdity” and “the spirit of the sublime, which subjugates terror by means of art” (1956: 52). The mimetic skits that end a Pyŏlshin-kut heal through the comic spirit. A symbolic rite greeting the Village Spirit at the very beginning provides healing through the spirit of the sublime. In this opening rite, villagers gather at the Village Shrine by the sea or in a grove of trees to summon the Spirit to show his or her presence by causing a tall bamboo “Spirit pole” to shake. While a strong villager holds the pole firm, the mudang asks the advice of the Spirit regarding the village’s present state and interprets responses manifested in the shaking pole. Believers are spell-bound; but a non-believer, too, cannot but be moved by the scenic panorama that forms as a clear April sky, towering mountains, and the picturesque Village Shrine on a knoll above the sea crystallize around the Spirit pole, its white flag fluttering toward the sky. As participants join in a buoyant round dance accentuated by the graceful arm movements of traditional Korean dance and animated by the shrill notes of pipe and resounding gong, the ritual scene captures a sublime moment of primal union of earth and sky, sea and land, and human beings with nature, other human beings, and the Gods. It gives spatial expression to a traditional Korean longing for harmony that at the same time is an archetypal religious longing of the human heart. In this case, surely, as Eliade says of all such rites, the performance momentarily recaptures an archetypal state of paradisaic harmony “uncontaminated by time and becoming” (1954: 89).

The band of hereditary mudang who perhaps centuries ago began performing this symbolic ritual had a keen sense of theatrical gesture.
and space. They fashioned a spectacle that bears the mark of artistic genius on at least two counts: It uses simple means to evoke an experience charged with deep feeling and import; and it employs the particulars of indigenous music, dance, religious belief, and setting to evoke an universal experience.

The beginning of an East Coast Ogvi-kut for one who has drowned at sea provides another example of an utterly simple, yet dramatically powerful symbolic rite that offers healing through the power of the sublime. The rite begins by the sea shore. To the rhythm of the waves and beat of a gong, the mudang asks the Spirits to send the dead person’s soul to land. As a family member holds a bamboo pole topped by a white flag fluttering in the breeze, an assistant entices the soul to shore by tossing a live chicken and a covered bowl of rice into the sea and drawing them back by cords. The mudang meanwhile calls to the soul in a slow, mournful chant in which longing for the lost loved one blends with the breaking waves: “Come to shore! Come to shore!”

What the philosopher Ernst Cassirer says of mythic activity applies to the kind of intuitive creative activity we have here. Myth, he says, signifies “an intuitive unity preceding and underlying all the explanations contributed by discursive thought” (1955. II: 69). Intuitive though it is, myth-making is by no means a passive process. “Nowhere,” Cassirer continues, “do we find a passive contemplation of things; here all contemplation starts from an attitude, an act of the feeling and will.” The shaman neither consciously plots out the lines of this initial scene by the sea nor offers an explanation of the mystery of suffering and death. But neither does she simply stand dumb before life’s mysteries. She fuses simple gestures, chant, and the natural setting of the sea in an act of creative intuition that endows human sorrow with theatrical form, beauty, and religious significance. She stirs up anew the sorrow of loss to enrich it with an appreciation of both the mystery of the Spirits’ care and the wonder of nature, whose destructive power surges beneath the soothing movement of the waves.

Another genial manipulation of symbolic gesture to enrich sorrow with cathartic wonder occurs in the rite described earlier at the end of the Ogvi-kut. Telling the deceased, “Now we must load the boat and you must go,” the mudang slowly passes paper lanterns and a colorful paper boat over the length of a long white cloth held by an assistant. In some instances, she then takes up a small staff, topped with paper flowers, that represents the deceased. With calm, dignified grace, she

uses the staff slowly, but firmly, to split the cloth. Fusing the searing pain of absolute separation in death with an image of the flowering of existence, this technically simple, but richly ambivalent yin/yang theatrical image teases the heart with the mystery of life’s fulfillment in the painful separation of death. Composed equally of blossoming and splitting, it evokes both a soothing hope that death brings fulfillment and a cruel fear that life ultimately is separation.

Folk theater though it be, this rite endows the perhaps poor village family who offer the kut with a sophisticated spiritual and aesthetic experience. It has been said that Cheju-do shamanism has traditionally achieved “an endless parley, a friendly relationship between life and death,” in which “death could involve both a personal turn for the better and a cause of calamity and thus, while setting off dread and anxiety, become an object of wonder” (Y. Kim 1993: 193). The gestural image that ends the Ogvi-kut does the same. It sends participants away with a wonder in the face of death that is far removed from the naive theatrical bedazzlement of many a Seoul-area kut. It sends them away with the fertile amazement described by Cassirer: “an astonishment moving in a twofold direction, composed of opposite emotions—fear and hope,” the amazement with which “myth as well as scientific cognition and ‘philosophy’ begins” (1955. II: 78).

Whatever effect an Ogvi-kut may be believed to have with regard to the ontological status of the deceased, its impact on those still alive depends more on theatrical artistry than on faith in the world of the Spirits. The final gesture has an intrinsic dramatic power that depends very little on belief that the deceased is visibly present in the flower-tipped staff. It is enough if the soul is present simply in the way that one regards the soul of a loved one to be present when a Confucian rite or Christian funeral is held.

It has been said that a kut for the dead aims to insure that the deceased achieves ancestral status, with the right to receive reverence in ancestral rituals (K. Ch’oe 1978: 270; 1989: 102). A bereaved family may hold a kut with this intent for the soul of an unmarried offspring or other person who does not automatically qualify for ancestral status; but the kut itself, in the symbolic gestures that constitute its climax, points to the mystery of life’s pain and fulfillment rather than to any specific goal such as ancestral status. In the splitting of the cloth with the flower-covered staff, the Ogvi-kut points toward a hope that the painful rupture of death will bring flowering fulfillment and seeks magically to insure this fulfill-
ment. The Seoul Chinogywi-†ut points in the same direction when the Abandoned Princess escorts the deceased to the other world in solemn dance before the flower-covered “gate of thorns.”

The Southwest †ut for the dead, the Ssitkim-†ut, fuses pain, hope, and peace in the symbolic gesture of the Kop’uri, a rite in which a white-clad mudang uses graceful, dance-like movements to release large loops knotted in a long white cloth. The word ko (loop knot) forms a pun with ko (苦), bitterness, and the knotted loops symbolize the bitter tangles of frustration and regret that a life of cruelty can leave bound in a person’s heart. For the dead, this gesture evokes hope that death will bring release from life’s knots of bitter pain and frustration; and it aims magically to effect such release. It allows death to become what the Korean cultural view expects it ideally to be, fulfillment in freedom and peace: “Through dying one achieves life’s fullness. . . . That is what the Kop’uri is” (Y. Kim 1981: 121). For the living, this ritual gesture constitutes an unforgettable spatial image charged with both the sorrow of a lifetime and the peace of wondrous release (pl. 3 b).

These images from †ut for the dead have dramatic power both because of where they appear in the overall movement of the whole rite and because of their intrinsic visual and aural appeal. Fashioned though they are from the simplest of materials, they speak an eloquent spatial language. If †ut laughter exemplifies Antonin Artaud’s ideal of “archetypal, primitive theater” in its power of “anarchic dissociation” (1958: 42), these gestural images do so because of their primal theatrical power as “poetry in space” (1958: 38). Words of the Spirits form the core of †ut ritual, but theatrical gestures empower these words. †ut culture is thus not so much a “culture of words” as the “culture of gestures” that Artaud holds us as an ideal for playwrights (1958: 108). At its best, as in these climactic images of †ut for the dead, †ut drama achieves a genial “mental alchemy which makes a gesture of a state of mind” (1958: 66). It attains a fertile “metaphysics of gesture” that gives ever-renewed life to the richly imaginative spiritual culture of Korean shamanism while exemplifying Artaud’s dictum that there are “attitudes in the realm of thought and intelligence that words are incapable of grasping and that gestures and everything partaking of a spatial language attain with more precision than they” (1958: 56, 71).

Not all †ut use the language of theatrical space to such moving effect. Sometimes, as in the case of a mudang’s dance on rice-chopper blades, †ut gestures induce what seems to a non-believer to be no more than mind-benumbing awe. Many †ut, too, consist of rambling, repetitious episodes that, dramatically speaking, are vapid and tedious. The never-ending appearances of Spirits in a Seoul †ut for good fortune and the elaborate processions of the celebrated Pyŏlshin-†ut from Unsan have little in the way of universally appealing dramatic significance. Even such a dramatic rite as a mudang’s initiation †ut can include hours of litany-like chants that have no inherent dramatic interest.

Nonetheless, all †ut, like shamanist séances in other parts of the world, speak the spatial language of the theater. Scholars study shaman rites in the light of the theoretical language of folklore, anthropology, sociology, and the history of religions; but any study of a shaman rite bears its best fruit when it is rooted in the rite’s own language of theatrical gesture and spatial imagery. The theatrical language of a shaman rite has an intrinsic symbolic significance regardless of the intent or interpretation of any particular mudang, participant, or scholar. As a language of symbols, moreover, it has its richest meaning and power to heal when it is multileveled, ambiguous, and even self-contradictory. We saw this in the dark version of the skits that end the village Pyŏlshin-†ut and in the splitting of the cloth with the flower-covered staff at the end of the East Coast Ogwi-†ut. At its best, Korean shaman drama sends participants away with unforgettable images of thought-provoking, spiritually enriching power.

We have seen that Korean shaman rituals provide ample evidence for E. T. Kirby’s argument that shamanist rituals constitute a kind of “Urdrama.” But if “Urdrama” means merely an embryonic form of primitive folk drama, Korean shaman rituals are not “Urdrama.” Naive though they often are, they constitute a sophisticated body of dramatic religious ritual that deserves to be recognized as much more than a curiosity of Korean folk culture. †ut drama merits an honored place in the dramatic heritage of all mankind.

I give fuller examples of the heritage of †ut drama in book form in Kister 1997. The illustrations appended to the present article are of staged performances. They differ from living rites in spirit, but not to a great degree visually.
References


Dramatic Characteristics of Korean Shaman Ritual

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The Origins of Order.
A Set of Nepalese Shaman Recitals

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Continuing a series of Nepalese shaman oral texts and translations, this article presents a set of three short texts recited in public over critically ill patients. The first is used to treat adult males, detailing the creation of the first human being and narrating both the origins of the planets and of healing rituals. The text used to treat women introduces their (separate) origin and outlines their proper behavior, while the recital over seriously ill children introduces the eldest ritual specialists. Together the three texts constitute a concise introduction to the most important features of the world of Nepalese shamans.

Introduction

An article in a recent issue of this journal (Maskarinec 1994) introduced the reader to the oral texts of Nepalese shamans, to the social context of Western Nepal, and to the specific issue of “star obstructions,” difficult moments in a patient’s life-course that require serious shamanic intervention. This set of problems is so significant that many shamans have sets of different recitals to use when treating such cases. The choice of text depends on the severity of the case, the status of the patient, and, for some shamans, on whether the patient is an adult male, an adult female, or a child. The three texts that I provide here belong to such a set. The first, the “Event of Planet Offering,” begins the treatment of critically ill men. It describes the creation of the original man and the origin of the present solar system, and details the first ritual ceremony, performed by Mahādev on behalf of the entire race of man, a model for shamanic intervention. If the patient is an important person or a close relation, the treatment continues with the “Event of Tiligramā,” the crucial initiation text (too long to be included here).
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The second text, the “Event of Sacrificing to the Time of Death and the Messenger of Death,” besides being recited at shaman funerals, is used when treating women who are in crisis. It explains the divine origin of women while outlining with concrete examples and counter-examples proper female behavior. The third text, the “Event of Distancing Star Obstructions,” treats children, those suffering, as the text says, the children’s crises of birth, death, of short duration (“a month”) or of long duration (“a year”). This text introduces the world’s specialists, the first (“eldest”) shaman, oracle, astrologer, priest, fortune teller, counselor, and seer, with short summaries of their characteristic activities.

As with all publicly recited texts, these three would conclude with spells (mantar) whispered over the patient, but the possibilities here are so extensive as to warrant a separate article.

Source of the Texts

The three texts that I have transcribed and translated here were provided by Karṇa Vīr Kāmī, a seventy-one year old shaman of Ciuri Village, Jājarkoṭ District, who has been a shaman for the past fifty-five years. Although his health and subsequently his shamanic activity has recently declined, he remains probably the best known and most respected shaman in Jājarkoṭ, and has trained many of the shamans who now practice in the area. I first recorded these texts from him in 1981, and have done so at periodic intervals since then (most recently in October 1994), without finding any significant variations, other than substitute endings chosen to fit individual circumstances. Karṇa Vīr’s “brother” Abi Lal Kāmī (actually a paternal first cousin) is also a practicing shaman and learned his texts at the same time as did Karṇa Vīr, from the same teacher. I have included as notes extra lines and other differences found in his versions.
Abi Lal adds the following lines at this point:

1 Additional lines at this point in Abi Lal’s version:

2 Abi Lal adds the following lines at this point:
Alternate version to the concluding 28 lines:
Abi Lal’s beginning is much more concise:

75 जाने न जोला, अोटी धूपको खरूँ।
धूपको गाया, अोटी धूपको।
को हो, यामा हो।

80 बिख़ गहजी बन्दू दिदी।
बिख़ में बेली।
विख़ बाबू भावान।
बिख़ में खीरी।
बिख़ दादी नारायण।

85 बिख़ में बैगी।
बिख़ भाजी।
बिख़ नन्द।
पट पटम्बा विधानमा बन्दू गान।

90 दिखाई समेत एक, दिन दिन की धराओ दिन, धन लाइगू।

3 Abi Lal’s beginning is much more concise:
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70

71
Abi Lal’s version adds here the line:

शालक्षी फल वर्ष छाट्या, गाउँबाट बल वर्ष छाट्या।
6 Abi Lal’s ending from this point:

[Devanagari text]

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Abi Lal’s version adds the following lines here:

हाँ श्राधारी भनो, बणकेट भनी,
प्पौलिंक्च, ब्यास रहस्य भनिन्।
Abi Lal’s path to Indra Lok:

The Origins of Order. A Set of Nepalese Shaman Recitals
1. Event of Planetary Offering

The eldest age the Golden Age,
the eldest valley the valley of Nepāl,
the eldest level of the world Tilīgramā,9
the eldest direction East,
the eldest month Cait,10
the eldest weekday Sunday,
the eldest conjunction Tuesday’s conjunction,11
the eldest lunar day the Eleventh,
the eldest god Selfcreated Mahādev.12

Selfcreated Mahādev designed the solid and liquid world.
The world was just a disorderly place.
“Be,” he said, there were no men, “Speak,” he said, there were no men.
“How will time pass, how will there be a world?
I shall make the race of man,” he said, churned gold and silver,
gave the body blood, arms strength, legs marrow, gave the eyes brightness,
gave it life breath, “Speak, man,” it didn’t speak, it didn’t move.
“How will there be a world, how will time pass?” he began to say.

9 Māndam (alternate pronunciations māndam, māndav). A level (one of seven) of
the world. Tilīkarmā (pronounced Tīlīgramā) is the lowest level, where the crafts
of metalworking were originally learned (by the original shaman). The “solid and liquid
world” (jalthal māndam) is our world’s surface.
10 Cait < Caitra (Sanskrit). Atkinson (1882) observes that Cait (overlapping March
and April) was the first month in the traditional Kumaon calendar. In Nepal, it is now
considered the twelfth month of the year.
11 Jog < yoga (Sanskrit). The path of the planets, and of the sun and moon, takes them
through twenty-seven fixed stars, called the nakṣatra, as well as through the twelve
houses of the zodiac, the rāśi; the configuration of each planet with a rāśi is called a
daśā, and that with a nakṣatra is a jog. Locally, a jog is thought to last only 4 or 5 hours,
but astronomically its length varies for each planet. For example, a lunar jog ranges from
a maximum of 66 ghashi (1 ghashi = 24 minutes) to a minimum of 56 ghashi.
12 Varsya. Literally ‘rain-like; falling from the sky’, from varṣa (Sanskrit) ‘Rain’.
Compare also varṣyas (Sanskrit) ‘Very great, considerable, important, etc.’
He cut white, red, Malāyāgirī sandalwoods, burned them to ash, brought droppings from an aged cock, churning them, made man, gave the body blood, arms strength, legs marrow, gave the eyes brightness, gave it life breath, tested the side of the forehead, tested with a cane staff, brushed downward a black yak tail, brushed upward a white yak tail, “Speak, man,” it spoke, it moved.

He gave the race of man immortality, they became so many they didn’t fit, they didn’t quit. The world of death was an earth stuffed with living beings, goods weren’t enough, foods weren’t enough, chasing away, locking away, nothing helped.

“I will trick the race of man. Go now, O Pārvatā, to relieve the summer heat, pick cucumbers, bring them here.”

She went to pick cucumbers. Picking small ones, picking big ones, tiny ones, ripest yellowed ones, gathering fallen flowers, old men died, babies died, little ones died, big ones died, there were seven times of natural death, fourteen times of unnatural death.

“O Destructive Pārvatā, Mother Teacher, they can die when old, let them live when young,” he said.

Old men died, babies died, little ones died, big ones died, there were miscarriages. “For man the nine planets have begun to originate,” he said. Mahādev went to bathe, from bathing, Mahādev went to stay in a cave.

Staying in the cave six months, Pārvatā waited in the kitchen.

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13 This is a gesture done to open the ears, explained Karṇa Vīr.

14 Cucumbers are an apt metaphor for mankind, commented Karṇa Vīr, for they grow in profusion on a dung heap, have no fixed season and no intrinsic worth.

15 Abi Lal’s additional lines here:

They were impaled on poles, they were caught in nets, they were swept away in rivers, they fell off cliffs, they fell from trees.

16 A version of the Nine Planets Event by another shaman, Lakṣamān Kāmī, specifically mentions that Mahādev had leprosy, and nine lumps of decaying flesh were washed off of his body and thrown by Pārvatā into nine springs. For similar shamanic versions of creation, see de Sales (1991: 195 ff.) and Lecomte-Tilouine (1991: 482 ff.).
Mahādev was able to get up. He put on his head a tiger’s skin, put on his forehead charcoal ashes, sandalwood ashes, lumps of ash, put on his ear a large pendant, put around his neck a rudrākṣa necklace, slung over his shoulder a pair of begging bowls, put camphor in his mouth, held in his hand a thunderbolt staff, slung in his waist a double-edged knife, put on his ankles heavy anklets, wooden sandals on his soles, took on the appearance of a yogin.

He went to Ghaṭī Rājā’s palace, cried for alms.

“Take it, respected father, take a stable of elephants, take a stable of horses, take diamonds, pearls.”

“I won’t take them, father, they’re at my house.”

“What will you take?”

“Get the leaves of nine trees, get the fruit of nine trees, get nine trains, get nine slivers of iron, get nine black goats, get black cloth, circle it all around the head, that’s what I’ll take,” he said.

He got nine grains, got nine slivers of iron, got nine flowers, got nine cloths, got black goats, got black cloth, made an offering of grain, made an offering of wealth, made an offering of gold, silver, copper offerings, made nine dishes of garlands, got nine trees, the fruit of nine trees, the leaves of nine trees, nine sacks, nine packs, to the Time of Death, the Messenger of Death, he gave sacrifice.

Mahādev took his pair of begging bowls to the road, filled the begging bowls, circled them around the head. Mahādev took the black goats, took them to the crossroads, took them to Crossroads of Avenging Spirits, gave nine shares, gave nine sacks, nine packs, gave them at Crossroads of Avenging Spirits.

Mahādev’s rice was cooked.

“Where can I throw Mahādev’s rice?” she said.

Thrown on the snowy mountains, the snowy mountains had a downy fleece. Mahādev, after six months, a full year, emerged from the cave, Pārvatā wrapped him in sweet smelling musk.

The sweet smelling musk opened up his wounds. Mahādev’s twenty-two lumps of filth emerged.

“Where can I throw Mahādev’s filth?
If I throw it on the trash heap, a piglet may eat it,
Mahādev would go to hell,” she said.

“If I throw it at Crossroads of Avenging Spirits, lepers, cripples, beggars, mendicants, yogins or holy men may touch it, Mahādev would go to hell. Where can I throw it?” she said.

“Go now, O Pārvatā, you must throw it into Blood Lake,” he said.

She threw it into Blood Lake.

The nine planets originated, the nine star obstructions originated, having finished off Blood Lake they arose. Mahādev was able to get up, a blade in his hand. He cut eight planets, cut eight star obstructions. The eldest planet is Ketu, the eldest star obstruction is the Wheel of Time.

He cut the first, there were two, cut the second, there were three, cut the third, there were four, cut the fourth, there were five, cut the fifth, there were six, cut the sixth, there were seven, cut the seventh, there were eight, cut the eighth, there were nine, Mahādev quit cutting the nine planets, the nine star obstructions.

They went up, struck Ghaṭī Rājā (“Inferior King”). One moment he was pierced, one moment he was dying, the days of Ghaṭī Rājā were threatening, the months were threatening.

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17 Barmā dhuwā refers to any major crossroads frequented by Bajyū and Barmā, spirits of high caste suicides who at death vowed to return as avenging spirits.

18 A complete description of Mahādev dressed as a Kānphaṭa yogin can be inserted here, but most often Karnā Vir just mentioned the blade in his hand and postponed this description until after the planets have been cut.

19 Ketu is a nodal point of the moon (see note 25 below).

20 Kaḷcakra. “The Wheel of Time.” In conversation, Karnā Vir also used this to refer to a sacrifice to Juma Kāl and Juma Dūt, another parallel with Kānphaṭa yogins.

21 Karnā Vir could not explain anything about this king.

22 Darṣan jolī. “A large ear pendant” (Krṣṇa is ordinarily depicted wearing one).

23 Vajraṭīṅgā. The meaning “thunderbolt staff” was approved by Karnā Vir. However, Briggs (1989: 14–15) notes that a Kānphaṭa yogin holds in his hand a rosary, a japa mālā, made of nummulities, the smaller ones of which are called bājra ṭhumrā. This perhaps suggested vajraṭīṅgā.

24 Abi Lal’s extra lines are part of Karnā Vir’s Event of the Nine Little Sisters, used when treating cases of witchcraft:
cut the black goats, made blood sacrifice.
He distanced the nine planets, distanced the nine star obstructions,
the seven times of natural death, one time,
the fourteen times of unnatural death, one time he made,
he began to distance the planets, began to distance the star obstructions,
Rāhu, Ketu, Comet, Saturn, Jupiter, Venus, Mars, Sun, Moon,\(^{25}\)
he distanced the nine planets, distanced the nine star obstructions.
He placed his own Lord Mahādev’s oath,
the Ghaṭī Rājā’s days improved, months improved, he survived.
This possible feast has been rejected, from my child you’ve been deflected!

World Earth a witness, banyan and pipal tree a witness,
Sattivati River a witness, the Nine Hundred Thousand Stars a witness,
Earth Mother a witness, Flame Goddess a witness,
Sījāpati King and Jumrātam Shaman a witness,
my own lord Mahādev’s oath!

**ALTERNATE VERSION TO THE CONCLUDING 28 LINES:**

Overturned foundation stones he controlled, cast pentagrams he
controlled,
crop land he controlled, donated land he controlled, field land he
controlled,
he began to make planet offerings, began to make star obstruction offerings,
\(^{5}\)
the fourteen times of unnatural death.
began to give sacrifice to Rāhu, Ketu, Venus, Mars, Comet, Saturn.

"Planet offerings, silver offerings,
I’ll give gold offerings, I’ll give copper offerings,
I’ll give iron offerings, I’ll give camphor offerings,
I’ll give blood offerings, I’ll give red blankets,
I’ll give crop offerings, money offerings,
I’ll give planet offerings, I’ll give star obstruction offerings,” he said. 
Mahādev pressed full the pair of begging bowls,
the offerings were assembled for Mahādev, Mahādev took them,
took them to Extreme Impasse, took them to Crossroads of Avenging Spirits.
He assembled nine packs, he assembled nine sacks.
He assembled nine grains, assembled nine slivers of iron,
assembled nine cloth bags, took them to Crossroads of Avenging Spirits,
he cut a black goat, gave blood sacrifice.

He made the planets peaceful, made the star obstructions peaceful,
to Rāhu, Ketu, Venus, Mars, Comet, Saturn, Jupiter he gave blood sacrifice.
He made the planets peaceful, made the star obstructions peaceful.
This possible feast has been rejected, from my child you’ve been deflected!
my own lord Mahādev’s oath!

\(^{25}\) In shamanic discourse, astrological problems are treated as specific collectivities
(viz. the Nine Planets, the Star Obstructions, the Children’s Crises), not singly, so
individual identities are subordinated within a collectivity, allowing for a casual attitude
toward details such as planets’ names. (See Höfer 1994: 284–306 for some of the issues
possibly involved in this strategy.) The first two entries here, Rāhu and Ketu, are popu-
larly considered two of the nine planets, although in Hindu astronomy, they are the nodal
points of the moon. As the only points at which an eclipse is possible, and since due to
parallax an eclipse sometimes occurs when both the sun and moon are still above the
horizon, these points have been conceived as physical but invisible bodies responsible
2. Event of Sacrificing to the Time of Death
and the Messenger of Death

Casting off the planets, casting off the star obstructions, listen!
Star Obstruction of Birth, Star Obstruction of Death,
Star Obstruction of Children’s Crises, Star Obstruction of Planetary Threats,
Star Obstruction of Lost Wits, Star Obstruction of Hidden Desires,
the Time of Death, its Reason at the Foot,
Rāhu, Ketu, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Comet, and Saturn,
listen to this old recital!
The truth of that day, the cure of that day.
The eldest god Selfcreated Mahādev,
The eldest age the Golden Age,
the eldest valley the valley of Nepāl,
the eldest level of the world Tilīgramā,
the eldest direction East,
the eldest month Cait,
the eldest weekday Sunday,
the eldest conjunction Tuesday’s Conjunction,
the eldest lunar day the Eleventh.
The eldest god, Selfcreated Mahādev designed the solid and liquid world.
The world was just a disorderly place.
“Be,” he said, there were no men. “Speak,” he said, there were no men.
“How will time pass, how will there be a world?”
Andhāserā was old, he tore at his chest, he tore at the earth,
he wailed and wept, was in tears.
It was night at night, it was night at day.
He was heard at Indra’s house. “Go now, attendants, go,
in the world of death, who is there, what’s this, why this weeping?”
The attendants came to the world of death.
“Who’s there, what’s this, why this weeping?”
My eyes have gone blind, my ears have gone deaf,
it’s night at night, it’s night at day, there’s no one with me, no companion,
no elder sister, no younger sister, at whose face can I look?”
He wailed and wept, he tore at his chest, he tore at the earth.
The attendants went to Indra’s house. “Why does Andhāserā cry?”

35 “There’s no one else, no companion, it’s night at night, it’s night at day,
at whose face can I look?” he says,
“he tears at his chest, he tears at the earth, he wails and weeps.”
He gave him Maitācelī.²⁶
“Go now, Maitācelī, to the world of death, that is your kingdom,” he said.
Maitācelī descended to the world of death, was given to Andhāserā.
Six months, a full year passed, a son was born.
“There’s no one with me, no companion, no elder sister, no younger sister,
it’s night at night, it’s night at day, at whose face can I look?”
she tears at her chest, she wails.

40 “Get a daughter-in-law, go now, Maitācelī,
call one from your parents’ home,” he said.
Maitācelī wailed and wept. “How can I go to my parents’ house?” she said.
She was heard at Indra’s house. “Why does Maitācelī cry?
Go now, attendants, to the world of death.”
The attendants descended, to the world of death.

45 “Why does Maitācelī cry?”
“There’s no one with me, no companion, no elder sister, no younger sister,
what misfortune is this, what disaster is this?”
she tears at her chest, she tears at the earth, she wails.
The attendants went, to Indra’s house. “Why does Maitācelī cry?”
“’There’s no one with me, no companion, no elder sister, no younger sister,
what misfortune is this, what disaster is this?’
she tears at her chest, she tears at the earth, she wails and weeps.”
He gave them Candravatī.

50 “Wonderful daughter Candra, go now, Candra, below to the world of death,
that is your kingdom,” he said, gave her to the world of death.
Candravatī descended seven levels of the world.
Andhāserā was the father-in-law, Maitācelī was the mother-in-law.
Six months, a full year passed,

55 “Get it, daughter-in-law, get it, from your parents’ house,
bring back a dowry of nine moons, bring back a dowry of nine suns,
how will time pass, how will there be a world?” he said.
Wonderful daughter Candra ascended a first level,

²⁶ Maitācelī. Literally, ‘girl from the parent’s home’. For a relevant discussion, see Oppitz (1991: 36).
²⁷ Annakelt, also Ānnapamkt. Literally, ‘not easily satisfied, unique, incredible’.
“From the world of death, on what errand have you come, descendant, on what task have you come?”
“I’ve come to take a dowry of nine moons, father,
I’ve come to take dowry of nine suns.
In the world of death, it’s night at night, it’s night at day, how will time pass, how will there be a world?” she said.
“There is no dowry of nine moons, daughter, there is no dowry of nine suns. A stable of elephants, a stable of horses, jeweled bracelets, diamonds, pearls, thousands of rupees, take whatever you need, descendant, there is no dowry of nine moons, of nine suns,” he said.
“I won’t take them, father, my house has them.”
They made bows of khungī bamboo, bowstrings of lebre bamboo, arrows of cane, stunning poison from Kalākoṭ, wristguards of cimalā wood, jingling bells on their hunting dogs, Skinny Wasp and Forehead Spot, beating on the ridges, flushing game in the valleys, beating in the valleys, blinds on the ridges, father and son went to hunt in the forest. Elder Brother Nārāṇ, Father Bhagavān went off.
“If I am Nārāṇ’s little sister, if I am a special daughter, a daughter so abused, a sister so disgraced, I go to die,” she said.
“Come, all villagers, attend the funeral,” she said.
Sixteen hundred funeral goers went, to Ocean of Tears, to Little Sister Ocean, descended to Cremation Ground of the Dead, descended to Riverside Graveyard.
They split the best red, white, Malāyāgirī sandalwoods, heaped up one level of pyre, it was one sky, heaped up a second level of pyre, it was a second sky, heaped up third level of pyre, it was a third sky, heaped up fourth level of pyre, it was a fourth sky, heaped up fifth level of pyre, it was a fifth sky, heaped up sixth level of pyre, it was a sixth sky, heaped up seventh level of pyre, it was a seventh sky,
“How can I carry them?” she said.
They summoned a skillful craftsman.

160 He made a bowl of gold, made a lid of silver,
put in snow storms, foggy patches, cyclonic dashes,
put in lightning flashes, total darkness splashes.\(^{33}\)

“Take it, descendant, to your house. Go to a high ridge in your world,
from a high ridge, cast off the nine suns, the nine moons to the east,
release the snowstorms to the northern slopes,
release the lightning flashes, total darkness splashes to the western slopes,
release the nine moons, the nine suns in the eastern direction.”

She descended a first level, a second level, a third level, a fourth level,
a fifth level, a sixth level, she descended a seventh level of the world.

170 From a high ridge the nine moons, the nine suns
she released in the eastern direction.

She released the snow storms to the northern slopes.
She released the cyclonic dashes, the foggy patches to the southern slopes.

175 They reached Ocean of Tears, came to Cremation Ground of the Dead.
They scattered water on the ashes, blew through a tube, found the ring toe.

“Is it, father?” he said.

“Address your elders abusively!” he said.
“How can I address my elders abusively?” she said.

180 They scattered water on the ashes, blew through a tube, found the ring toe.

“Take something, daughter-in-law, take something inauspicious!” he said.
“What inauspicious thing, father-in-law?” she said.

185 “That damn daughter may curse us as daughter murderers, as sister offenders,
it may be Satya Nārāṇ’s little sister, may be Father Bhagavān’s descendant,
let’s smear out the fire, she’ll live.”

Truthfully doing a truth act they went to extinguish the pyre.

190 They reached Ocean of Tears, came to Cremation Ground of the Dead.
They scattered water on the ashes, blew through a tube, found the ring toe.

“Take it, descendant, your desired dowry.”

He gave her a dowry of nine moons, gave her a dowry of nine suns.

She put them in her skirt, the skirt caught fire,
put them in her wrap, the wrap caught fire,
put them in her blouse,\(^{32}\) the blouse caught fire,
put them in a basket, the basket caught fire, she cried and wept.

31 Meaning suggested by Karṇa Vīr, but uncertain. Abi Lal places this phrase (jujātu nārāṇī gartā) earlier, as the pyre was being prepared.

32 Khokyālt. Literally ‘the folds of clothing doubled over at the chest’.

33 In Abi Lal’s version, Nārāyaṇ calls these additions ‘snacks and presentations’ (aranī paranī, nāso tuso), and instructs Candravatī to take them out on the trail, not to take them home.

34 The Bhāgīrathi River in Abi Lal’s version, which includes here the line:
Eight moons departed, eight suns departed, one moon remained, one sun remained.\textsuperscript{36} 

they rose in the east, they set in the west. There was nightfall, dawn was born, the land was chilled, the soil was chilled, wet season springs bubbled, dry season springs trickled, the Sattivart River began to flow with force.

At that time, the eldest grass, Soft Trail Grass survived.\textsuperscript{37} The eldest thatch, Dumb Thatch survived. The eldest stone, Black Ammonite Fossil survived. The eldest tree, Black Oil wood survived, Banyan and Pipal survived. To the race of man he gave the body blood,

arms strength, legs marrow, put in a life breath, struck the side of the forehead, struck with a cane staff, brushed a black yak tail downward, brushed a white yak tail upward, the race of man improved for a day, improved for a month.

The deadly star obstruction of the house pinnacle, was transferred to its foot. The deadly star obstruction at the foot, was transferred to the doorstep. The deadly star obstruction of the doorstep, was transferred to the edge of the porch. The deadly star obstruction of the edge of the porch, was transferred to Extreme Impasse,\textsuperscript{38} to Crossroads of Avenging Spirits,

\textsuperscript{36} At this point in Abi Lal’s version:

“Do something auspicious, daughter-in-law!”
“What auspicious thing, father-in-law?”
“Give a stranger arriving at dusk a place to stay, a place to rest!”
She gave shelter, [etc.]

\textsuperscript{37} Dhuwā naram is a grass that grows in small clumps on trails, lāṭo bābeyo the longest variety of thatching grass, sālligrām are coiled, chambered fossil shells of a cephalopod mollusk, representations of Lord Viṣṇu, and kāli telpāri is a small hard-wood that grows along river banks. Other eldest items included in this list by Abi Lal, but put by Karṇa Vīr only in his Alcohol Event, include the eldest fish, magalunyā fish, the eldest bird, Black King Crow Slippery Beak, the eldest metals, iron and zinc, the eldest grain, black pulse, and the eldest cow, Black Brown One.

\textsuperscript{38} Hari gauḍā (‘Extreme Impasse’) is the crossroads where the first shaman, Jumrātam, encountered the first witches, the Nine Little All-skillful Sisters.
“What shall we eat as we go, what shall we take as we go?”
said the deadly star obstructions, said the Time of Death, the
Messenger of Death.
“I will give you sacrifice in place of man.
barren cows, lame oxen, buffalo flesh, I will give you in sacrifice,” he said.
“Mother Buffalo, you must go to the star obstructions,
you must go to satisfy the Time of Death,” he said.
“This is not my share, this is not my sacrifice,
my male buffalos I will give at the goddess’ post, I will not go,” she said.
“Mother Cow, you must go to the star obstructions,
you must go to satisfy the Time of Death,” he said.
“This is not my share, this is not my sacrifice,
my milk is a pure offering to Nārāṇ,
my urine and dung are cleansing, are used to purify,
my oxen plow for men, I give them to be raised.”
“Mother Sheep, you must go to the star obstructions,” he said.
Mother Sheep said, “This is not my share, this is not my sacrifice,
my rams I will give at Barāh’s post, in place of man I will not go,” she said.
“My sacrifices I will give at the goddess’ shrine,
I will go for important things, I will not go for unimportant things,” she said.
“This is important, you must go, Mother Goat.”
“If man will eat my flesh, I will go, otherwise I won’t go,” she said.
“One share we’ll give to the Eastern Parts,
one share we’ll give to the Northern Parts,
one share we’ll give to the Western Parts,
one share we’ll give to the Southern Parts,
the collected blood will give to the King of Death,
ears and hooves, we’ll give to the Extreme Obstruction,
the head and feet Tārātālī’s Shaman Jumrātam will take,
half the body will be eaten by the master of the house,
half the body will be eaten by those who come and go,
the sin of your killing will not be on me, it also won’t be on my patient,
go to the star obstructions,” he said.
Mother Goat began to postpone the severe problems,
began to postpone the star obstructions.
The deadly star obstruction atop the house was transferred to its foot.
The deadly star obstruction at the foot of the house was transferred to the doorstep.
The deadly star obstruction of the doorstep, the Time of Death, the Messenger of Death,
were transferred to the edge of the porch.
The deadly star obstruction of the edge of the porch, the Time of Death, the Messenger of Death,
were transferred to the Ocean of Tears, to the Cremation Ground of the Dead,
to the Riverside Graveyard, to the Crossroads of Avenging Spirits.
This possible feast has been rejected, from my child you’ve been deflected!
To the Time of Death, to the Messenger of Death I give sacrifice!
World Earth a witness, banyan and pipal tree a witness,
Sattivatī River a witness, the Nine Hundred Thousand Stars a witness,
Earth Mother a witness, Flame Goddess a witness,
Sijāpati King and Jumrātam Shaman a witness,
My own lord Mahādev’s oath!

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39 From here, Abi Lal used a different ending, which resembles one of Karna Vīr’s alternate ways to end the Star Obstruction Distancing Event:

Provide my patient with needed supplies, fill the ear with advice,
providing a cotton string, providing a waxed string,
setting up seven bars, setting up fourteen fences,
providing a return, providing a solution,
distancing the seven times of natural death,
distancing the fourteen times of unnatural death,
distancing the complications, distancing the star obstructions.
Bring the water wits, bring the water wits,
The lost wits may be in a spring, bring the spring wits,
The lost wits may be in a water tap, bring the water tap wits,
The lost wits may be with a dead soul, bring the dead soul wits,
The lost wits may be with a ghost, bring the ghost wits.
3. Event of Distancing the Star Obstructions

The eldest god Selfcreated Mahādev,
the eldest age the Golden Age,
the eldest valley the valley of Nepāl,
the eldest level of the world is Tilīgramā,
5 the eldest direction East,
the eldest month Cait,
the eldest weekday Sunday,
the eldest conjunction Tuesday’s Conjunction,
the eldest disease Malevolent Injury;  
10 the eldest planet Ketu Planet,
the eldest star obstruction the Wheel of Time,
the eldest children’s crises the Crisis of Birth,
the Crisis of Death, the Crisis of a Month, the Crisis of a Year.
The eldest god, Selfcreated Mahādev designed the solid and liquid world.

“Be,” he said, there were no men, “Speak,” he said, there were no men.
“How will time pass, how will there be a world?” he said.
Selfcreated Mahādev played a trick.
“Go now, O Pārvatā,
to relieve the heat of summer, pick cucumbers, bring them here.”

Pārvatā went to pick cucumbers.
Picking small ones, picking big ones, tiny ones,
ripest yellowed ones, gathering fallen flowers.
old men died, babies died,
there were seven times of natural death, fourteen times of unnatural death.

“Damn, O Pārvatā, Destructive One, Mother Teacher,
they can die when old, let them live when young,” he said.
Old men died, babies died, they were miscarriages.
There were seven times of natural death, fourteen times of unnatural death.
“For the race of man, how will time pass, how will there be a world?”

30 Now I will play a trick” he said.
For the race of man, the seven times of natural death,
the fourteen times of unnatural death, I will postpone,” he said.
“I will make Maitu Dhāmī, will make Sato Gyānī, Bharśā Paṇḍit,” he said.
At Chārkābhoṭ, Bharśā Paṇḍit, Sato Gyānī, Prajā Prakil 42 he made.

At Tāgāserā he made Ratan Pārkī,
at Bāchigāũ he made Kālu Jaiśī,
at Tārābhoṭ he made Maitu Dhāmī, at Tārātālī he made Shaman Jumrātam.

43 At Indra’s house, Śivajī’s palace, Daughter Kṛṣṇa Mother Padmā,
washed by death, bowed her forehead to the ground. 44
“Go now, attendants, bring back Bharśā Paṇḍit,” he said.

They went to Chārkābhoṭ, brought back Bharśā Paṇḍit.
Bharśā Paṇḍit did knowledge, did meditations,
read the stories, read the seven day ritual, worshipped Satya Nārāṇ,
“I don’t know this illness, it’s cause,” he said.

“Go now, attendants, in Chārkābhoṭ is Sato Gyānī,
bring back Sato Gyānī,” he said.
They went to Chārkābhoṭ, brought back Sato Gyānī.
He did knowledge, did meditations,
“I don’t know this illness, it’s cause,” he said.

“Go now, attendants, in Chārkābhoṭ is Prajā Prakil,
45 possibly, Tarakoṭ or Tānātālī in Southern Ḍolpā, but Karṇa Vīr regarded
it as a mythical place; perhaps related to talātala (Sanskrit), the name of a particular
hell. Abi Lal lists Bharśā Paṇḍit’s place of origin as Tārābhōt, and Maitu Dhāmī’s as
Timurkoṭ. This section can be expanded by having Mahādev explain what each spe-
cialist will do once he is created. These actions are then reported in each summons.

Double meaning: tilting her head in respect, and bowing it to the ground in pain.
The text sounds like two individuals are meant, Daughter Kṛṣṇa and Mother Padmā,
but Karṇa Vīr heard this as one entity. Abi Lal’s version adds the following lines at
this point:

Her throat had gone dry, it was sealed with a block,
she was one moment pierced, one moment dying.

He also adds the phrase “Nārāyaṇ’s city” in the previous line.

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40 Jāgmī. Also pronounced jākhmi. ‘Injury, wound’ and vāi are malevolent entities
that resulted when the first shaman subdued the first witches (See Maskarinec 1995,
chapter 2).

41 These three lines are a short way to begin this story. Karṇa Vṛt would also some-
times use the entire episode of the creation of man (as in the preceding text) as an
alternate beginning.

42 Prakīl. ‘To make a diagnosis based on the nine pulses of the body’, prakāta <
prakartā (Sanskrit) gamu. ‘To make known’ (Turner 1980).

43 Pārkī. Shamans explained this as someone who knows the hearts of others. It
seems to combine both parākār garmu ‘To discriminate; to examine’ (Turner 1980), and
parkirti < prakṛti (Sanskrit). ‘Human nature; one’s own nature’ (Turner 1980).

44 Tārātālī. Possibly, Tarakot or Tanatālī in Southern Dolpa, but Karṇa Vṛt regarded
it as a mythical place; perhaps related to talātala (Sanskrit), the name of a particular
hell. Abi Lal lists Bharśā Paṇḍit’s place of origin as Tārābhōt, and Maitu Dhāmī’s as
Timurkoṭ. This section can be expanded by having Mahādev explain what each spe-
cialist will do once he is created. These actions are then reported in each summons.

45 Double meaning: tilting her head in respect, and bowing it to the ground in pain.
They brought back Kālu Jaiśī. He checked the horoscopes, checked the auspicious days, checked figures on a chalkboard, calculated times to travel to bazaars, to Tibet, to fight and dispute, the time to marry, gave the time to begin a house, “I don’t know this illness, it’s cause.”

They went to Tārābhoṭ, brought back Maitu Dhāmī.

He took a leafy branch in his hand, tossed a handful of sacred rice to Indrajyū, tossed a handful of sacred rice to Vāsudeu, threw down sixteen grains of sacred rice on his throne, “I can postpone child crises, I can postpone planetary threats, I don’t know this illness, I don’t know its cause.”

“Go now, attendants, go to Tārātālī, bring back Selfcreated Shaman Jumrātam.”

The attendants went, to Tārātālī. The famous shaman, his head to the east, feet to the west, a single thin blanket, a mattress of straw, one ear closed, one ear open, the porch faintly trembles, a walking stick taps faintly.

“What attendants have come, what supplicants have come,” he said.

“Get up, let’s go, famous shaman.”

He assembled his equipment, beat a copper plate,” he said.

“Begin a transfer with the right foot, a period of good daylight will result, “Begin a transfer with the left foot, a period of a good day will result,” he said.

50 bring back Prajā Prakil.” They brought back Prajā Prakil. He made arbitrations, made mediations, “I don’t know this illness, it’s cause.”

“Go now, attendants, go to Tāgāserā, bring back Ratan Pārkī.” They went to Tāgāserā, brought back Ratan Pārkī.

55 Ratan Parkī examined, he discriminated, “I don’t know this illness, it’s cause,” he said.

“Go now, attendants, Kālu Jaiśī is in Bāchigāũ,

The remark can be expanded by listing the whole section of explicit transfers (below) in the future tense, asking what is needed to transfer away the problems.

Tāmā ḍyāṅgrī. Literally ‘a little copper shaman’s drum’. However, an ordinary copper plate is often beaten to accompany the recital of a mantar, both by shamans and by non-specialists, particularly when no blood sacrifice is intended to accompany the recital pāṭi sarna. To begin any major endeavor; to set out on a long journey; to transfer one’s residence.
100 He transferred the children’s crises, the planetary threats from the doorstep to edge of the porch. He transferred the children’s crises, the planetary threats from the edge of the porch to growing trees, to rocky landslides. “What shall we eat as we go, what shall we take as we go?”

105 “Mother Buffalo, you must go to the star obstructions.” “This is not my share of sacrifice, my male buffalos I will give at the goddess’ post,” she said. “Mother Cow, you must go to the star obstructions.” “This is not my share of sacrifice, my oxen plow for men, I let them be raised, my milk is a pure offering to Nārāyaṇ, my urine and dung are pure, I let men use them to purify.”

110 “Mother Sheep, you must go to the star obstructions,” he said. Mother Sheep said, “This is not my share of sacrifice, my rams I will give at Barāh’s post.” “Mother Goat, you must go to the star obstructions,” he said. “This is not my share of sacrifice, my sacrifices I will give at the goddess’ shrine, I will go for important things, I will not go for unimportant things,” she said. “Mother Pig, you must go to the star obstructions,” he said. Mother Pig said, “This is not my share, this is not my sacrifice, my piglets I will give to be killed by shamans.”

115 “Go now attendants, In Maraṅ’s Country, Rāvan’s house, there’s an aged cock, an aged hen, bring them here,” he said. They went to Maraṅ’s Country, Rāvan’s house. “O Rāvan Mother, give us your aged cock, your aged hen, we need them,” they said. “You cannot buy my hen, diamond, pearls, jeweled bracelets, a hundred thousand rupees is the price,” she said. From the cage spoke the aged cock, “Open up my cage, I will change my price myself, if my price is that much, the wealthy will survive, the poor will die, without me, the world will not survive.”
They opened the cage, they fluttered lightly, fluttered more heavily, settling down, the cock crowed like a fiddle,
settling down, the hen crowed like a bugle.

“If my price is that much, the wealthy will survive, the poor will die, without me, the world will not survive.
I will postpone what is around, will postpone what is to be found,
I will postpone the complications, will postpone the star obstructions,
I will go at the right time, will go at the wrong time,
will go in place of man, without me the world will not survive.”
“My price is five cents, the price of my hen is four cents,” the aged cock said.
The aged cock began to postpone the children’s crises,
began to postpone the planetary threats.

He transferred the children’s crises, the planetary threats
from atop the house to the head.
He transferred the children’s crises, the planetary threats
from the head to the foot.
He transferred the children’s crises, the planetary threats
from the foot to the doorstep.
He transferred the children’s crises, the planetary threats
from the doorstep to edge of the porch.

“Clucking ‘falcon’, clicking ‘falcon’, your share, your burden,
the sin of your killing is not on me, it’s also not on my patient,
this is your share from birth.
Your place to stay is on the doorstep, your nourishment is flint stones,
pecking, pecking, at the grinding place, at the threshing place,
scraping and scratching in the house corners, the drainage gutter,
provide your beak pecking, provide your claw scratching,
provide your pot upsetting, dirtying cleaned places.
Clucking ‘falcon’, clicking ‘falcon’, flinty ‘falcon’, stony ‘falcon’, your promise, your burden, bow your right wing in obeisance to all this,

52 This trembling by a chicken was described as resembling a blustering sound from the lips, and as with deep, choking breaths.

53 Literally, ‘thunder’, but more generally any heavenly threat or complication.

54 To flatter it, the chicken is addressed as ‘falcon’.

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Intellectual Coherence and Constraining Function of Shamanism

MICHEL PERRIN

The author engages in a “systematic” approach to shamanism, which is a set of ideas justifying a set of acts. It entails a specific representation of the person and the world and requires a particular type of alliance between men and “gods.” Lastly, it is constrained by a function, which is to prevent imbalance and to avert or remedy misfortune. This brief “description” implies several logical consequences, which give rise to as many ethnographical issues. It can also help to make a distinction between shamanism and the other great magico-religious systems (possession, mediumism, sorcery, etc.), and to resolve the problem of the limits of and the relationships between these systems in time and space.

Shamanism is one of the great systems that the human mind has constructed to explain and relieve misfortune or to prevent disequilibrium of any kind, be these biological, climatic, economic or political in origin, such as illness, bad weather, famine, or problems in hunting or war.

Shamanism implies a specific conception of the world and of man that is associated with or, rather, constrained by a function, the shaman’s function—which is to respond to any adversity by foreseeing it, providing an explanation for it and, if possible, by forestalling it or finding a remedy for it. Shamanism is a set of ideas that justifies a set of actions. It cannot be understood if one ignores the uses to which it is put and the resulting constraints.

The great principles associated with the shamanic system can be classified in three groups, as set out in the sections that follow.
A Dualist Conception of the Person and of the World

A human being consists of a body and of one element (or more) that can separate from it and which survives death. The latter is what is usually called a soul (or souls), giving this word its more general significance. The fleeting departure of the soul during the night explains dreaming. Its prolonged absence accounts, in part, for illness, and its definitive separation from the body means death. The possession of a soul is not limited to human beings; anything in the natural realm may have one, living beings as well as objects.

The world, too, has a double nature. There is this world, quotidian, profane, visible. And there is the “other world,” invisible in normal times to ordinary people, the world of the “supernatural,” of the “sacred.” It is the world of the gods and their emissaries to this world, of spirits of all kinds—animal, vegetal, benevolent or pathogenic—the world of the masters of the animals, of ancestors and ghosts.

All societies have two terms to distinguish what concerns this world and what concerns the other, to separate the profane from the sacred, the banal from the supernatural.

But if this bipartition is essential, it is neither absolute nor immutable. The boundary between the two is, in fact, fluctuating. The meaning of this world is given to it by the other world, which is always present within it. The other world and its denizens are hidden within it, dwell on it and penetrate its entire extent, governing it and animating it. Beings in this world can turn out to be emissaries sent by the beings of the other world. Humans experience this fact almost every day because any extraordinary event, misfortune or disequilibrium is supposed to originate from the other world. Moreover, the other world is anthropomorphized: it is a projection of this world. The beings that populate it are driven by the same thoughts and passions as those of the human beings who imagine them.

The reasons that more commonly justify this persecutive interpretation are summarized in a metaphor borrowed from hunting–gathering societies: the beings from the other world behave like hunters towards humans since the latter destroy their animals to feed themselves. More generally, men behave like predators towards the environment, which is, in fact, controlled by the other world. Hunger, drought, illness and death are some of the ways in which humans pay their debt to this other world which, to subsist, they plunder incessantly. In fact, the beings of each world are game for the other.

To this direct cycle of exchange many societies add a longer cycle which, at the same time, gives a deeper meaning to death and to the idea of exchange itself. This cycle assumes that the souls of humans are finally released in death and that these souls contribute in different ways to the regeneration of society and the environment through reincarnation or a return to earth as, for example, rain (Perrin 1976).

A Type of Communication

The cultures that subscribe to these logics assume that communication is possible between this world and the other. The latter communicates indirectly with the former by means of special languages, such as those of dreams or visions, which are supposed to be a vehicle of diagnosis and oracles. But the communication can be still more indirect, known only by its effects: some illnesses or a prolonged drought can be interpreted as the aggressive acts of beings from the other world or of their disguised emissaries. These communications are, however, aleatory.

Shamanism supposes that certain people can, at will, establish communication with the other world. They can see it and know it—unlike ordinary people, who only sense it or suffer from it. These are the shamans. They are designated and elected by the other world, as if, while persecuting humanity, the other world considered it a partner. It offers some of its power to the shamans so that they can relieve misfortune, delaying the payment of a debt that is inextinguishable and constantly being renewed.

This power of the shaman, which is the power to open oneself to the other world and communicate with it, can be exercised in two ways. First, the shaman can convok one or more “auxiliary spirits,” which originate from the other world and have a special link to it. These spirits may be animal or vegetable spirits, the souls of former shamans or of dead persons, a “double” of the shaman himself or emanations of Dream.

1 This is the case with the Guajiro, who consider that dreaming comes from Dream, a kind of deity, and that the preferred language of the other world expresses itself through dreams (Perrin 1992).
One observation must be added concerning the therapeutic dimension of shamanism. Corresponding to the dualism of body and soul there are two conceptions of illness. In one, illness reflects the absence, departure or abduction of the soul (or one of them if there are several); in the other, it arises from an excess of some factor due to the introduction into the body of a pathogenic element.

The second explanation may itself take one of two contrasting forms. If the somatic signs are favored, the pathogenic agents are considered to be inanimate. If, on the other hand, the illness is viewed mainly in terms of its psychic effects or the behavioral changes it induces, the pathogenic agents are seen as animate, with animal, anthropomorphic or monstrous form.

This dual interpretation of pathogenic effects also reflects two empirical ways of experiencing sickness, which may be felt either as a loss of strength or vitality or as the intrusion of a foreign presence, causing pain, an impression of weight or a change in mood or personality.

To this duality in the conception of illness correspond two types of therapy: endorcism and exorcism. Either what has been lost has to be returned, or what has been added has to be removed. Endorcism is the return of the missing part, the reintroduction of the soul. Exorcism is the expulsion or transfer of the disruptive principle.

Both endorcism and exorcism are found in shamanism, even if endorcism is often dominant in the ideology. These two logical and complementary modes are rarely exclusive. While bringing back the soul, the shaman may suck on the afflicted part of the body, extract the harmful agent, materialize it and display it.

It is interesting here to surmise the parallelism between this two-sided concept of illness and notions of the shaman’s powers. In many shamanic societies the communication of the shaman with the other world is explicitly or implicitly conceived as having dual modes. The shaman not only receives messages from and converses with his (or her) auxiliary spirits, but he is also able to send one of his souls towards the other world. It is on this second form of communication that Eliade, and subsequently all “Eliadist” literature, has placed the greater emphasis.

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These, then, are the broad lines that permit a preliminary distinction of shamanism and avoid the pitfalls of so many “classical” but heterogeneous, misleading and unwarrantably constraining definitions. The best known of these is Eliade’s own, from which many others derive with few modifications a definition that has become a veritable shackle for anthropology:

Shamanism is an archaic technique of ecstasy. The shaman is a guide of the souls, a specialist of the mastery of fire, of magic flight and of a trance during which his (or her) soul is supposed to leave her or his body to undertake celestial ascents or infernal descents. He (she) has relations with spirits which he (she) dominates . . . He (she) communicates with the dead, the “demons” and the spirits of nature without being yet their instruments.2

Shamanism is here reduced to a set of heterogeneous features. For Eliade, the relations that combine the “shamanistic elements” and organize them into a system are secondary. He isolates these elements and attempts to identify them everywhere despite the fact that his definition reflects specific Siberian shamanisms.

Devereux also inspired some definitions. Without doubt one of the most questionable and peremptory of these definitions, which displays a mixture of his and Eliade’s influences (and here it is observed that, although constantly speaking of structure, they never really define any such thing), is the following:

Shamanism is a medico-magical activity founded on the capture of power and of symbolical efficiency. The shaman, who is generally an ancient mentally sick person, does his office as a “therapist” (1) either in fighting and taking away from his patient the pathogenic spirit that attacked him, (2) or on the contrary entering himself in possession and inviting his patient to enter with him in a two-persons madness and in a frenetic trance which is supposed to be purificatory. (my translation, Laplantine 1974: 248)

It is now obvious. These phenomenological and partial definitions mix the most imprecise psychological terms (trance, ecstasy, madness) with fortuitous elements from particular societies (magical flight, mastery of fire, infernal descents, etc.). They lend credence to previous ideas that prevent understanding and discourage investigation of the way in which an individual shamanic society responded in a specific manner to certain great, systematically organized principles.

However, if a shamanic system is defined to serve at least as a marker, such an ideal framework could accommodate many specific forms and externals. From behind an indisputable coherence emerge proper aesthetics and dynamisms.

Of course, this will not resolve the question of the spatial and temporal limits of the system. But it certainly helps to confront the problem more effectively if the same position is adopted for other systems dealing with misfortune, such as possession, sorcery, mediumism, etc.: the definition of sorcery, possession, etc., as systems permits at least to situate between them the often much more complex configurations corresponding to observed realities.3

This “systematic approach” might also help to avoid the permanent extension around the world of the words “shaman” and “shamanism,” a trend that appears to have established itself with the complicity of anthropologists.

References


2 Eliade 1951: 22–23, repeated in 1968: 124. For some variants of Eliade’s definition, see for example Reinhard 1972: 16; Lewis 1984: 4; Hultkrantz 1973; etc.

3 See Perrin 1995, Chapter V.
The Use of Music in the Ritual Practices of the Itako, a Japanese Shaman

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The itakos are able to go into a trance without taking narcotic drugs or engaging in strenuous physical exercise. They do so simply through chanting sutras. Before going on to describe the musical structure—the tonal system and rhythm—of these sutras, the author clarifies the notion of a trance, and what it would look like in practice. This is to preclude unproductive arguments about whether an itako is a shaman or not. The historical background of the itako’s practices will also be described in brief, as will the qualifications required for someone to become an itako. The procedures and ascetic rites engaged in, and the kinds of sutras and sacred ballads sung will also be described. Then, taking a typical sutra, kuchi yose (spirit talk), the text of the chants will be examined. So will the manner of its performance, its function for the itako, as well as its psychological effect on the audience. Finally, the significance of the itako for Japanese society will be addressed.

The Historical Background of the Itako

Blind female shamans have been known as azusa miko in Japan since the olden days. The name is derived from miko (shrine maiden) who played the azusa yumi (a bow made from the catalpa tree) in order to fall into a trance and become possessed by a spirit. This bow is already mentioned by name and described in the Kojiki (712) (Ogiwara 1973: 260). In the nô play “Ao no ue” by Zeami (1363–1443?), the spirit of the lady Rokujô no Miyasudokoro appears when an azusa miko plays the azusa bow (Itô 1983: 19). The name azusa miko appears in various pieces of literature (Sasamori 1989: 51).

Old documents originating in the Tsugaru district of northern Japan also describe the itako as azusa miko. The first appearance of the
term itako in Tsugaru is in “Iwate no Yama” (1788) by Sugae Masumi (1754–1822) (1788. 1: 439).

After the Meiji Restoration, in the 6th year of Meiji (1873), the Japanese government prohibited the practice of shamanism. Yet shamanism continues as a living practice to the present day, in spite of the periodic government injunctions issued against it in the past. Some itakos joined Buddhist sects and obtained missionary licenses; others practiced their art in secret. As time wore on, the prohibition lost its relevance: at one point, there were between fifty and one hundred itakos practicing in Aomori Prefecture.

Presently there are fewer than ten of them living in the Tsugaru district. The tradition is on the point of extinction. The main reason is that few potential practitioners meet the severe prerequisites: blind, female, and willing to undergo the required training as described more fully below. Another reason is the prejudice shown toward the profession: an itako deals with the impure spirits of the dead, something that Japanese people consider to be shameful. It is rare that a blind young woman would want to learn the trade today. This type of shamanism is doomed to disappear entirely in the very near future.

The Itako’s Qualifications

The fundamental qualifications of an itako are that she be blind, trained under a senior itako, and confirmed through an ascetic initiation rite.

The itako’s ritual practices are performed with a view to: (1) calling down or invoking the spirit of a client’s deceased ancestor (hotoke); communicating the instructions and wishes of the deceased to the living relatives; (2) calling down or invoking the kami (spirit), or spirits in general; (3) practicing divination for the benefit of her clients; (4) curing some illness; and (5) entertaining her clients by chanting sacred ballads and singing songs.

When a community or individual needs the services of an itako, she is invited to their place; people also visit the itako’s home, or go wherever the itako practices.

Is an itako really a shaman? The Japanese scholar Ichirō Hori has answered this question in the negative, and Carmen Blacker, the author of The Catalpa Bow, agrees. One passage in the book reads as follows:

The Use of Music in the Ritual Practices of the Itako

The blind mediums known as itako or ichiko are not considered by some authorities, notably Hori, to be true shamans . . . Nor are they capable any longer of achieving a truly ecstatic state. What passes for a trance among them is seen on shrewd inspection to be mere imitation. (Blacker 1975: 140)

“Are the words really from the spirits?” When the itako are asked this question, almost all of them reply, “Yes, they are.” They stress the fact that they: (1) cannot foretell what words will come to their “spirit possessed tongue”; (2) can’t remember anything the spirit or god said.

A trance is generally considered to be: (1) a temporary “absence” of the soul: stupor, hypnosis and/or ecstasy; (2) possession by a supernatural power.

Defining the term ‘trance’, Reinhard suggests that one should not take the word in a narrow sense:

The shaman is in a non-ordinary psychic state, which in some cases means not a loss of consciousness but rather an altered state of consciousness. . . . The definition arises out of what the shaman says he does and acceptance of this by members of his society rather than what might in reality be taking place. Therefore, perhaps the phrase “non-ordinary psychic state” should be substituted for “trance.” (Reinhard 1976: 20)

Is there any possibility that the itako really is in a trance during the ritual? If she is, it must be during the first half of the ritual, which usually takes 10 to 15 minutes. The itako might go into a “trance” through autohypnosis achieved with the help of grating her beads, tapping her bow, chanting a sutra, or a combination of the three.

All itakos, if they are officially confirmed through yurushi, a permit granted as a result of having undergone the ascetic initiation rite, experience a trance state at least once in their lifetime. The initiation rite, which continues for a week, consists of the following: (1) not eating any kind of grain, not taking salt; (2) no fire (during winter); (3) performing ablutions with cold water three times a day, even in the winter season; (4) reciting all the sutras and sacred ballads that have been learnt; (5) examination; (6) concluding celebration.

The Japanese scholar Tokutarō Sakurai has interpreted the initiation rite as a ceremony in which the candidate dedicates herself to the gods, or a symbolic marriage with the gods (Sakurai 1988: 243). But
my own research has shown that none of the present-day itako relate
the experience to marriage. What they have mentioned is that: (1) when
they faint, the god(s) enter into them; (2) when they come to, they blurt
out the names of the god(s) that will be their lifetime guardian deity;
(3) the rite is a means of acquiring extraordinary power; (4) the rite is
only to prove that they have done the required ascetic exercises; (5) the
fainting is nothing but the result of exhaustion.

At any rate, they all faint no matter what the interpretation. There
are, thus, two possible explanations for the subsequent “trances”: (1)
the itako can revert at will to her original, post-initiation trance state;
(2) once they have experienced trance, they are capable of calling the
spirit at any time.

The initiation rite involves exhaustion by hunger, cold, and loss of
sleep. The endless repetition of chants can also lead to a state of stupor.
A succession of short gasps, panting, and listening to repetitive, monoton-
onous sounds can make a person dazed, just as violent body movement
can. Neurological tests conducted by the Japanese researcher Takeichi
Tsugawa (1989) indicate a correlation between the itako’s trance and
epileptic seizures.

Here again I would like to point out the fact that all itakos are blind. It
seems safe to assume that the itakos are not adept at using their bodies
to demonstrate movement and spatial structures; they cannot transmit
much of the traditional kinetic meaning of the society to which they
belong. The shamanic element characteristic of the itako is verbal art.

The Sutras

There are 15 or more sutras and myths. There are no written texts;
they are all learnt and handed down orally.

(1) Spirit talk (kuchi yose). The components and procedures of spirit
talk are:

(a) Preliminary portion of the ritual
(b) Summoning the gods (kami yose)
(c) Searching for and calling a spirit (hotoke yobi)
(d) Declaration by a spirit (kudoki)
(e) Sending off the spirit of a dead (hotoke okuri)
(f) Sending off a divine spirit (kami okuri)
(g) Remarks by the itako on what the spirits or gods said

(h) Receiving a fee for having performed the rite
(i) Driving what is left of the spirits out of her body by rubbing herself
with the rosary beads.

(2) Tutelary gods. Guardian gods of the local community (ubusuna)
(3) Invocation of the gods (kami sandan)
(4) Sutra about humans (ningen kyō)
(5) Heavenly plain (Takamaga hara)
(6) Thirty-three Kannons (sanjū san Kannon)
(7) Rice-sprinkling sutra (sango date)
(8) Counting of the shrines (kuni gake)
(9) Curing illness
(10) Celebration of the New Year (aratama)
(11) A ritual text about the god Oshira (Oshira sainom)
(12) An epic record about the god of Mount Iwaki (Iwaki-san ichi-
daiki)
(13) An epic record about the god Konpira (Konpira ichidaiki)
(14) The god Inari (Inari-sama)
(15) Sutra or magic spell that one narrates when one makes nine sym-
bolic signs (kuji) with the fingers (kuji wo kiru tokino najinai).

The texts which an itako chants or narrates can be: (1) an entirely
fixed text; (2) a fixed plot with some fixed phrases and words; (3)
improvised.

Hand props, the hogu that an itako uses, are sacred objects whose
usual function is to make noise.

The Texts

On examining the texts of kuchi yose (spirit talk), we find them to bear
a close resemblance to Buddhist sutras and to yamabushi texts. Wasan,
the Japanese version of Buddhist hymns, and the popular texts of folk-
lore are similar in content.

The following is the translation of a part of a hotoke yobi sutra. If a
woman dies unmarried, or without bearing or fostering children, she
will be sent to the hell described below.

The hell for unmarried women is a miserable place; if she looks up above, she
will see a carriage of fire, if she looks down, she will see a carnage of black
iron. The hell for women who have had an abortion is a miserable place; they
The altar for kuchi yose (spirit talk) is constructed as follows: three straw rice bags are tied together, and bamboo sticks with strips of sacred paper on them are thrust through the bags. This is the traditional altar, but an alternative one can be made from sake, a pile of rice grains, dried squid, dried seaweed, rice cakes, salt, whole fish, and short stakes of willow or maple. These stakes, called yama (mountain), are the place where the spirits from the other world descend and stay.

The altar for the initiation rite is made of three straw rice bags (as above), and two piles of rice grain on which bamboo poles are placed. Candles, fish, and sake are also placed in front of the rice bags (Bunkachō 1986: 36–44). Every itako has in her home her own altar, a syncretistic Buddhist–Shinto altar in appearance.

The Musical Aspects

Instruments. The bead rosary (irataka no juzu) is made of three hundred or more diamond-shaped wooden beads. When they are rubbed, they make a loud sound. Animal jawbones, skeletons, claws, horns and old coins are attached to the beads. These are the charms that protect their owner from evil spirits.

The beads are used to (1) keep time; (2) mark the phrase ending; (3) imitate the sounds of nature; and (4) fill the pause between words or to cover up the mistaken words.

The bow is made of catalpa, mulberry or maple wood. The string is made of hemp with which, it is said, three strands of the itako’s hair must also be entwined. A bamboo stick measuring 3 shaku is used to tap the string. A drum or a crosier is sometimes used in place of the bow or of the beads.

Vocal. The vocal part of the itako’s performance can be one of three types: narration, chant, and a combination of parlando and singing.

(1) Narration is used mostly in kudoki (declaration by a spirit). The salient characteristics of the “declaration” are the tone color (timbre), rhythm, tempo and the manner of breathing.

(2) Chant: Fifteen types of chants performed by six different itakos have been analyzed for their tonal systems as shown in fig. 1. The tonal systems of the sutras are shown in figs. 2a and 2b. The

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1 One yujun is equal to seven miles.

2 One shaku is equal to 0.994 ft. Shaku is the basic form of this term, jaku is the result of certain spelling rules in combinations.
chants consist of several short melodic patterns which are freely varied. There are several styles of chanting, depending upon the person chanting or the sutra.

(3) The combinations of narration and chanting can be heard mostly in the performance of sacred ballads. Here, choking, crying, and falsetto are used. What text is combined with what melody depends on who one’s teachers have been.

Musical Structure

Tonal System. The chants fall into one of two tonal systems: either the anhemitonic pentatonic or the hemitonic pentatonic scale. Only two of the chants sung by the *itako* Mrs. Kasai (and shown in fig. 1) were hemitonic.

The smallest tonal system is comprised of 3 notes, the beginning and end note giving a perfect fourth as also shown in fig. 1. The largest is 7 notes, the beginning and end note giving a minor tenth.

Melodic Patterns. A monotone psalmodic style is the simplest melody that we find in the chants. The melodic patterns are of a limited number, and of short duration; emphasis is by repetition. Some examples are shown in figs. 3 and 4. Unlike in European art music, we can discover no formal patterns in the *itako* chants; at most, short phrases recur at random intervals.

Rhythm and Tempo. The rhythm—a metric rhythm—is given by the beat of one of the traditional instruments. The syllables of the text also fall into a rhythmic pattern.

The tempo is conditioned by the nature of the sutras. *Hanako* (sutra used when calling the infant spirit) is usually slow; *hotoke okuri* (sutra for sending off the spirit) is faster.

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Fig. 1. Tonal system by the *itako*.

Names of the six *itako* are in first line on top of the table.
Fig. 2 a. Tonal system of the sutras.
The names of types of chants are in the first line on top of the page.
Kasai S. and Kasai K. are names of itakos.

Fig. 2 b. Tonal system of the sutras.
The names of types of chants are in the first line on top of the page.
Fig. 3. Example of an Iwaki-san ichidaiki type of chant as sung by itako Kasai K.

Fig. 4. Example of an iki kuchi type of chant as sung by itako Kasai K.
Conclusions

In Japan, one is supposed to believe that the spirit continues to live on after separating from the body. It can live in heaven, in the mountains, underground, or in the ocean. None of these places are considered to be far away. It is believed that communication between this world and the next is not difficult. In shamanic rituals, the impurity and fearsome nature of the spirits of the dead changes to harmless hotoke. The term hotoke (spirit of a dead person) originally meant the Buddha. In the other world, the hotoke is purified and loses its personality. It unites with its ancestor spirits, and watches over its descendants by occasional visits to this world.

The clients sob and cry while listening to the voice of the spirit. Their breathing synchronizes with the rhythm of the spirit’s breathing, who has come from the dark world of death. It has been delivered by a mysterious woman, the itako, who is blind, and so also lives in a dark world. The utterances of the spirit have neither high ethical nor philosophical quality. The ritual is, rather, an act of faith in human sentiment. It expresses the belief that the ancestor spirit will protect his/her descendants. People are good to the spirits—they call the spirits and give them offerings—hoping that their own descendants will respect and worship them after they die. This is the sentiment and belief behind the itako ritual.

As already stated, the itakos do not use drugs or other substances to induce a trance. They go into a trance through chanting. Chanting has a psychological effect on the listeners as well. It is the route that the itako uses to journey to other worlds; chanting is the passageway through which the spirit descends to the human world and returns to the spirit world; it is the “place” where man and spirit can engage in conversation. Unfortunately, the chanting and the sutras will soon disappear: there are no successors learning the art, and the youngest itako is now 65 years old.

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References


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Shamanism in Yughur Folk Tales

JINWEN ZHONG

Shamanism, an archaic religion, represents a traditional way of thinking that pervades Yughur (Yellow Uyghur) folklore. It has also deeply influenced the history of Yughur culture. Based partly on Yughur folk tales published in Chinese translation and partly on his own fieldwork, the author discusses shamanic elements that occur in Yughur folk beliefs.

It is a basic tenet of shamanism that all beings have souls (*ling*). Moreover, nature worship occupies an important place in shamanism, with heaven, earth, sun, moon, the stars, hills, rivers and plants as its primary objects. The widely known and recited tale of Asihasi (*Yugu minjian* 1985), which has a central role in Yughur marriage rites, is also a representative piece on the cult of the god of heaven. According to this tale the world was created by the god of heaven, who filled up the sea with loess and supported the sky with four pillars to hold it aloft. This myth, although later connected with Śākyamuni Buddha, is definitely of non-Buddhist origin: the subsequent addition of Buddha's power to the myth does not efface the real nature of the god of heaven's wealth. The absolute superiority of the god of heaven in shamanism is the product of shamanic ideas concerning the origin of mankind. A more important aspect of the myth is, however, the interpretation of the character of the god of heaven. The idea of the earth as having been created by filling up the sea and that heaven rests on four pillars standing in the sea implies that the sea was the origin of everything—the god of heaven included. This contradictory character of the god of heaven in Yughur folklore reflects the survival of an important idea in Yughur thinking: the idea that since heaven and water were once connected, heaven and earth originally formed a chaotic unity. Heaven is called *tengri* (or *khan tengri*) by the national minorities of northern China. The word is rather similar to the Turkic *dengiz*, meaning ‘sea’.
It is clear from this connection that the cult of the god of heaven is in fact based on the cult of water—and water is the symbol of the origin of life. Thus, although at first sight the tale of Ashihasi appears to tell of the origin of matrimony, its deeper structure reveals the connection of the origin of mankind with water.

In another Yughur tale entitled “The Heavenly Ox of the Eastern Sea,” we are told that a long time ago there lived a heavenly ox in the Eastern Sea. Every year its bellowing could be heard from the beginning of summer until wintertime. In the years when the bellowing was rarely heard the winds were good and the rain was favourable; when it was heard frequently drought was sure to follow. The people of those times were not aware of this rule, only discovering it after the heavenly ox had been killed by hunters. Since then, however, it has never been forgotten. Turkic people have a belief of similar content—that “water ox had been killed by hunters. Since then, however, it has never been forgotten.

Shamanism in Yughur Folk Tales

To ensure offspring, it is a widespread custom among Yughurs that barren women steal or in some way procure children’s wear from a Buddhist temple near water. Tales of encounters of aged, childless people with an ox, such as “The Single-Horned Ox,” have their origin in this custom. Here, too, the underlying idea appears to be that water is the source of life.

The rite Khan Tengri, which is practised to the present day, points to a shamanic nature cult. The meaning of the term is ‘heavenly khan’. Since, according to the Yughurs, Khan Tengri is able to avert disasters and ensure wellbeing throughout the year, the rite has always been regarded as very significant. It is performed twice a year, the more important observance invariably being held by the side of a river or lake. From this it may be deduced that the rite, although nominally dedicated to heaven, is in fact a homage to water. With the progress of mankind and the evolution of human thinking, the original, primeval connection between water and heaven receded into the background and was transformed by new experiences (Wu 1984), but it survived to become as vital a religious observance as it was in the past.

In “The Tale of Mola” the hero, fighting against the damage wrought by a snow-demon, follows the advice of an old man and visits the sun-god (taiyang shen) by the Eastern Sea. Mola makes obeisance to the sun-god and learns how to get hold of the magic treasure, with which he is able to subdue the snow-demon. Overcoming various perils, Mola borrows from the sun-god a magic fire-gourd, but, because he forgets how to put it out, the magic fire continues to bum even after the demon has died. Mola can extinguish the fire only by stopping the mouth of the magic gourd with his own body and, on doing so, he is transformed by the fire into a hill of red stones.

Sun and fire were originally one and the same god in the thinking of primeval man and became divided into two deities only at a later stage of social development. The sun god is a god that fosters and supports all creatures, whereas the fire-god exists for the benefit of man alone. In the tale of Mola the bifurcation of the notions of fire and sun in primeval man’s thinking is readily apparent. At the same time, however, it reflects without embellishment the dreadful fact that man is unable to control the magic fire-gourd obtained from the sun-god. There must, therefore, have been a close tie between the cult of the sun-god and the desire of the Yughurs’ ancestors to subdue the forces of nature.

This kind of world concept is expressed even more strikingly in the following two mythical tales of the Yughur. In “The Tale of Sun-Mother (Ri mu) and Moon-Father (yue fu)” (Wu 1991) we are told that after the separation of heaven and earth there existed only the moon (yue liang) and the sun (taiyang). They were husband and wife, our ancestors. Their many cattle and sheep are now the stars. After land had been created by the sun-god of heaven (tianshangde taiyang shen), they drove their flocks down to earth. Later there was a great inundation and the Sun-Mother and Moon-Father drove their flocks once more back to heaven, the rainbow in the sky being their whip.

In “The Story of the Magic Pearls (Shen zhu)” we are told that in the beginning there was darkness on earth and men had to crawl around like animals. They were afraid of everything and did not know what to do. The god of heaven then threw down two magic pearls, one yellow and one white, to give them light. One day a man and his wife went to
the wilderness to dig up roots to eat. Noticing the magic pearls, the man happily grasped the yellow one and his wife picked up the white one. They started to play with them and, nobody knows how, all at once they became united with the pearls and lo, one was transformed into a shining yellow fireball and the other into a dazzling white one. Both flew up into heaven, where they started to shine and rotate. It was only then that people noticed the existence of the many things on earth. Later the white fireball was named the sun and the yellow one the moon.

In these two tales sun and moon occur together and form a family, and there are men among them who become gods and gods who become men. This ensemble of men and gods reflects the cognitive stage at which no distinction is made between ego and object. The notion of sun being mother and moon father is common with Turkic peoples in general; the cult of the sun-god is closely related to motherly love: the sun shines on the earth, giving life to everything like a loving mother caring for her children. This gave rise to the honorific title “Fire-Mother.”

The cult of the fire-god is based on two kinds of experience. Natural fires caused by lightning could be a disaster for primitive man and struck terror into him. On the other hand, there were his impressions of the sun and his first attempts to use fire. These two kinds of experience gave the nature of the fire-god a rather complicated form. The twofold nature of the fire-god is expressed in Yughur folklore in various ways. With the fire-gourd he obtains from the sun-god of the Eastern Sea, Mola is able to destroy the cold-arousing snow-demon, but, at the same time, the fire from the gourd turns the hero into a hill of stones. In the tale “The Three-Headed Demon and the Valiant Youngster” the means for kindling fire are regarded as a treasure and are guarded with care; when these are lost and people go in search of a new fire, the new kind of fire they find in the land of the mangus proves to be dangerous. This duality in the character of the fire-god is a concentrated reflection of various contradictory experiences of the great natural phenomena.

Shamanism originated in wooded regions, in the age of primitive hunting and fishing. Beliefs, taboos, the rules of life—all are connected with the object of hunting, the wild animals. In the age of hunting and fishing our forebears lived in caves, caught animals and birds, ate their flesh, drank their blood and slept on their hide, but in their struggle for survival they might be hurt by their prey and were sometimes even devoured by them. In the course of this struggle for existence with the beasts there arose the cult of animals among our distant forebears, who were aware of their own weakness.

Many Yughur tales deal with this topic. The majority of animals appear as endowed with divine powers, as far wiser than men or as benevolent and upright. In these tales animals play a decisive role and cannot be dispensed with. They have lost their wild nature, their ferocity, and there are no fantastic animals. In most cases the animals come to aid man, helpless against the forces of nature, with their magic powers or divine might. This aspect of the plot is the outcome of shamanic animal cults.

In tales of this kind the animals, whose fates are inseparably linked with those of men, are all, without exception, wild. Although not as closely related to man as domestic animals, these beasts always play a decisive role in man’s destiny. They are liable to mete out both good luck and misfortune very readily. The peculiarities of the narrative are especially suggestive in such tales. In “The Pearled Deer” and “Fox-Fur Cap” the protagonists, as the titles suggest, are a deer and a fox, and the stories concern the relation of these animals with man. The first relates that the hunter Saka wishes to shoot a gazelle for his pregnant wife. In his pursuit of the wounded animal he reaches the desert. The weather changes suddenly, darkness falls and a storm breaks out. Saka becomes lost and is unable to find his way home. There follow ten years of difficult wandering during which he cannot find his way. He is on the point of taking his own life when he meets a beautiful spotted deer. The deer leads him to a place where he finds food and drink and, ultimately, to his home. This benevolent creature had earlier been rescued by the son who his wife had borne after his disappearance.

The second tale tells how, after a master archer had shot two fox cubs, darkness set in, a storm broke and the archer was taken into the desert by a great red fox. His bride also finds herself in deadly peril. The pair are punished for having killed the fox’s cubs. From this time on the head-gear of Yughur brides is made of the fur of two foxes, the bride starting to wear it three days before the marriage ceremony both in commemoration and as a reminder.

In the tale “The Ape Daughter-in-law” the ape possesses superhuman wisdom and solves the most intricate human problems with ease. This ability testifies not only to her wisdom but also to the fact that she is an envoy of the gods who governs the affairs of the world and achieves tasks unattainable by mortal men. When the skin of the ape is burned...
by a heedless youngster, he finds himself before a monster who is neither human nor spirit.

In this world of monsters men change into animals and animals into men, the will of the gods is realized in the changes that befall men and the fate of men depends on the whims of the animals.

The ties between man and his domestic animals are close and are based on their functions in his everyday life. In this relationship man has gained the upper hand, so in tales that feature such animals their divine nature is effaced and traces of their former cult are somewhat vague. At the same time domestic animals were undoubtedly revered and worshipped by our ancestors, for whom they would still have possessed a divine nature. In the fable of Asihasi we are told, along with the story of the earth’s creation, that Yughurs possess three treasures: horses, cattle and sheep. The place these animals occupy in the everyday life of the Yughurs is obvious and remains unaffected by the changes the stories that were told of them underwent in the course of the centuries. In ancient times the importance of the relation of an animal to man depended directly on its divine nature. For our nomadic ancestors the horse was very important. The identity of a popular hero and his mount became inseparable, the fate of the champion being one and the same as that of his steed. Among Yughurs it is forbidden to eat the meat of animals “with a pointed muzzle and a round paw,” i.e. of the ass, the horse and the dog a taboo that is connected with the cult of these animals. “The Tale of the Bare-Backed Ass” tells how a woman mistreats her young brother-in-law. The benevolent character of the ass reveals its divine nature: not only is it able to speak but it is able to foretell the future, and it commiserates with the younger brother in his need. The gist of the tale is that when the brothers divide the family wealth between them, the younger brother gets only a bare-backed ass, but the ass is able to do anything for its master. In her greed the sister-in-law wants to have even the ass, but the ass is able to do anything for its master. In her greed the sister-in-law wants the hide back—and so on. Finally, the wicked woman dies of anger and the good ones live happily ever after.

It is known from their folklore that in their nomadizing life the Yughur chose a leader from among their animals which they then called “divine horse/ox/sheep.” The chosen animal wore a red scarf on its shoulder and was not allowed to be killed, eaten or even mounted (Wu 1984).

Birds occupy a peculiar place among the gods of shamanism. The peoples living in Northern China consider birds before all as incarnations of shamans or as their sacred animals. In Yughur folk tales birds of prey appear most frequently, followed by wild geese and then swans. Besides these real birds there are sacred birds that change into men, associate with them and have a heavenly mission. They played an intricate role on the stage of our ancestors’ lives that is not easy to explain. In this respect “The Tale of the Eaglet (Sarmila)” can be mentioned as a piece of representative character. A boy is rescued by an eagle after being exposed on a hillside. The child is reared by the eagle, learns the language of the animals and acquires the name Sarmila, or “Eagle-Son.” Sarmila learns many skills among the eagles, which he uses to promote the wellbeing of the nomads. As a result, they come to consider the eagles as their parents.

The common element of the tales about birds is that a character is carried into the skies, where he is brought up to a life in the air and masters various skills. This aspect reflects the divine power, the magic skills of the shamans. It is generally held that shamans are “envoys” of the divine world among men. The word for shaman in the language of the Western Yughur is elči—akin to the Old Turkic elči, which is, in fact the same word, meaning ‘envoy’. It was held by our ancestors that shamans are mediators of the will of the gods among men. According to the logic of primeval man, if the shaman acts as an envoy of the gods he must always be journeying between heaven and earth. Since it stands to reason that a person who does so is able to fly, in the world concept of shamanism shamans are capable of flying. In addition, it is believed that things that are close to the sky (tengri), such as high hills or tall trees, are “heavenly ladders” that help to communicate with heaven. They house gods and spirits and merit special reverence. In the same way, it was believed by our forebears that eagles circling freely in the sky were able to soar up among the clouds and thus approach nearer to heaven and the god of heaven than hills and tall trees. Moreover, the ability of eagles not only to soar high but also to come down to earth conveyed the idea of a mighty power. In their thinking perception and emotion became fused, the objective and the subjective aspects of the
ancestors to be similar to man. When, under certain conditions, a shaman is abandoned by his demon it means the loss of his power. The mangus is a high-ranking figure of the shamanic spirit world. The power of manguses and gods reflects the inability of our ancestors to cope with natural disasters. “The Three-Headed Demon and the Brave Youngster” relates that a long time ago there lived a young Yughur couple. Once, when the man went out hunting, the woman let the fire go out and so had to go in search of some means of rekindling it. After night had fallen she found a yurt where there was a fire. An old woman living in the yurt put ashes in a fold of the wife’s robe and placed some embers on them. When the wife returned home with the embers the old woman, who was in fact a three-headed mangus, followed the trail of ashes trickling to the ground. Thereafter she visited the couple’s home every night and sucked the wife’s blood. On discovering this, her husband engaged in a desperate fight with the mangus that ended in serious wounds for both parties.

This story tells of the condition of primeval man in which he knew fire but had not mastered its use. In the early shamanic world the fire-god is the most powerful. The fear of fire is striking, the loss of fire forebodes danger, and the link between the mangus and the disaster is important proof of the magic power of the demons. In a tale entitled “The Two Horses and Three Brothers of Shumushi” the loss of the dove-attire by the three girls leads to a similar outcome.

“The Story of the Cruel Old Man” is a mangus tale that has connections with the cult of hills. When an old man turns his five daughters out of their home, they find shelter in an old woman’s cave. Not only is their life saved in this way: after killing the old woman’s man-eating son, a mangus, with her help, they adopt her as their mother and live happily ever after.

This story of a kinship with cave people is by no means without foundation. In it the contradictory experiences of our ancestors are expressed. Caves afforded shelter, so our ancestors were attracted by them. Yet, at the same time many frightening natural phenomena—mysterious, unexplained and unforeseeable—occurred in the mountains where the caves were found. High mountains were associated with a feeling that they cannot be conquered. On these contradictory emotions are based all religious sentiments and beliefs. They are also the underlying reasons for the cult of hills.
Apart from its various demonic manifestations, the *mangus* figure expresses an important social meaning. When shamanism flourished among the nomadic Yughur, those practising shamanism enjoyed considerable support and power. Because of this, the increasing complexity of social conditions showed its influence in the formation of the spirit world. In this way traditional thinking, from which shamanism emerged and evolved, was able to penetrate to the innermost recesses of the soul, from where it influenced the development of Yughur folklore more strongly than ever. In the *mangus* stories real-life heroes and imaginary gods, the objective world and that of the spirits, coalesced into one to create the peculiar domain of Yughur folklore. Later *mangus* stories approached actual social conditions more closely: the heroes, the khans, show superhuman wisdom, courage and power—but they are no longer gods, only deified mortals from the world of men. These heroic khans are to be noted not only for subduing rebels and pacifying a turbulent world but also for having destroyed *manguses*.

The story of “The Present of the *Khatus*” has been collected by the author. The content of this hitherto unpublished tale can be summarized as follows.

A khan goes to war. Before departing he asks his three wives to honour him on his return with a present. Two of the wives promise to make coloured robes embroidered with gold and silver; the third says she will bear him a nice son. The first two wives, jealous of the third, pose as midwives and, when the boy is born, they destroy him secretly and put him on his return with a present. Two of the wives promise to make coloured robes embroidered with gold and silver; the third says she will bear him a nice son. The first two wives, jealous of the third, pose as midwives and, when the boy is born, they destroy him secretly and put him in his place. On his return the khan becomes very angry and orders the princesses to explain the significance of the khan’s fight with the *mangus*. According to Yughur tradition, however, the *jiaoashi* did not die: when someone emits a shrill cry in a gorge, the echo sounds in honour of her soul.

Shamanism is a magic (*wushu*) religion of special form. Not only is the magic activity of the shaman connected with the cult of spirits, his authority is also strengthened by his power of prophecy. Yughur folk tales include instances in which this power is referred to. In the *Tale of Two Brothers* a spirit appears to an old man in a dream; during the celebration of a sacrifice the hero of the tribe, Suerke, finds a clear spring at the foot of the sacred tree, which saves the tribe from destruction. The running water that flows from beneath the holy stone makes the wilderness flourish and allows the herd to be enlarged. Having found a source of water in the sand, he is elected to be the khan of the tribe.

Shamans and wizards had considerable power in Yughur history. The Yughur word for shaman is *qam*. Malov gives this as the regular term; generally the shaman is called *iiči* (Malov 1957: 52). According to the *Zin Tang shu* (1975: 6148) wizards were called *qam* by the Kirghiz. Mahmud al-Kashghari, a Turkic author of the 11th century, defines *qam* in his *Dīwān ḥašat-at-turk* as ‘prophet, shaman’. This must have been the original meaning.

After this elucidation of the Yughur term for shaman it remains to explain the significance of the khan’s fight with the *manguses*. In Yughur folk tales heroes, khans and wizards all play the same role.

The fight of the hero or khan with the *mangus* is a relatively late phenomenon in Yughur folk tales, and it reflects the historical development described earlier. The cults of the sphere of popular customs coalesced with the magic notions of shamanic belief. Courageous and wise as the khans in these tales may be, it is more important that they possess the

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immortal soul and the divine power of the shaman-wizards. Thereby the power of all the gods and spirits becomes united in the person of the khan and shamanism is brought into the sphere of politics. After the rise of Lamaism the social status of the shamans diminished and folklore was enveloped by a veil of Buddhism.

References


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An Archaic Rite in Nanai Shaman Ceremonies

T. D. BULGAKOVA

During the period 1980–1990 I had the opportunity to observe and tape-record different Nanai rites in settlements in the Khabarovsk Territory, Russian Federation. Since to date only isolated texts of shamanic rites have been published, 1 one of my tasks was to collect as much material as possible on a waning tradition. The recorded pieces were translated and commented on in detail by their performers. The most valuable assistance was provided by the shamaness Gara Gelker (1914–1985), who appreciated that Nanai shamanism was devoid of historical prospects and was of the opinion that knowledge of the Nanai shamans could be preserved for the future only in books.

Among the items collected were transcriptions of shaman ceremonies and also of rites performed without a shaman. Comparative study revealed that some rites have an independent existence, falling outside the practice of a shaman, yet are at the same time included in shaman ceremonies as separate parts. Although these rites and their counterparts in shaman ceremonies are referred to by the same popular terms, the way in which they are performed is different. In a non-shamanic rite the words are improvised and intoned like ordinary speech with elements of incantation. The words of the corresponding parts of the shaman ceremony are more fixed and are chanted to the accompaniment of a drum. Another difference is that the actions in a non-shamanic rite are performed by a man, whereas the same actions in a shamanic rite are carried out by a spirit manipulated by a man. If people able to see spirits are present at a shaman ceremony, they may give a precise

1 The texts of archaic rites have so far been published only to illustrate certain assumptions in ethnographic works (Gaer 1984; Smoliak 1974). Part of a shaman ceremony (Döszegi 1972) and two short shaman prayers (Bulgakova 1989) have also been published.
account of how the spirits carry out the shaman’s orders. Furthermore, a non-shamanic rite deals with real things (with other people or natural phenomena, animated in accordance with Nanai beliefs), whereas a shaman ceremony is concerned with souls and other spirits. Finally, the action of a rite that has become part of a shaman ceremony is transferred into a specific mental space. This requires explanation. The Nanai believe that, like their human counterparts, souls and spirits are capable of moving in real, everyday space. Old people say that in the past, when there were many shamans on the Amur River, luminescence could be discerned floating above the water and surrounding taiga as darkness fell and the shaman ceremonies began, the light being the spirits aroused by the shamans. A shaman himself will also state the exact itinerary in real space (for example, from one real house in a village to another) on which he is sending his spirits. Spirits, however, can penetrate ideal spaces that are inaccessible to ordinary perception. These have real, concrete locations, such as sites of spirit worship, in a sanctuary or inside a rock or hill. During a shaman ceremony or while sleeping a shaman is able to enter these concrete locations and find the unreal space within, whose vastness contrasts with the size of the object that contains it. The rites to which I am referring are performed by a shaman when he or she enters such a space, which is called a jokaso or ogjian.²

A jokaso may also be located in a cliff or elevation, especially if the elevation is the mound on the site of an ancient settlement, or even inside a fish. One known jokaso is an invisible town at the foot of a cliff not far from the real village at the confluence of the Amur and Sungari rivers. A shaman, penetrating the jokaso during a ceremony or in his sleep, sees a big village or a town with stone houses. The houses are inhabited by the souls of living people. Each jokaso has a river and, even if sited underground, has a sky, a sun (only dimmer than the genuine one), a moon and stars. Alien spirits cannot penetrate it as it is surrounded by a solid fence and gates, which are usually locked fast and will admit only the shaman of the particular jokaso. A jokaso is also guarded by spirits—dogs, tigers and other beasts. One shamanic report mentioned that in a dream she saw eight jackal packs and nine wolf packs around her jokaso. The masters of a jokaso are the spirit Father Maito and Mother Maija (each has its own Maito and Maija). They are some of the shaman’s various ajami, whose wooden figures he keeps at home. Father Maito maintains order in the jokaso and protects the souls dwelling in it. Mother Maija takes care of the souls, treats them, feeds them kidney-beans and gives them tincture of ledum to drink (ritual food and drink also used by the Nanai to treat their spirits). She also suckles the souls of any seriously ill persons in the jokaso. When the masters of a jokaso have something important to tell their shaman (if, for example, he is guilty of something) they meet him, with crowns on their heads, on the elevation in the eastern part of the jokaso over which the sun rises.

A shaman inherits a jokaso from his ancestors and, if his mother’s and father’s families include several shamans, he may come into possession of a number of jokasos. He acquires his jokaso while sleeping. He dreams that he is approaching a jokaso but that spirits, wolves, tigers and dogs will not let him in. The shaman must calm the animals and put collars on the dogs before he can be admitted. Then he has to settle matters with the stem masters of the jokaso, Father Maito and Mother Maija, and win their friendship. If his efforts meet with success, he is considered to be yatagani, the holder of a jokaso. This means that he may visit it during his ceremonies and that the spirits of the jokaso will serve him. Should he fail to master these spirits at the first attempt, the same dream is repeated several times, as if he were being offered further opportunities to acquire the jokaso. A shaman does not always succeed. Old folks remember the shaman Piloza, who, although assisted by strong spirits and passing for a good shaman, nevertheless failed to acquire a single jokaso belonging to his forebears and was therefore obliged, with their consent, to use his brothers’ jokaso during ceremonies.

Jokasos are located in real areas where the shaman’s forebears dwelt. When, during a ceremony, he sets off for a jokaso the shaman enumerates the concrete geographical points he passes, and it is possible from these to deduce where this or that Nanai kin lived.

A shaman places the souls of his patients in a jokaso. If the illness is caused by the fact that the soul (panjan) has abandoned the patient, a shaman performs a ceremony called taociori, during which he follows the soul’s trail, finds it, exorcises evil spirits, swallows it with water prepared in advance and then goes up to the patient and returns his soul by breathing it out at him. However, during the shaman ceremonies I

² Researchers mention briefly that the souls of the sick can be sent to an ogjian by a shaman. This is why I allow myself to give detailed data on my field research (Gaer 1978).
Pregnant women and children were usually treated in the same way. The rite influenced a coming birth and indicated how it would go. If the hoop passed freely, without touching the body, the birth would be easy. The text of such a rite is given below.

_Er be isiočani. Puril er be isiočani. Xaida orkin opoandami. Tuj ulėndi, tur-gendi opoandini-goa. Turgan daliory-mėt tuj silkomsa._

The time is coming. It is time to give birth to a child. May nothing bad happen. It will pass well and quickly. As quickly as this hoop passes.

The following text is taken from a rite for treating a child with a hoop.

Porondolani poldo
muireleni multi,
unčilani ungė,
sol-sol, dal-dal.
Ulėn gudiėni bald’iondu!
Urėktė-mėt uriėndu!
Sol-sol, dal-dal.
Dai urėguėri,
ulėn balǰigoani,
sol-sol, dal-dal.
Xaolia ulėn osiondo!
Ulėn balǰiondo!

(The hoop passes), the top of the head tears the threads,
Sliding over the shoulders,
Descending to the heels,
Sol-sol, dal-dal.
Live well!
Grow as a purple willow does!
Sol-sol, dal-dal.
May he grow big,
May he live well,
Sol-sol, dal-dal.
I pray, may he feel well!
May he live well!

3 According to E. A. Gaer, the threads should remain intact; their tearing portends a bad outcome to the illness.
Such rites can be performed by anyone and not only by shamans. Even when performed by shamans they are still not specifically shamanic rites. The sōlboačiori only becomes a shaman rite when incorporated in a shaman ceremony, when a shaman brings the soul of a patient to a jokaso. The mistress of the jokaso, Mother Maija, heals the soul with a hoop and the shaman tells her what to do:

Sōlboačio!
Enie, telbėgėmbėni
pukičiėlėni
pumbėliu!
Siandolani simboliu!
Giandolani gibambo!
Mėjrėlėni multuliu!
Xėnueliu xėnueliu!
Sōlboačigoi!
Cumčuien duelėni
čimčuliu!
Čokilani čilomsa,
okilani olbimi!
Palgandolani palimsa!

Perform the sōlboačiori rite!
Cut the illness in two and pull
it down from the top of the head
on either side of it!
Pull it off the ears!
Stretch it and pull it over the jaws!
Slide from the shoulders!
Fall down from the chest!
Perform the sōlboačiori rite!
Shake it (the illness) off the
finger tips!
Pull it off the pelvis,
Carrying it
away from the hips, pluck it off the feet!

Immediately after this the mistress of the jokaso performs one more rite over the soul of the patient. This is called puėhlėdiuri. E. A. Gaer (1984) was the first to describe the similar non-shamanic rite: “Holy splinters giusadan, narrow strips, made of the skin of a Siberian weasel and of different fabrics, were tied to a niŋmako stick. All of them were tied together, making a sort of besom. The besom was passed along the body, as if sweeping the illness away. The illness was being asked to go, the non-semantic word puėh was repeated.” I was able to record several puėhlėdiuri rites that were resorted to not to cure an illness but in response to a flood or bad weather. The common element in these rites is action aimed at driving something away. In a healing rite it is an illness; in other rites it may be clouds threatening bad weather or the rising waters of a flood. It is the essence of a ritual action (in, for example, driving something away, pacifying something or putting somebody off his guard) rather than the immediate practical purpose of a specific performance that is significant in classifying Nanai ritual genres. The word puėh (or puėjeh) is also common to all these rites. This word is pronounced melodiously and is accompanied by certain gestures: the movements of a besom in a healing rite, sweeping gestures with the hand to imitate dispersing clouds or the pushing movements made in the water with his feet by an incantator sitting on a river bank.

The following text is taken from a rite aimed at stopping the rain:4

Puėh! Tėvėksė, χuėduruėh! Tėvėksė, χuėdurusuėh! Χėi, soli kaltarami,
ėnėmi χuėduruėh! Puėh! Tėvėksė, gudėruėh! Ėusi-taosi gudėruėh! Jakaugoe
aŋgosîlambî. Siumbė garpaqoandu! Siumbė aŋbimbogoro! Pueh! Xoalish
guĵėsû! Puėh! Puėh! Puėh! Puėh! Puėh! Bėjumbė vandagoi tajau,
ťei iai aŋgosîni, xoŋimu, bėjumbė, vandagoi. Jepuridė kėjukė. Ėlė jepuridė,
ėlė margaalapî. Žepugueri gelendēguerî, bėjumbė vandagoi ta. Bėjumbė naža
osini, goidami-da jekpuri-téni.

Puėh! Cloud, disperse! Clouds, disperse! Disperse to the mouth and to the source of the river! Puėh! Cloud, tear yourself into pieces! May the sun shine! May the sun

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4 The text is not from a healing rite but from one conducted to influence the weather, because the latter is intoned in a more conventional way. The approximate notation of the excerpt is shown in figs. 1 and 2. The text was recorded from Tamta Digor (born 1918) in August 1987 in the village of Belgo, Khabarovsky Territory, Russian Federation.
come out! Puēh! I pray, have mercy! Puēh! Puēh! Puēh! Puēh! Puēh! Puēh! Puēh! Puēh! Puēh!
I am making this small canoe to go on an elk hunt. When I have finished making it, I shall go for an elk hunt. We have no food. We are already starving. I want to go on an elk hunt to get food. If I kill an elk, the food will last for a long time.

Further on, the text of the puēlējuri rite performed by the spirit Mother Maija in a jokaso is given:

Χēi, soli puēlējipsindu! Puējeh!
Uǰin, bējun siŋaŋtaǰian sioliǰiani. Puējeh!
Dėgdėči gasa upaltečiėn sioliǰian. Puēyeh!
Ėniēh-le! Ėnieh-le!
Givan gikoričiani, sium baljičiani
puējiu, puējiu!

Drive the illness away to the river mouth and to the source of the river! Puējeh! May it get entangled in the skin of cattle and the fur of wild beasts! Puējeh! May it get entangled in the feathers of flying birds! Puējeh!
Mother! Mother! Drive it to where the sun rises!

In addition to the sōlboačiori and puēlējuri rites, the rite of washing the soul with water is performed in a jokaso:

Xali muelé čaborba!
Gēŋgięn muelé gėlčilų!
Ori muējięni oboro!
Siru muējięni silkoro!

5 This is an excerpt from the taočiori shaman ceremony recorded by the author from Gara Geĭker (1914–85) in July 1981 in the village of Derga in the Khabarovsk Territory, Russian Federation.
6 An excerpt from the same ceremony.
Dip the soul in the purest water with a splash!
And pour clear water!
Pour down healing water!
And wash with cold water!

It may be assumed that there once existed a rite of pouring water over a person in order to cure him, but I have so far failed to come across any information concerning this.

The treatment in a jokaso ends with a ceremony in which the spirits place a soul in a special receptacle called an oni. Each soul has its own oni. When a patient is treated by a shaman for the first time he has to give him some new dish: a pot or a saucepan, for example. The vessel should be without flaw. The best present is a boat. The saucepan, pot or boat will be the oni for the patient’s soul in the shaman’s jokaso. When she has finished the healing rites Mother Maija and her spirits place the soul in the oni so that the rising sun shines on its face. The soul must keep its balance in the oni because, if it fails to do so, the patient is unlikely to recover. After this the shaman, with his train of assisting spirits, leaves the jokaso and returns home.

Some recall that in certain cases in the past, especially if the patient was also a shaman, the doctor laid aside the drum after the soul had returned to the body and performed the sōlboaciori and puêlëjiuri rites, i.e. he passed the hoop over the afflicted person and drove the illness away with his arms. Such treatment was considered more effective than attempting to heal the soul in a jokaso. The hypothesis that the rites performed without a shaman came into being in the pre-shamanic epoch is widely held among Russian researchers of the Manchu-Tungus peoples, who traditionally term them “pre-shamanic” rites (Smoliak 1974: 109). If we adopt this hypothesis, the shamanic and non-shamanic versions of one and the same rite, dealt with here, represent different historical stages in the evolution of Nanai rites and their comparative study provides valuable material for investigating the development of Nanai notions concerning the opportunities for contact with the spirits and the evolution of the poetic and musical languages of Nanai folklore.

By comparing such versions we can, for instance, trace the trend from the actions of a man to the actions of a spirit manipulated by a man in a shaman ceremony. This transition alters the structure of the ritual texts. According to N. I. Tolstoi (1980: 157), “the words of a rite represent the unity of verbal, real (object) and action planes,” and in later versions of the rite the plane of action is replaced by the verbal plane, i.e. the action is replaced by the word that renders it. The Nanai materials confirm this assumption and enable us to elaborate it. When an archaic (pre-shamanic) rite is included in the shaman ceremony, the action is not replaced by the word but is retained. It is merely transferred from the man to the spirit and is thus translated from the real world into the ideal one. The retention of the words rendering the action is explained by the necessity to instruct the spirit that is entrusted with its commission. It is not the words but the action to which the shaman attaches the greatest importance. In some cases the words may even be omitted. If a shaman is sure that Mother Maija knows how to perform the rite by herself, he limits himself to brief instructions on how the soul of the patient should be treated. And, in spite of the fact that the rite is in no way reflected in the ceremonial discourse, it is considered as having been performed.

The Nanai tradition has retained its notions of the sense and expediency of melodious intoning. The study of such notions can contribute to an understanding of the way musical intonation evolved. The intoning of an archaic rite is almost speech-like, but it is speech with a strained intonation, the separate syllables being drawn out and sung. The Nanai consider that such intonation helps to attract the attention of spirits, who will not hear if invoked in conventional tones. Melodious vocalizations such as puêh or puêjeh are also a means of contacting the spirits. When I asked for a translation of these words into Russian I was told it was impossible. The words are not comprehensible to people but to spirits alone, and they are addressed to them exclusively.

Another and even more effective means of attracting the spirits’ attention is the drum. The shamaness Gara Geioger asserted that spirits are usually inactive, asleep in their dwelling-places. When a shaman starts to beat the drum they awake and gather round him, ready to obey the instructions which he will express by the words chanted. During the ceremony a shaman can afford to make long pauses in his chanting, but the drum must sound continuously. For as long as the drum is beaten the spirit is there, working, but as soon as you stop he will fall and become inactive.

One may assume that in the initial stages of mastering the art of shamanism or of including archaic rites in the shaman ceremony the Nanai intended to combine two means of exerting influence over spirits: chanted speech and the rhythm of the drum. Such a combination could transform the intonation of a ritual incantation. Syllabic rhythms, adapting themselves to that of the drum, would have become regular and, in what is no doubt a single process, a stable scale may have been established. In spite of the fact that, already at
this early stage, a shaman chanted and did not speak, the melodious pattern of each phrase was still very close to that of spoken forms in archaic rites. The notations given in figs. 1 and 2 demonstrate this. It is worth noting that the last syllable of a word or word combination is raised and drawn out. Nanai rites may have retained features characteristic of earlier processes in the evolution of musical intonation and Nanai ritual melodies therefore provide valuable material on the problem of the origin of music.

References


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A Shamanic Séance Conducted by a Woman in Nepal

ROMANO MASTROMATTEI

This report should be considered as a fragment of research into the ecstatic condition of Eurasian shamanism, a project parsimoniously financed by the Italian National Research Council. My work is carried out almost entirely in Nepal, where I have, in particular, paid special attention to the Tibetan-Burmese Tamang population. The Tamang term for ‘shaman’ is bombo. Most bombos are male, but for years I had heard of female bombos, spoken of with esteem and respect. At the last moment, however, these women would disappear into thin air, a thing which happened too often to be purely casual. Finally, in 1990, I managed to find in the area around Kathmandu an Āmā bombo, or Mother bombo, as she was called with great respect and more than a shadow of fear by everyone who knew her. The Āmā bombo is a woman of Tamang stock, about forty years old, with an abrupt manner, haughty and authoritarian, not at all like typical Nepalese women, whatever their caste and ethnic origin. Her expression and gestures denote not only arrogance, but also a lively and ready intelligence. She has a husband and three children and lives in a house that indicates a certain affluence.

My first significant contact with the Āmā bombo was the observation of a séance, celebrated for a reason which was at the time concealed from us, but which in part became clear during the ceremony and was then revealed some days later.

The behaviour of the Āmā bombo during the rite differed from the corresponding male behaviour only in a single, essential respect: the woman did not personally kill the sacrificial victims—two chickens—but delegated the task to some men. At that particular séance, the Āmā bombo did not dance, and the ritual dances were performed by an old
bombo. If, however, we rightly understood an answer given to us at the time, on other occasions the woman did not abstain from dancing.

The gods were invoked and invited by an old bombo, assisted by another bombo who, though younger, was also of mature years, and by an apprentice, as well as by one of those singular characters, rather common in Nepal, who want to become shamans, attend every possible shamanic ritual, but are without sufficient natural talents to achieve their desire. The gods and other beings which, as we shall see below, in Western terms would belong to quite another category, were summoned by reciting a mantra, by beating the drum and by offerings presented on a plate used as an altar. The arrival of these supernatural beings was announced by the characteristic shaking which took possession of the old bombo. Only at this point, about half an hour after the ceremony began, when the gods were considered to be already present, did the Āmā bombo enter. Up to that moment, she had been busy with magico-therapeutic practices in the next room, using—as far as I could make out—neither musical instruments, nor any other kind of shamanic attribute. From the moment of her entrance, however, the woman dominated the scene and directed the actions of the men, who placed themselves at her orders without a trace of that competitive spirit, so frequent among shamans, which we have often noted.

At other shamanic séances celebrated by Tamangs, the objects placed on and around the altar are mainly the gtor-mas, seeds of Oroxylum Indicum mounted on slender slivers of bamboo, Tagetes erecta flowers, rice, rock-crystals, incense sticks, an egg, and coins. At this particular séance, on the other hand, apart from the items listed above, a number of packets and containers of various kinds could be observed, in which were placed powders, feathers and other indefinable articles, such as belong to the tools of magicians, healers and sorcerers, rather than those of shamans, or at least of those known to me. About two hours after the start of the séance, the Āmā bombo suddenly took over the drum and was immediately struck by a strong and progressive trembling of the legs. At this point, when her facial expression indicated that she was already in trance, the old shaman quickly threw the ritual necklaces around her neck and the bandoleer of bells across and around her torso. Soon after, the Āmā bombo began to speak and sing, assuming an expression of great sorrow and torment, as if she were witnessing some extremely painful scene. I was greatly struck by this circumstance, since in the many séances celebrated by men which I had attended, I had seen the shaman’s face take on expressions of respect, benevolence, or else hostility, anger, anguish and also physical suffering, but never intense emotional sorrow. The woman went on rapidly, or rather instantaneously, to impersonate a menacing being, which spoke with a deep, hoarse voice, and immediately began beating the drum with extreme violence, at a certain point going so far as to strike the right side of her skull hard with the stick. Then, with great difficulty, owing to her violent shaking, she seized the egg which had been previously prepared and painted, blew on it several times and, without any sign of getting up, threw it out of the window in front of her. This scene, which I have witnessed on other occasions and also among other ethnic groups, simultaneously expresses an offering and a violent repulsion, the driving-out of a hostile spirit, almost like throwing a bone some distance away to rid oneself of a fierce dog. A few minutes later, the younger shaman offered her some uncooked rice, which the woman chewed avidly, only to spit it out or even vomit it after a second or two, sticking out her whole tongue and expressing repulsion and contempt, rather than disgust. The interpretation of this gesture, given by the woman some days later, was that the bhut, the savage and irremediably evil demon, to which the rice had been offered, had rejected it. The female shaman’s increasingly violent possession was matched by the bitter and desperate weeping of two women, one young and the other old, the first of which—as we learned later—was mourning for the death of her baby girl, and the second, the death of her thirty-year-old daughter. The souls of these dead ones were, for different reasons, not resigned to their fate, which they felt was unnatural and cruel in any case, and their sorrow in the next world was added to their mothers’ affliction on earth. Another circumstance which was new to us was the silent but copious weeping of the Āmā bombo herself. While trembling, her face took on an expression of what seemed intense compassion, but which in reality may have revealed not her personal emotion, but her impersonation of the dead baby girl and young woman who, as we found out later, had died a violent death. In this case too, the behaviour of the female shaman was different to that of the male shamans I have observed, who never seemed to be afflicted and influenced beyond a certain point, even when they saw, in their visions, the lives of friends or kin threatened by the most fearsome demons. A further characteristic of the Āmā bombo was the ritual use of her hair, which was loosened without her touching it with her hands, merely by the shaking of her
head and body during the trance, and which she put into order again as soon as she took off the ritual necklaces and lay the drum aside or passed it on to others. The laymen present—including her sixteen year-old son, highly intelligent and interested in his mother’s profession—did not understand the unknown tongue in which she expressed herself at times. Furthermore, nothing of what was happening in the first part of the séance appeared to disturb or trouble those kin and friends who were not actively involved in celebrating the rite.

The tension and continuity of the rapport with the gods was maintained by an ecstatic condition which, together with the drum and necklaces, was literally passed from one shaman to another. As could be easily foreseen, however, not all of them managed to attain the same level of intensity. (About one o’clock in the morning, a therapeutic interlude took place, without any ecstatic features, of which no description will be provided at present. It should be noted however, that non-ecstatic elements may be of great importance in shamanic rituals, and any research which did not take this fact into account would be partial and tendentious.)

Two chickens were sacrificed during the course of the night. The elder shaman killed one by tearing off its head during a dance with ecstatic features, which took place in an apartment on the second floor where the female shaman lived and on a railless terrace giving onto the courtyard. The throat of the second chicken was slit by a boy in the courtyard, before a small temporary altar on which were arranged those cult related objects found in Nepal in the sanctuaries of Shiva or Bhimasen. These sacrifices were performed with a complex ceremonial and with great care taken of the ritual details. In all séances, the expressions and gestures of acceptance or of rejection towards the carcass of the victim indicate the celebrant’s identification with the supernatural being to which the sacrifice is dedicated, if the celebrant is in an ecstatic condition, i.e. is not representing himself, or at least not his everyday self. If, however, the celebrant is in normal conditions and throws the carcass to the ground with a display of disgust, it means he is sacrificing the victim to some despicable being, such as a bloodthirsty intractable demon. In a shamanic ceremony, the borderline between the various identities is naturally uncertain and unstable, and a shaman may simultaneously impersonate different beings. This multiple identity was evident in the Āmā bombo, who could, at the same time, mime to perfection a savage and cruel bhut, while brandishing a burning brand to scare and chase it away. This scene must have been too frightening and dangerous for several persons present, who then went away. During the most significant stage of her ecstatic condition, the female shaman emitted a true diphonic chant, for a sound box using the drum, which she kept close to her mouth. According to a code which has never been fully revealed, the female shaman was at that moment a desperate dead woman, a fierce revenant, and even perhaps one of those infernal powers, a lord of demons and ghosts. These impersonations caused great distress to the two women bereaved of their daughters, but this trial, though hard, was necessary to see and let them live again and to find the way to placate and pacify them.

It was four o’clock in the morning, and the ecstatic condition of the Āmā bombo was to last for a further fifteen minutes, after which the woman came to herself, put her hair in order, lighted a cigarette, and seemed to be wholly delivered from the emotions which had shaken her so violently. The rites of dismissing the gods and closing the séance were entrusted to the men.

A few days later, a long conversation took place between the Āmā bombo and ourselves, during which we were able to talk about her vocation, her powers, and the séance she had recently celebrated. That occasion—a fact I should like to emphasize—was the only one on which we had been able to observe the woman in a fully ecstatic condition which, for the time being, fixes the limits of our scientific assessment of this case. Furthermore, it should be taken into account that in this context we have deliberately neglected the non-ecstatic aspects of the ritual which, on the other hand—we must repeat—form an integral part of it and necessitate careful study in order to provide a complete analysis and synthesis of the ritual itself. The shamanic destiny of Sommaya, this being the woman’s name, was revealed when she was only seven years old and therefore some time before the onset of puberty. It occurred during the monsoon period, while she was seeking a lost sheep, when all of a sudden she fell asleep and felt herself rise in the air. She was taken “toward something that looked like a river and something that looked like a mountain,” an expression that well describes the enigmatic and oblique relationship of shamans with the real world. This happened while the little girl was “in a state of unconsciousness.” “I learned alone without teachers.” After one year, a female spirit-guru ordered her to make a pilgrimage with other jhākrts to Gosaitan, where the child paid homage to Mahadeo-Pokhari, a shamanic divinity—not
immediately identifiable with Shiva—connected with a lake. After this pilgrimage, Sommaya returned to her natal village and did not practice her profession for four years, “because she was ashamed in front of the inhabitants of the village.” From the Āmā bombo’s discourse, it appears that, her shyness notwithstanding, she already felt the fullness of her magic powers. She married and moved to her husband’s village, where he became sick and risked becoming blind: the first of a very long series of illnesses. Sommaya had a baby, which died suddenly, without any apparent cause. “Then my guru told me, ‘You mustn’t stay there doing nothing: you must do something’.” The young woman thus sent a message to her natal village requesting “the jhākrī’s things which belonged to her.” Evidently, these objects were kept at home and had been used by her father or mother, or perhaps by some ancestor: but this was not made clear. As soon as her professional tools arrived, the woman organized a pujā. The villagers were surprised and amazed, because they had not suspected that she “could do those things.” That explained why she was often sick: the cause was something unclean, a kind of sexual miasma, connected with trauma or with an accidental knowledge of “bad things.” Such “bad knowledge” (a recurring motif in shaman’s accounts) must not be understood as a mere notion, but as something which can maliciously dispatched to harm someone: the jhākrī’s task is to send it back, thus liberating the person afflicted.

At this point, referring to what she had just recounted, the Āmā bombo said, “I sent the ‘bad knowledge’ back again. I have no flesh-and-blood guru but, you see, when you hear tek-tek-tek from the jungle, she—she is the goddess who is called ban-devī (the goddess of the forest)—she is my guru.” Now in my opinion, this relationship with a female deity explains why she was often sick: the cause was something unclean, a kind of sexual miasma, connected with trauma or with an accidental knowledge of “bad things.” Such “bad knowledge” (a recurring motif in shaman’s accounts) must not be understood as a mere notion, but as something which can maliciously dispatched to harm someone: the jhākrī’s task is to send it back, thus liberating the person afflicted.

Indeed, during our conversation (October 14th 1989), on being asked whether there really were jhākrīnīs whom I had never met till then, Sete Rumba replied. “Yes, of course there are. There may still be one in the village of Chali, near Bhaktapur. There is one at Chatturipawa, in the Nawakot district: she is now very old, but has taught some young women,” and at this point, to my amazement, he pointed to two young European women present. On yet another occasion, Sete Rumba, who is used to weighing his words, said without beating about the bush, “Remember, all women are witches (boksī).” Such terms used concerning men would be inconceivable: a jhākrī does not teach “young men,” but chosen individuals. Still less would he say “All men are wizards.”

In an article based on notes taken in 1958 and 1960 in the Darjeeling region and sub-district of Kalinpong, Alexander Macdonald (1962: 309–341) gives a concise and extraordinarily rich picture of what might be termed the “jhākrīstic complex,” which can be set according to what we can deduce from Macdonald’s writings—partly within and partly on the margins of the shamanic complex.

In this article, Macdonald speaks of a group of supernatural females, the banko burhent (old women of the wood). These female beings, whom Macdonald merely calls “women,” evidently reporting faithfully the opinion of his informers, are seven and cause a series of physical and psychical illnesses. The banko burhent kidnap girls—who worship them as deities—and carry them off to the woods. On returning home, the girl is instructed by a male guru, a jhākrī.2

The Āmā bombo made no mention of this kind of instructors who would have integrated the intervention of the “goddess of the forest” and, on the contrary, as we have seen, boasted of not having had any human guru, but I feel this cannot be excluded. The fact that the woman had previously sent someone “to collect the jhākrī’s things that belonged to her” leads one to believe that in her childhood she had been familiar with this sphere and that she was thus deemed to be predestined for that profession. When I very cautiously asked the Āmā bombo whether she instructed young women, she replied dryly, “Nobody can capture my mantras but, when I die, my mantras will move on to someone else who wants them.” I may be deceiving myself, but I feel that if the question had been asked by a woman, the answer might have been different.

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1 See Mastromattei 1988: 90.

2 The detailed description of the banko burhent is found in Macdonald (1962: 322–323). The exact spelling should be banko burent, from bur, the ancient term for burhī ‘old woman’ (Turner 1931: 452 column b; hence: T.: 453, column a). The reference to the initiatory activities of these characters and of the real life jhākrī is found in Macdonald 1931: 337.
Since, during the séance, the Āmā bombo had evidently been possessed by various beings, which induced her to adopt different types of behaviour and speak in various languages we asked her who these beings, these deities, were. As might be expected, the main one was the ban devī, the first to induce the trembling, to whom the Shivaistic-type courtyard altar was dedicated. “This guru has tangled hair and long hair on her body, like a yogi. When she came to me, she helped me to undo my hair. If other deities come, I mustn’t loosen it.” From a linguistic point of view the rest of the discourse is not very clear, although the woman identified her guru, on this occasion calling her, not ban devī, but laṭṭadhārī, a word of uncertain spelling, but which certainly relates to the noun latto ‘tangle’, a ‘tousled lock of hair’, and to the adjective latṭāwāl ‘with matted hair’. “When laṭṭadhārī comes, I undo my hair. I undo them to be like my guru,” and she added, speaking in the plural, “We are not aware, when we undo it.”

For the Āmā bombo, the unawareness with which the gesture is performed is manifest proof of the deity’s presence. At outside observers, we can say that her hair, in this case gathered in a bun, was loosened when the woman’s whole body was shaken violently by the trembling. The impersonations, however, and temporary assumption of other personalities, were not really limited to a mimesis of the expression and behaviour of the female initiator of the woods. Indeed, the Āmā bombo impersonated, one after the other during the lengthy rite, first the souls of the baby girl killed or the young woman suicide—shedding all their tears and expressing their sorrow, after which dangerous and intractable demons, then the souls of the same dead females, but in their terrible shape as beings returned to earth to take revenge for the wrongs they had suffered. As usual in shamanic ritual, these impersonations could break off, whether at their peak, or during a dying away: the woman put her hair in order, smoked a cigarette, drank something, even ate a tiny amount of food which had been prepared aside for ritual purposes. On being asked whether she remembered anything about these experiences of hers, the Āmā bombo first replied—like all shamans we talked to—that, no, she remembered nothing: “When a deuti speaks of the various things, I remember a little, and then I forget everything. This is why the persons around me must listen carefully.” A short while later, however—like all shamans—the woman spoke of her visions, her victories and defeats in the field: and her tone was not that of someone talking of things they had heard repeated by others.

References


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Reviewing a Review

ROY ANDREW MILLER and NELLY NAUMANN

Critical reviews of scholarly publications are a *sine qua non* for any academic journal; and the high hopes and good wishes with which all of us greeted the first issue of *Shaman* were only enhanced by the discovery of a section devoted to “Book Reviews” in its Volume 1, Number 1. Our enthusiasm was further increased to find that our monograph on Old Japanese *FaFa*ri (Miller and Naumann 1991) had been selected for the place of honor, the first book to be reviewed in this new journal.

But reading that review by Catherine Uray-Kőhalmi (59–61) has raised several questions that we feel it necessary to share with the editors and readers of *Shaman*, not because the review reflects negatively upon us and our work, but because its irresponsibility and carelessness bode ill for the future of this new journal.

In the following critical remarks upon the review in question, we do not take issue with any of Uray-Kőhalmi’s negative evaluations of our work or of our conclusions. She is fully entitled to her opinions, as we are to ours. That is not the problem. Rather, the problem is that 95% of Uray-Kőhalmi’s review consists of blatant misrepresentations and flatly incorrect allegations concerning what we say in our book, leading us to the regretful conclusion that she either did not, or could not read the book carefully enough to understand it; and this in turn casts serious doubt upon her negative evaluation of the same. It also has obvious implications for future editorial policy concerning reviews in *Shaman*.

Uray-Kőhalmi’s account (in her third paragraph, 59) of our linguistic hypothesis consists entirely of one blatant error and misrepresentation after another. She writes, “Nicholas N. Poppe has claimed that Altaic *pap* ‘witchcraft, sorcery’ . . . is a borrowing of Chinese *fa* . . .” False! Poppe never made any such statement. “The etymology of the word has already been discussed by such great fig-
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ing in our monograph is nearly as simple as Uray-Kőhalmi makes it out to be, and the reader of the same will seek there in vain for the simplistic claims (nearly all of them simply false) that Uray-Kőhalmi attributes to us.

Again, we must stress that we do not here take issue with Uray-Kőhalmi's negative evaluation of our monograph and its hypotheses, only with the evidence in her review showing that she read only fragments of the book, and barely understood those few that she read. If this were the place to evaluate her evaluations, then her paragraph on 60–61, where she sets forth her unique historical–linguistic reservations about the probability of Chinese fa (which in this passage she suddenly decides means ‘law’ and only ‘law’) ever having been borrowed “to indicate ‘magic’” (61) would necessarily take pride-of-place. Her argumentation there does not rise above the level of her simplistic one-word English gloss ‘law’ for fa. Does she even know, one can only ask, of such words as Chinese fa-li ‘magic power’ or fa-shu ‘the black arts’? Apparently, not, for she asks, “what need was there to adopt a word with the meaning ‘law’ . . . . to describe something for which there already were plenty of verbs?” What, we must ask in return, were these “plenty of verbs,” or for what matter, what do verbs have to do with it: Chinese fa after all is and always was a noun.

But we stray from our subject, which is not to evaluate Uray-Kőhalmi’s evaluations, but to document her irresponsible misinterpretations. She is, as we have already stressed, fully entitled to her views. But readers of Shaman deserve to be warned about her generally superficial and mostly inaccurate reading of our monograph, to which she is by no means entitled.

The religious-historical and ethnographic contributions of our monograph are, if anything, subjected to even more irresponsible and cavalier treatment at the hands of Uray-Kőhalmi than are its linguistic components. The only difference is that, being rather more complex in and of themselves, the extra-linguistic issues have been subjected to even more distortion and misrepresentation than have the linguistic ones. A few specific examples must suffice (to signal all of Uray-Kőhalmi’s errors in this area would mean copying out and reproducing almost her entire review). Such statements as her claim that “[the] FaFuri . . . served in the shrine of a certain deity . . .” is simply false. But usually her misrepresentations in this area are more subtle. She makes general allegations concerning the roles of the FaFuri in funerals and in animal sacrifices which especially seriously misrepresent the content and argumentation of the monograph; there the careful reader will find not the oversimplified flat statements of “fact” that Uray-Kőhalmi erroneously puts into our mouths (e.g. 59–60), but evidence, texts, discussions and hypotheses. Noth-
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Book Reviews


This is not the first book in which the author, Nikolaï Alekseevich Alekseev, has dealt with the religious beliefs of the Siberian Turks. These are the Turkic peoples who were not influenced by Islam and who were influenced only superficially by Buddhism. In his earlier works the author concentrated on the Yakut, and later he also did research on the religious beliefs of the South Siberian Turkic peoples, especially the Tuvan. His present book can be regarded as a sort of summary in which he collects and compares the beliefs of the Siberian Turks about the world of spirits and the characteristics of their shamanism.

The first chapter of the book is an excellent historical overview of research on the shamanism of the Siberian Turks and will be useful for everyone concerned with the topic. The second chapter has the comprehensive title of “The animistic conceptions of shamanism” and is divided into the following sections: (1) “Gods and spirits of the upper world”; (2) “The nether world and its inhabitants”; (3) “Animistic conceptions in the middle world”; and (4) “The protecting and helping spirits of the shaman.” The division of the book follows the general multilayer world concept of the Siberian peoples, whose layers are the following: the celestial layers or the upper world; the layer of mankind, i.e. the middle world; and finally the nether world, the layers of the underground world. In the chapters the material is systematically arranged by peoples, starting in each case with the Yakut, then continuing with the Altai Turks, the Altai-Kizhi, the Teleut, the Telengit, the Kumandin, the Tubalar, the Chelkan, the Khakass, the Kacha, the Sagai, the Koibal, the Kizil, the Beltir, the Shor, the Tuva, the Tuvan-Todsha and the Tofalar. The terminology of the Yakut has already moved far away from their South Siberian relatives.
Unfortunately, there is a misleading misprint here. The Tuva word erteine, with the intermediation of the Mongolian erdene ‘gem’, cannot come from the non-existing Sanskrit word gatana but from the Sanskrit ratna ‘gem’ (66). Of course the translator may not alter the text, but perhaps the author would have approved of omitting the quotations from the ephemeral secretary-generals of the Soviet Communist Party and the few out of place Engels citations. Acknowledging the large merit of the translator-publisher in making Russian literature available in German, let us suggest that perhaps this intermediation would have been even better and more useful if the translator had not stuck to the original Russian syntax as doing so has made the text ponderous and sometimes difficult to understand. It also would have been useful if a Turkologist had revised the text and transliterated the recited Turkic words in the transcription that is used in Turkology. On the whole, however, we have gained a useful and valuable source-book through this translation.

BUDAPEST


In his dissertation (submitted to the Faculty of Arts at the University of Berne in 1993) Kurt Derungs attempts the impossible—to reconcile structuralism, research into shamanism and matriarchy, as well as Max Lüthi’s phenomenology of fairy tales. His intent seems to be to bow to a trend in current fairy-tale research which aims to rehabilitate magical–mythical ways of seeing, especially shamanism, which with us has chiefly been rediscovered by amateurs of esoterica. The concept of shamanism at the present time is so much the victim of popularization, divorced from the roots of its meaning, and of inflation that one can respect Derungs’ intention of making cultural–historical research into fairy tales scientifically acceptable again.
In the first chapter, “Cosmology,” the author presents shamanism (or \textit{wuism}—that is, female shamanism) and its connections with myths and fairy tales using Eliade’s and Drury’s definition of shamanism. Next he treats the issue of \textit{wuism} and its links to (Siberian) forms of matriarchy, making passing reference to Frazer’s \textit{Golden Bough} and Robert Graves’ \textit{Griechische Mythologie} and Göttner-Abendroth’s \textit{Göttin und Heros}. Finally, he deals critically with existing studies of matriarchy and presents “images of cosmology” from various cultures and epochs; up to this point very little has been said about fairy tales.

In the second, methodological section Derungs seeks to demonstrate the parallels between myths and (magical) fairy tales, mainly on the basis of Röhrich’s \textit{Märchen, Mythos, Sage} (1984), before examining modes of structuralism à la Lévi-Strauss and critics such as Rölkele and Röhrich in order to propose a morphology of the fairy tale (Propp’s maximum formula) and, indeed, one of his own principal interpretative schemes, “transformation of the magic fairy tale”: “Phenomena of transformation in mythologemas do not occur simply in shamanism/\textit{wuism} or in Greek mythology, but are a global phenomenon, as is the fairy tale itself” (97), and the folkloristic alienation of the deep structure of an image (iconotrophy) or of an idea. He means by this, for instance, the mutation of the shaman’s staff into a horned serpent, symbol of St Margaret (105), or of certain rites to narrative forms such as myths and, finally, magical fairy tales. At this point the author makes one of the central statements of the book: “In its magical world-picture the magical fairy tale is influenced by shamanism, but is in its essentials and origins pre-shamanistic. These pre-shamanistic phenomena are, according to various analyses, femininely determined, that is, they testify to the primacy of female shamanism” (111). Is this really the case? By this token the motifs of shamanic initiation (e.g. death or resuscitation) would correspond in structural terms to the function/sequence death and reincarnation (want, and removal of want). Hell, witch, wood-demon are shamanic intentional assistants; bones must on no account—as in shamanic journeys to the world beyond—go missing, otherwise no resuscitation from them is possible; ecstasy corresponds to deep sleep, etc. To locate the world beyond in fairy tales corresponds to the triadic division in shamanism (upper, middle and lower world). There are further parallels: fairy tales reflect matrilocal relations in early shamanism; kings’ daughters are the sacral queens in the context of ancestor worship; trees are world-trees (\textit{axis mundi}), etc. Even Litthi’s phenomenology of fairy tales, in Derungs’ argument, serves only to demonstrate the congruence of both systems (120f.).

Then follows Derungs’ attempt to verify his arguments in extended form by taking the example of AT 671 (670,725), KHM 33 “The Three Languages,” of which Derungs has collected variants and listed them in an Appendix. In his opinion, this type of fairy tale—probably quite archaic in its individual elements—describes “above all the progress of the hero, his initiation, enthroning, etc. But on the psychological level of deep structures he is entirely beholden to the cosmos of a goddess—his actions relate to a goddess(-triad) and become intelligible thereby.” The plot is structured as follows:

- **Death** through the goddess or predecessor in office
- **Return** mythical helper-animals, in the successor
- **Initiation** by goddess, mythical animals; hero receives magic devices and throne
- **Marriage** holy wedlock of goddess and hero (133).

This example is perhaps not all that well chosen since there are many other universally known fairy tales whose shamanic resonances are more obvious (Machandelboom, Seven Ravens, etc.). Derungs’ next step, therefore, is to differentiate once more from type to individual motif, where he recurs upon mythical animals such as “frog and toad” (in a broadly based cultural–historical excursus and with borrowings from other narrative forms), which he is persuaded should be seen as totems and “female ancestors.” The animal versions that follow on “Celtic” shamanism and on “death and return in the context of shamanism” serve to underpin further details of his chosen prototype and his main motifs, and are, at the same time, an archaeological excursus on grave-finds and on source-cults (naturally feminine) in Switzerland and elsewhere in Europe. The passages on “initiation and enthronement” or, again, “transformation” against the background of what the author calls “religation” (a term not found in the index) and “iconotrophy” should be taken as components of an iconography of the (mother)goddess–hero structure. The interim concluding section, “The bearers of

\footnotesize{1 \textit{Cf.} examples in Gehrts and Lademann-Priemer 1986, \textit{Passim}.}
action and their attributes,” thus attempts to make more concrete statements which vary greatly, appearing in various guises and weightings. As Derungs remarks, “The woman-serpent and the queen-toad are iconographies of the goddess, whose variant appears in a diminished form in the mythical animals. Thereby amplifications and substitutions become all the easier.”

This is admittedly only the first half of a work whose second half came out in 1994, but one must be apprehensive that Derungs has in part succumbed to the very danger of “losing his way in a nebulous area” of which he warns himself in the introduction. He fails to produce either a hermeneutically convincing critical–ideological theory of transformation (despite the pretentious claims of the blurb) or a revealing contribution to our understanding of shamanism. Above all, he makes no reference to tradition, neglecting to mention shamans as repositories of folk poetry.2 But perhaps that was not his intention. The author’s purpose, in his methodological package, is to reoccupy the high ground of a common analytic discourse, whose loss has handicapped interdisciplinary exchange on various levels of fairy-tale research, and to illuminate the reality of shamanism as folk poetry. Or how should we take his emphasis on the Umberto Eco-quotation “Whoever finds reading history unconvincing can always take refuge in fiction which, as is well known, is much more probable than reality.” These two aims would have been praiseworthy enough, but it strikes me that he heightens, rather than lessens, linguistic confusion and source problems (despite, or indeed because of, his many illustrations). That is a pity, since by the widening in all directions the concept shamanism) is beginning to lose its meaning. (Raudvere 1993: 88). Perhaps it is in the end simply a question of faith whether all European fairy tales can be connected to shamanism (even if so broadly defined as to be quite arbitrary).

Despite these reservations, Derungs’ book is at present the only one which at a high and current level of reflection seeks to link the hypertrophic research literature on fairy tales and shamanism.

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2 Cf. the review by Beyer (1994).

References


The author, Elena Sergeevna Novik, has undertaken a large and interesting task in this book. She wanted to reveal the structures and structural relations in the shamanic rites of the Siberian peoples in the spirit of Claude Lévi-Strauss, in addition to which she wished to explore their relation with the narrative folklore of Siberian peoples. She includes the natives of the whole of Siberia, from the Ob-Ugrians to the Ainu and from the Chukchi to the Buriat. The book consists of three chapters. The first deals with the structure of the shamanic rite, the kamlanie, in the following order: (1) “The functions and subject types”; and (2) “The processes of the realization of the syntagmatic structure.” Here she examines a Yakut healing rite, the content transformations of the shamanic rite, the types of the séances and the syntagmatic structure of the rite. The final conclusion of the research is that the essential character of the shamanic rites is their dialogical character. Having
determined the nature of the matter (the violation of law), the shaman comes to an arrangement with the spirits in the exchange of certain values (strength, sacrifice, etc.).

The second chapter typifies the forms of the rites. First it determines and proves magic, mantic and the sacrifices. Here again she points out the communicative exchange character of the rites. Then she examines the rites according to their reason, which can be economic interest, e.g. making a capture, or it can be one of the so-called rites de passage—birth, marriage, death, the inauguration of a new shaman, or any annually recurring ceremony. The author's final conclusions are based on the dialogic character of the shamanic rites, or simply of the rites. The whole world concept of the Siberian natives and their relation to spirits, spiritual masters, demons and gods and the existence of the whole spiritual world can be attributed to the fact that the searching, rogating partner (i.e. man) spiritualized and personalized the addressee of his wishes. Through the communicative act he fixed the spirits and his relationship with them.

The third chapter deals with the archaic epic and its relation with the rite. In connection with this, the author examines the poetics of shamanic legends, their genre characteristics, and the illustration of the shamanic rite in legends as it is only here that she can find harmony between the folklore narrative and the rite. Finally, she analyses the place and role of the folklore narrative and here she, among others, analyses the relation between heroic epic poetry and tales. Just like Heissig (1991: 8, 9, 112), and to a certain extent Kerényi (1940: 25), she also sees the tale in the deritualized text, i.e. in a text which is not regarded as sacred by the audience, as opposed to the heroic epic of sacred character. Unfortunately, her folklore analysis does not produce more than that, and these results are also not the results of deduction. Although shamanic rites are comparable in spite of the difference of peoples, the folklore texts are not. The author—due to a lack of detailed knowledge of the folklore of the Siberian (and non-Siberian) peoples—does not compare the shamanic rites with the concrete folklore texts of the given people but with the abstract categories of Propp and Meletinsky. That is also the reason for her getting only to the shamanic narrative. Already on the basis of its objective and of many others, heroic epic cannot be compared directly with the rite. The basis of the comparison of rite and folklore can only be the culture and the afterlife concept of the given people, but this can be analyzed only by peoples or at most by cultures. The whole of Siberia, at least at the first step, is too large for that, so an analysis based on it cannot be successful. Considering the question raised, the answer is not satisfactory.

Finally, I would like to call attention to some minor but irritating errors: chanja is not a Manchu word but an Evenki one, the Manchu word is fanja; there is ‘Manci’ instead of the Manshi Ob-Ugrian ethnic name; swine and the name enduri ‘god’ are mentioned in connection with the Nganasan Samoyed, perhaps instead of the Nanai. As in the book by Alekseev (1987), many problems arise from the fact that the transcription of the quoted terms has not been revised by a linguist of Altaic languages. The mistake of printing Clyde Kluckhohn’s name as “Cluchohn” both in the text and in the bibliography (14, 345) is perhaps also due to the Cyrillic transcription. The style of the translation is ponderous and adheres rigidly to the original Russian.

References


Anna Vasilevna Smoliak, the well-known researcher of the ethnography and shamanism of the Amur peoples, in this book presents the reader with a rich material consisting of her own observations and their parallels from earlier literature, the findings of fieldwork and other interesting conclusions. After the introduction, in which she acquaints the reader with the present situation and circumstances of the Nanaï, the Ulchi and the Negidal and with previous research, the book is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter collects the ideas of the Nanaï and the Ulchi about the universe. As is usual among the peoples of Central Asia, they have the conception of a multilayered world which not only consists of the heavens, the earth and the nether world, but the heavens and the nether world themselves can have several layers. The author makes an interesting observation in stating that the world concept of the Upper Amur Nanaï is richer in layers of heaven than is that of their relatives at the lower end of the river. However, the land of the dead is not located in the layers of the lower regions but somewhere in the west or in an undetermined place. A typical element of this world concept is the world tree, the shamanic tree which penetrates through each layer of the earth and the heavens. Among the roots of this tree live colorful wild boars, and heavenly rabbits are to be found among the leaves. The reader is acquainted with the inhabitants of the heavenly layers, the myths of the constellations and with the phenomena of the earthly layer, the spiritual masters of earth, water and fire. We come to know that it was the head of the family and not the shaman who offered the annual sacrifice and that other sacrifices could also be made without the participation of the shaman.

The second chapter describes the general characteristics of the shamanism of the Nanaï and the Ulchi. The shaman's ability and the most important protective deities are inherited in the family, usually on the father's side. Usually it is already at birth that the physical signs characterizing the shaman appear. Eventually, overcoming the shaman's disease and autotherapy make the candidate a shaman. Brothers could inherit the family's shamanic abilities at the same time. The strength of the shaman was also determined by inheritance. Acquiring the knowledge was independent of education. The shaman also inherited his most important protective deities, the local spirits and the spirit of his heavenly love partner, his wife. Shamans from different families and clans could support each other, but they could also fight each other, often in animal form. The author mentions that the intensity of ecstasy differs between shamans: there are cases where it is totally superficial, or it may be interrupted and then continued. The author's listing and characterizing of people who have contact with the other world is very interesting, as there were people besides the shaman who could heal certain diseases, and there were also oracles.

The third chapter deals with the world of spirits, the different protective deities of shamans, the family guardian spirits and the spiritual masters of certain geographical locations and with their representations. These representations of the spirits had to be fed as well. The myths about the origin of the malignant spirits are peculiar. According to these myths, evil spirits mostly originate from incestuous relations and the resulting family tragedies and from the bodies of those killed in war.

The fourth chapter deals with the souls of people. According to the author, these souls are invisible yet material substances. This is indicated by the fact that the souls of the dead are fed and are located in different objects. The section describing the three souls of people is extremely interesting as it also presents previous theories. The tree of life also appears in connection with souls; the souls of unborn children stay here in the form of birds. The author presumes a joint Altaic heritage in the name of the goddess guarding children's souls.

The fifth chapter describes the inaugural rites of shamans, and the sixth chapter describes the types of shamanic rites and the duties of shamans. The last, seventh chapter presents the ritual properties, the clothes, the drum, the drumstick and the representations of protective deities. In the conclusion, the author states that shamanism is a form of religion where the shaman is in active connection with spirits. We can observe that during the last hundred years the concept of supreme gods of the world religions has also entered into shamanism. The shamanism of the Amur peoples was also influenced by different external effects, e.g., from Korea and China. The author reminds us of the excavations of Okladnikov in Amur and the archaic features that are preserved even today.

Anna Smoliak has presented her colleagues and the interested public with an extremely valuable work. She presents her rich material in an excellent manner, and she does not lose her way in the mass of facts,
which she systematizes and explains. The list of shaman terminology is a valuable addendum to the volume.

We hope that the book will be translated into English, German or French in the near future.

News and Notes


Antique engravings of entranced shamans and clips from old Russian films, a rapid succession of images in Mihály Hoppál’s “Shamanism: Past and Present,” proclaim centuries of Western fascination with shamans and their work, a visual record of a religious experience that teases our certain knowledge of theatrics as necessarily lies (Schechner 1982). The shaman and the camera enjoy a metaphoric affinity as two mediums that conjure from beyond the viewer’s immediate capacity to perceive. Filmmakers who work with shamans are challenged by a phenomenon that while innately, often startlingly visual and thus, at some level, immediately accessible, is embedded in the local knowledge of a people and a history (Atkinson 1992; Vitebsky 1995). If the fundamental power claim of both shaman and camera is in transmitting “something out there,” shamans’ clients level judgments regarding the efficacy of individual shamans even as international consumers of ethnographic film critique the efficacy of cinematic portrayals of shamans and their work.

The screenings and symposium on shamans and cameras held at the 1994 Margaret Mead Film and Video Festival was one forum of argument where filmmakers, scholars, new age practitioners, and members of the general public discussed styles of filmic presentation, what it means to enter the shaman’s world as an outsider with a camera, and how “shamans” have come to signify in the West.

* A modified version of this review also appeared in Visual Anthropology Review, Volume 11, Number 1 (Spring), 1995.
In addition to longstanding ethnographic, psychological, religious, and medical interest in shamans, some of the many new films on this subject are prompted by “New Age” enthusiasm, some by the opening of Siberia—the “classic” homeland of shaman studies—to outside ethnographers and camera crews, and some by a desire to record shamans as representatives of endangered lifeways. These diverse interests were well represented both in the films screened during the festival and in the questions and comments posed by the symposium audience. Films included in this year’s festival program were selected to show a range of filmic treatments, a gendered representation of shamans, and the variety of places where shamans are active—from a village in the Amazon to urban Seoul. The geographic range represented by the films included the Venezuelan rainforest, Japan, Korea, Estonia, Siberia, the Northwest Coast of North America, a Pomo Indian community in California, and New Age Europeans. The different filmmakers’ approaches were at least as varied as recent anthropological approaches to the prose construction of an ethnographic text, from the narrative-driven unfolding of a political crisis in Tim Asch and Napoleon Chagnon’s early “Magical Death” to the rapid play of images, spanning diverse media and national boundaries, in Mihály Hoppál’s film.

Three films that portrayed shamans as part of a larger cultural and political story were screened on other nights during the festival program. “Survivors of the Rainforest” (Jillings and Lizot) and “Siberia after the Shaman” (Johnston and Vitebsky) witness the destruction of indigenous cultures where shamans once played a central religious and political role. In Mark Soosaar’s global journey, “Grandma of Boats,” Siberian and South American shamans appear as ritual technicians who facilitate the crafting of canoes.

Yasuhiro Omori’s “A Shamanic Medium of Tugaru,” too long for the symposium evening but screened on another evening, portrays a round of shamanic work and client encounters in northern Japan: divinations, ceremonies of exorcism and purification, and the careful, indeed sometimes tedious, preparation of ritual paraphernalia. Most of the shaman’s work is performed while sedately seated behind a drum. This subtle film is a useful corrective to the quick cuts of ecstatic spec-

tacle encountered in so many documentary portrayals of shamans, a reminder that the day-to-day worlds of shamanic practice are far more textured and that even a relatively low-key performance may imply a significant connection with the spirits that is satisfying to both shaman and client. The film anticipates Michael Taussig’s comment, as symposium discussant, that in his own encounters with the shamans of the Putumayo in Colombia he saw not only terror and violence, but boredom and humor as well.

The symposium screenings began with a twenty-minute selection from Mihály Hoppál’s “Shamanism Past and Present” (the complete film was screened at Columbia University the following evening). The excerpt juxtaposed interviews with New Age shamans in Antwerp and Copenhagen, clips from shamanic theater in Hungary and the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), and montages of contemporary art in evidence of how some contemporary artists and religious seekers have turned to shamanic traditions for inspiration. Like many Festival films, this one served to “get the news out,” prompting members of the audience to ask about the revival of shamanic practices and the artistic use of shamanic motifs in Siberia today. Mihály Hoppál and anthropologist Marjorie Balzer explained that the use of this imagery and discussions about shamans by the ethnic minorities in Siberia were permitted only in the climate of liberalization in recent years.

“Pomo Shaman,” produced in 1953 in a darkly luminous black and white, is an intense portrayal of Essie Parish’s “doctoring,” the prayers and movements that will culminate in her sucking the source of illness from her patient. In his comments, Michael Taussig judged this film to be both fantastic and also difficult for audiences to watch, tending to either send viewers into trance or put them to sleep. (At least one member of the audience did find it necessary to leave the auditorium upon viewing this film.) In addition to the intimate camera work and the charisma of Essie Parish, “Pomo Shaman” draws much of its effect from the manner in which it was cut. But what is represented in this editing? “Pomo Shaman” is a recut of a slightly longer film, “Sucking Doctor,” made at the invitation of Essie Parish who wanted to preserve a record of her “doctoring” work for her grandchildren. Parish herself had a hand in editing the original film. David Wayne Peri, one of the original filmmakers who was located and contacted by telephone before the festival, considers “Pomo Shaman” a “mishmash” that jumbles the significant sequence of a two-day ritual purely for visual effect. Thus

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1 Five films in this year’s Margaret Mead Film Festival made mention of Siberian shamans.
while the film breaks free of narrative conventions to assault the viewer with an ecstatic encounter, it effaces the intentions of its subject in the service of its own aesthetic agenda.

“A Kut in Seoul,” by Alex Guillemoz (anthropologist) and Gábor Vargyas (filmmaker) follows a seven-hour ritual from the arrival of a client family at the shaman’s home to petition the spirits on behalf of their son’s marriage, through the setting up of offering food in the shaman’s shrine, to appearances by numerous spirits who deliver oracles in the person of the costumed shaman. Owing to limitations of time, only the first fifteen minutes of this film were shown. The narration resembles those many written accounts of Korean shaman ritual that emphasize the structure of events and the precise sequence of spiritual appearances but are less concerned with retrieving the improvisational dramas that transpire between human and spirit as a particular family confronts its own crisis.² Even so, “A Kut in Seoul” manages to convey a sense of intimacy. Mme. Hong, the shaman, long-time fictive “mother” to Alex Guillemoz, is at ease with the camera as she performs the full gamut of her work: drumming, dancing, delivering the words of the spirits, performing feats with knives, and casting divinations. The camera also captures relaxed moments of smoking and conversation at interludes within the ritual. The viewer has a sense of “sitting in” rather than observing from a voyeuristic distance.

“Cuckoo’s Nephew” by O. Cherkassova breaks festival conventions as a work of fiction, a folktale in the form of an animated cartoon. The film tells the story of an old shaman of the Nivkh people (northeastern Siberia) who passes on his knowledge and experience to a young apprentice. The apprentice then embarks upon a visionary journey. When festival organizer Elaine Charnov saw this film at the Parnu Film Festival, she was intrigued by its artful portrayal of shamanic experiences that might be recounted in the oral literature of a people but elude the more literal lens of the documentary camera.

The screenings concluded with two retrospective films, “Magical Death” and “Children’s Magical Death,” by the late Tim Asch in collaboration with anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon. In “Magical Death,” shot by Chagnon, the men of a Yanomamo village, led by their shaman and aided by hallucinogens, combat the destructive hekura spirits unleashed by a rival village, using their own ritual-induced powers to inflict death from a distance. In this early Asch and Chagnon film, the remarkable footage is freighted with a heavy, nearly distracting monologic narration.³ It is useful to compare this treatment with the innovative Jero Tapakan films (screened in retrospective at last year’s Margaret Mead Festival) that resulted from Asch’s collaboration with anthropologist Linda Connor.⁴ This later work is constructed as a dialogue between the medium, the anthropologist, and the camera. In one film, Jero provides her own commentary on the séance that is the subject of another film. “Children’s Magical Death” gives some indication of the artful experimentation that would mark the later work of Tim Asch. Yanomamo children play at ingesting hallucinogens and chanting to the spirits. There is no narration. The children’s spontaneous remarks appear in subtitles, including some sassy comments about the photographer.

In his remarks, Michael Taussig was highly critical of the narrative-driven treatment in “A Kut in Seoul” and “Magical Death” as a filmic form that replicates the now thoroughly destabilized authoritative voice of an older ethnography. In the case of “Magical Death,” he made an explicit link between the operation of power implicit in the timbre of the narrating voice and the political conditions under which Asch and Chagnon initially worked with the Yanomamo. More generally, he expressed unease over the West’s appropriation and essentialization of the notion of ‘shaman’ . From the 1960’s and 70’s, shamans have been regarded as “the good guys,” recast in an innocuous romantic image of our own. Taussig evoked the figure of the Yanomamo shaman in “Magical Death,” an agent of terror bent upon murdering children, in contrast with the New Age shamans’ sugary invocations of “blessings,” “peace,” and “love.” He suggested that in embracing other forms of

² See, for contrast, “An Initiation Kut for a Korean Shaman” (Kendall and Lee 1991), a film that places a strong emphasis on the story of a single initiate and the emergent quality of the ritual in which she must prove herself but glosses over the shamans’ own sense of the kut as a precise sequence of procedures which permit the otherwise unscripted appearance of the spirits.

³ In his comments, Michael Taussig cited a recent article by Eliot Weinberger (1994) which offers a critical perspective on Tim Asch’s early Yanomamo work.

religiosity, the West has great difficulty in getting over “two thousand years of having a good god and being good.” Taussig feels that ethnographic film should be more experimental in trying to evoke the feeling of trance and shamanic performance through its use of techniques found in early films made during the teens and twenties (some clips of which appear in Mihály Hoppál’s film). He applauded those treatments that approach the unrepeatable essence of a shamanic encounter: the intensity of “Pomo Shaman” or the experimental montage of shamanic art in Hoppál’s film. In “Cuckoo’s Nephew,” as an extreme approach to the difficult task of representing the unrepeatable, animation distanced the viewer from common sense notions of what is “real.”

Taussig’s comments provoked a heated discussion. Were all filmic representations, all attempts at explanation, inextricably part of the colonial legacy—ethnographic authority as authoritarianism? Is there no value in making a record for the record’s sake? Does our interest in shamans inevitably reduce them to essentialized objects of global consumption, “like soap or bananas”? How can a film like “Pomo Shaman,” seemingly free of ‘authoritarian’ ethnographic conventions, be considered a liberating project when the editors effaced Essie Parish’s own intentions? If an animated cartoon about a Siberian people contains ethnographic truth, then what about computer animations that visualize the images that New Age shamans, report to have seen during their trance voyages? Is not the experiencing of shamanic imagery in post-modern format itself another form of commodification?

If voice-of-god ethnography is dead, both in prose and in documentary film, then the question of what constitutes appropriate, visually effective representation is open to a great variety of approaches, perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the differences of opinion regarding filmic representations of shamans. Mark Soosar spoke of the difficulty of identifying with filmic portrayals in which all that we see is the shamans’ bodies in motion. He was skeptical of the power of animation in furthering insight. Culture is oral and people create their own unique worlds which it becomes the task of the filmmaker to represent. He noted that at film festivals we tend to see two types of films, records of action or talking heads. The challenge is in following and developing stories, real dramas of everyday life.

A member of the audience noted that the films had all focused on performance while ignoring the effect of shamanic performance upon the subjects of healing, those for whom the shaman performed. Indeed, some of the films presented rituals that were solicited expressly for the filmmakers and not addressed to local need, footage that could thus only show what the shaman does rather than why. Among the festival films, a client story is most evident in “A Kut in Seoul” but as a necessary catalyst to the ritual rather than as a central theme. “A Shamanic Medium of Tugaru” includes client voices in brief interview clips. In general, films about shamans tend to give only cursory representation to the shaman’s clients, “a ritual held for so-and-so because of such-and-such.” Filmed performances, visual manifestations of shamanic experiences consistent with a prior ichnography, are inherently dramatic and more easily produced than is the dynamic interplay between shaman, client, and spirit, rapid-fire dialogue recorded in the heat of ritual and predicated upon contextual knowledge, material that demands tedious, time-consuming, and sometimes expensive translation, editing, and subtitling. Clients may be far more reticent than shamans to have their adherence to “superstitious” rituals recorded or to have their personal crises become matters of public record. Practical considerations in filmmaking thus compound a tendency already well established in much (though by no means all) ethnographic writing on shamans, an observation in support of Michael Taussig’s position that we have essentialized “shamans” to our own needs.

Laurel Kendall asked the filmmakers to comment on what it meant to introduce a camera into a shaman ritual, noting that the question she is most frequently asked at screenings of “An Initiation Kut for a Korean Shaman” (Kendall and Lee 1991) is whether the presence of the camera caused the ritual to fail, made it impossible for the spirits to enter the initiate. David Perie had also related that the stylish darkness of “Pomo Shaman” was a consequence of Essie Parish’s insistence that the film be shot in low light, since brilliant floodlights and the hum in the electricity would inhibit the onset of trance. How had the festival filmmakers negotiated the presence of the camera and permission to film?

Yasuhiro Omori’s subjects considered the camera beneficial and told him that the spirits favored its presence, but he also related that in all of his projects, he is careful to establish rapport before introducing his camera and sound equipment. He described how he gained the good

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5 See Atkinson (1992) for an overview of the range of writings on shamans, and current trends in scholarship.
Filmmakers and anthropologists described a range of responses to the question of participation. Hoppál felt that it was not necessary to participate in order to film. Soosaar felt that the rituals he filmed could not be staged “just for show,” that all participants, including the film crew, had to approach these events with sincerity.

The symposium exceeded its allotted time and ended with participants and audience hungry to continue the dialogue. How does an outsider “know” another culture? On what authority is that knowledge transmitted. What is the effect of other media imagery upon representation of shamans? This meeting of “Shamans and Cameras” lead a diverse audience on one evening in New York to consider some of the fundamental questions of anthropological representation.

Films Screened

1. At the symposium:
   “Shamanism: Past and Present” (1994), Mihály Hoppál (Ethnographic Institute, Budapest)
   “A ‘Kut’ in Seoul” (1993), Alex Guillemoz and Gábor Vargyas (Ethnographic Institute, Budapest)
   “Cuckoo’s Nephew” (1993), Animated cartoon. O. Cherkassova (Russia)
   “Magical Death” (1973) Napoleon Chagnon and Timothy Asch (D.E.R.)
   “Children’s Magical Death” (1973), Timothy Asch and Napoleon Chagnon (D.E.R.)

2. Elsewhere in the festival program:
   “Survivors of the Rainforest” (1993), Andy Jillings and Jacques Lizot (UK, Channel 4)
   “Grandma of Boats” (1989–1993), Mark Soosaar (Estonia, Mark Soosaar)
   “Siberia after the Shaman” (1991), Graham Johnson and Piers Vitebsky (UK, ITEL)
Symposium Participants:

Moderator: Laurel Kendall, Anthropologist, American Museum of Natural History
Co-producer of “An Initiation Kut for a Korean Shaman”
Discussant: Michael Taussig, Anthropologist, Columbia University
Author of Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man (Chicago, 1986) and Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses (New York, 1993)

Participants:
Mark Soosaar, Filmmaker
Parnu Film Festival, Estonia
Mihály Hoppál, Anthropologist and Filmmaker
Institute of Ethnology, Hungary
Yasuhiro Omori, Anthropologist and Filmmaker
National Museum of Ethnology, Japan

References


2 Figure of a bird-headed man, symbolizing a spirit as represented by the Tuva living on the western shore of Lake Khöwsgöl, northern Mongolia. Museum of Ethnography, Budapest (No. 60.96.39). Diószegi 1963: 68, fig. 17b. Photo: László Roboz, 2007.
3 (a) The Abandoned Princess Spirit before the “gate of thorns” to the other world. Photo: Seong-nae Kim, around 2000.

3 (b) Releasing loop knots in a rite similar to the Ssitkim-kut. Photo: Seong-nae Kim, around 2000.