

# SHAMAN

An International Journal  
for Shamanistic Research

*Front and back covers: After drawings on Altai Turkic drums*  
(A. V. Anokhin, *Materialy po shamanstva u altaïtsev*, figs. 70 and 77)

Copyright © 1993, 2007 by Molnar & Kelemen Oriental Publishers, Budapest  
First edition published 1993. Second edition, revised and expanded 2007  
Photographs © Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, Mihály Hoppál and Kun Shi  
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, in any form or by any means,  
electronic, photocopying or otherwise, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Printed in Hungary

ISSN 1216-7827

# SHAMAN

Volume 1 Numbers 1 & 2 Spring/Autumn 1993  
Second Edition, Revised and Expanded 2007

## Contents

### *Articles*

- Introductory Remarks on the Study of Shamanism  
ÅKE HULTKRANTZ 5
- Are “Trance,” “Ecstasy” and Similar Concepts Appropriate  
in the Study of Shamanism?  
ROBERTE N. HAMAYON 17
- Some Hyperpragmatic Patterns in Tamang Shamanic Recitations, Nepal  
ANDRÁS HÖFER 41
- The Shaman in Myths and Tales  
ÅKE HULTKRANTZ 53
- The Kun-ning-gung Palace in Peking: The Manchu Dynasty’s Shaman  
Centre in the “Forbidden City”  
TATIANA A. PANG 71
- “Praying in the Darkness”:  
New Texts for a Little-Known Manchu Shamanic Rite  
GIOVANNI STARY 87
- Kamidari* as a Key Concept of Okinawan Shamanism  
MARI YOSHINAGA and YUJI SASAKI 105

### *Review Articles*

- Shamanism and the Politics of Culture: An Anthropological View  
of the 1992 International Conference on Shamanism, Yakutsk,  
the Sakha Republic  
MARJORIE MANDELSTAM BALZER 121
- Shamanistic Studies in China: A Preliminary Survey of the Last Decade  
KUN SHI 149

*Book Reviews*

- ROY ANDREW MILLER und NELLY NAUMANN. *Altjapanisch FaFuri. Zu Priestertum und Schamanismus im vorbuddhistischen Japan* (Catherine Uray-Kóhalmi) 163
- GIOVANNI STARY (ed.) *Das "Schamanenbuch" der Sibe-Mandschuren;*  
TATJANA A. PANG. *Die sibemandschurische Handschrift "Der Schamanenhof." Die sibemandschurische Handschrift Saman kūwaran-i bithe aus der Sammlung N. Krotkov;*  
ALESSANDRA POZZI. *Manchu-Shamanica Illustrata. Die mandschurische Handschrift 2774 der Tōyōbunka Kenkyūsho, Tōkyō Daikaku (Shamanica Manchurica Collecta. Vols. 1–3.)* (Catherine Uray-Kóhalmi) 166

*News and Notes*

- Report on the First Conference of the International Society for Shamanistic Research, Held 22–28 July, 1991, Seoul, Korea (Mihály Hoppál) 170
- Report on the "Shamanism as a Religion: Origin, Reconstruction and Traditions," Conference, Held August 15–22, 1992, Yakutsk, Russia (Mihály Hoppál) 174

## Introductory Remarks on the Study of Shamanism

ÅKE HULTKRANTZ

STOCKHOLM

The publication of this first international journal on shamanism is a sign that shamanic studies have come of age. As recently demonstrated, interest in shamanism dates back to the seventeenth century, when the first more comprehensive reports of this phenomenon were written down (Flaherty 1992). Analytical studies began to appear in the eighteenth century. A hundred years later, in 1870, Sir John Lubbock specified shamanism as the fourth stage of the evolution of religion. At this stage, he maintained, "the superior deities are far more powerful than man, and of a different nature. Their place of abode also is far away, and accessible only to Shamans." (Lubbock 1870: 119) His work opened floodgates to accounts of shamanism; the theories about its nature and history have also been refined over the years. Today, there is an enormous output of documents and research results on shamanism. Most of them are descriptions in ethnographical monographs, but there is no lack of theoretical works in the recent literature. Indeed, it seems that almost every writer on shamanism comes up with his own theory.

It is, therefore, timely that a new journal, *Shaman*, should undertake to be the forum of the scholarly discussion of shamanism. Today, shamanism is being investigated in many countries and from all possible angles. And yet, there is little fruitful interchange of ideas between the scholars involved. One main reason for this disjunction is the language barrier; another is the basic differences in scholarly tradition. We might, for instance, consider and contrast the American and the Russian research traditions.

Russia has a long tradition of shamanic research, as has been pointed out by V. N. Basilov (1984: 1. 46 ff.).<sup>1</sup> Basilov emphasizes the voluminous Russian scholarly output on shamanism; as is generally known, A. A. Popov (1932) could already count more than 650 papers on the subject in his bibliography of shamanism, most of them, Basilov tells us, dealing with shamanic clothing, instruments and rituals. Later research also focused on beliefs and myths. Until the fall of the Soviet regime, the theoretical framework was (Marxist) evolutionism, religious and social. Thus, shamanism was supposed to have succeeded to totemism, and then evolved in close connection with the clan system. Basilov does not mention, however, whether or not Russian shamanic literature during the Soviet era was much preoccupied with ethnogenetic analyses.

Another characteristic of Russian shamanological works is that they contain very few references to sources and investigations published outside the former Soviet Union. We get the impression that shamanism only existed in the Soviet area, with some extension to Lapland and northern Alaska and Canada, and that everything on shamanism worth mentioning had been written in Russia.

If we turn to shamanic studies in the United States, it is as if we faced a distorted mirror image of Russian shamanic research. Jane Monnig Atkinson (1992: 307 ff.) has recently written a survey article, "Shamanisms Today," which, actually, deals almost entirely with Anglo-Saxon, and particularly North American, works in the genre. Since American anthropologists have expressed a general distrust of the concept of shamanism (Atkinson 1992: 308), and have meant by "shamanism" a variety of phenomena dissociated from larger cultural contexts, their focus has been on single cultural traditions with strains of "shamanic features."

Atkinson's review is also a catalogue of works where shamanism is treated as an integral part of specific tribal cultures, and this integration has, then, been analyzed. Such studies demonstrate "that 'shamanisms' never occur in isolation but always are embedded in wider systems of thought and practice." (Atkinson 1992: 315) In other words, a continued tendency to break up the conventional concept of shamanism, as Clifford Geertz and Robert Spencer have done before.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See also the following non-Russian works: Hoppál 1988: 1/87 ff.; Humphrey 1980: 243 ff.; and Voigt 1976: 75 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. my criticism Hultkrantz 1977: 87 f.

It strikes me that this disqualification of shamans as a distinct category has its historical roots in the indifference to their specific roles traditional to American research, where concepts like “medicine men” and “shamans” have been rather carelessly used (cf. below).

The kernel of the problem is stated by Atkinson (in a rejoinder to me) when she points out that theorizing about shamanism falls outside anthropology, since a study of shamanism “as a detachable and self-contained problem” is at odds with the goals of anthropology, which aims at “understanding historically situated and culturally mediated social practice” (Atkinson 1992: 309). However, it is impossible to agree that generalizations about shamanism cannot be made, given that due attention is paid to relevant historical and cultural facts. Miss Atkinson’s interpretation is, evidently, rooted in that exclusive emphasis on the microperspective in history which has ruled American anthropology since the 1930s, and has, unfortunately, hampered so much historical research.

These short characterizations of Russian and American shamanic studies should suffice to demonstrate the need for debate between the different “schools” of shamanism, and where could this be done if not in an international journal of shamanism?

It stands to reason that any effort to define “shaman” and “shamanism” will be a challenge to the many scholars in the field who have found their own definitions. Still, after having criticized other approaches to shamanism, I think I owe it to the reader to give my personal interpretation of these terms. For those who have not yet found a suitable definition, my efforts might prove provocative—in the positive or negative sense.

One of the first scientific definitions of “shaman” was given by the Russian ethnographer V. M. Mikhaïlovskiï (1892: 67), who stated that the shaman is “an intermediary in man’s relations with the world of spirits.” This is a very realistic and accurate characterization of the shaman’s central meaning, his position as a mediator between two worlds: the natural world and the supernatural. Another famous scholar of shamanism, Mircea Eliade, whose investigations on the subject started with studies of yoga, saw the shaman as a master of ecstasy, and shamanism as a technique of ecstasy (1964: 4). One could say that Eliade here mirrors the religious psychology approach associated with scholars like M. A. Czaplicka, T. K. Oesterreich and G. Nioradze, to

mention a few names. Together these two definitions span the scope of the shaman concept, but neither covers the whole field.

Without entering into a discussion of the definitions which have been suggested by present-day shamanologists, I should like to repeat here my own definition from a former paper: the shaman is “a social functionary who, with the help of guardian spirits, attains ecstasy in order to create a rapport with the supernatural world on behalf of his group members” (Hultkrantz 1973: 34, and also 1978: 30–42). By “shaman,” thus, I understand a person, male or female, who through his/her training or spiritual endowment is able to act as a mediator between members of his/her social group (in some cases members of another social group) and the supernatural powers. The contact with the other world is realized through ecstasy or trance, two words for the same thing.<sup>3</sup> The trance signals the entrance of the guardian spirits. In its full-blown forms, it may also mean the appearance of mighty spirits coming from distant places to give information and help.<sup>4</sup> The flights of the shaman’s own soul presuppose a deep, sometimes cataleptic trance.<sup>5</sup> These flights could involve the retrieving of lost souls, the transporting of a dead person’s soul to the land of the dead, a scouting expedition to places in this world or the other world, or a visit to the high supernatural beings who control the fate and welfare of human beings.

It is obvious from this definition that “shaman” is best defined in terms of religio-phenomenological criteria. I will not deny that his social functions are also a part of his identity, but they do not describe the nature of his role as distinct from other religious and ritual functionaries.

It is likewise obvious that our definition is based on Siberian shamanic phenomenology. ‘Shaman’ is possibly a Tunguzian word for ‘magician’ and ‘conjurer’, and early it became a *terminus technicus* for the ecstatic performer among Siberian peoples.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, when persons fulfilling similar functions were identified among other

---

<sup>3</sup> For the identification of ecstasy and trance, see Arbman 1963: 347 ff. Ecstasy is a theological and humanistic concept; trance a medical and psychiatric term, cf. Hultkrantz 1978: 41.

<sup>4</sup> Eliade completely neglects this aspect of shamanism, cf. Hultkrantz 1978: 42.

<sup>5</sup> On the correlation between trance depth and visionary contents in shamanism, see Bäckman and Hultkrantz 1978: 90 ff. See now also Walsh 1989.

<sup>6</sup> The endless discussion of the origin of the word shaman is still going on, see the interesting article by Voigt (1984).



peoples on roughly the same level of societal development, these persons were also called “shamans” by scholars. In particular, the peoples variously labelled as “Arctic,” “circumpolar” or “northern” were found to have true shamans.<sup>7</sup> Finally, the ecstatic healers and diviners of Central Asia, North and South America, Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands were also recognised to be shamans. However, there has been no unanimity among scholars as to the geographic range of shamanic practitioners. For instance, most Russian writers have concentrated on Siberian shamans, and a scholar of the stature of Åke Ohlmarks (1939) has declared that the Arctic regions and Siberia were the only areas where true shamans were to be found. Today, most though not all shamanologists would agree that shamans and shamanism occur in most continents, with the possible exceptions of Africa and Australia.<sup>8</sup>

Whilst the shaman may be defined as has been suggested in the foregoing, we can, of course, also distinguish his/her main functions (Hultkrantz 1978: 35 ff.). The dominant function is that of a curing doctor or medicine man/medicine woman (although there are shamans who are not doctors but instead fulfill some other shamanic function). There are, as we know, also other categories of medical specialists: the non-shamanic medicine man who receives his calling through the spirits, or through spiritual heritage, but whose curing activity takes place in a weak trance, or no trance at all, so that soul journeys are, as a rule, excluded; and the herbalist, often an elderly man or woman whose skills have been learned through family tradition and practical experience (Hultkrantz 1985: 511 ff., 1989: 334, 1992: 17 ff.). There are also bone surgeons and trepanners, specialists who can rarely, however, be considered shamans. The shaman’s particular task as a doctor is to retrieve a patient’s lost soul or to expel a disease spirit (an activity which sometimes takes place in a state of possession). Other healing techniques are also resorted to, such as pointing out the culprit who, supposedly, caused the disease through witchcraft.<sup>9</sup> In soul retrievals,

---

<sup>7</sup> The concept “northern peoples,” earlier used by scholars like Anisimov, Vdovin and Haekel, has been revived by Pentikäinen (1992).

<sup>8</sup> There are scholars who defend the existence of shamans in Africa, for instance, Lewis (1971 and 1984), to whom shamanic ecstasy means possession. Similarly, Lommel (1989) has found something similar to shamans in Australia.

<sup>9</sup> See Hultkrantz e.g. 1992: 58 f. (Tlingit).

the shaman sometimes transforms himself into his guardian spirit, or sends out his guardian spirit, not his soul.

In several cases, the shaman is also a psychopomp, and a guide to the other world for people ignorant in eschatological matters. He is, furthermore, a diviner, and the middleman between man and the powers, the one responsible for bringing on hunting luck. Thus, the shaman acts as a beadsman who implores the supernatural masters of the animals to put the animals at the disposal of the hunters. Taryo Obayashi (1991: 1 ff.) has recently called attention to the importance of the shaman's role in hunting rituals, and Roberte Hamayon (1990: 287 ff.) has analyzed, in a new and impressive work, the Siberian shaman's dependence on hunting and the natural environment as sources of inspiration for his spiritual world of imagination.

The shaman's connection to sacrificial ritual is a challenging subject. We have ethnographical sketches and analyses, but no coherent comparative theory.<sup>10</sup>

With all these functions, shamans are, naturally, the main agents of shamanism. We may define shamanism as the complex of beliefs, rituals and myths that has developed around the shaman.<sup>11</sup> Its concrete reference varies, however. When László Vajda (1964: 268) pinpointed the elements of Siberian shamanism he did so not because he wanted to confine the term 'shamanism' only to Siberian shamanism, but because he was uncertain as to what extent shamanism as identified in Siberia was found in other areas. His range of shamanic phenomena includes ritual ecstasy (and only secondarily possession), theriomorphic guardian spirits, a leading female animal guardian or *Tiermutter* ('animal mother'), ritual initiation into the profession, with ecstatic experience of how the spirits dismember and then renew the shaman candidate's body, a cosmology of three vertical world zones (heaven, earth, underworld) and a world pillar, ritual fights between shamans, a ceremonial dress and a drum (Vajda 1964: 268–290). Vajda rightly points out that many of these phenomena, for instance guardian spirits, a three-tiered cosmology and the world pole, are to be found outside the world of

---

<sup>10</sup> Cf. however, Paulson 1964: 140 f.

<sup>11</sup> Hultkrantz 1973: 36. Mihály Hoppál (1985: 135 f.) underlines the importance of the "belief system." For an alternative, less adequate and wider concept of shamanism which takes in all types of medicine men and is used mostly in North America, see Hultkrantz 1979: 85 f.

shamanism. It is the simultaneous occurrence of the entire set of the indicated phenomena that constitutes shamanism.<sup>12</sup>

It is, therefore, a mistake to say that shamanism is a separate religion, the religion of Siberia, as some scholars have done in the past.<sup>13</sup> Siberian religions contain many elements which cannot be subsumed under the heading “shamanism.” And there are many shamanisms in other areas showing a different constellation of traits, many of which do not occur in Siberian shamanism.

The element index provided by Vajda is, thus, only partly applicable to other shamanic areas. Certainly, with some exceptions, it fits Eurasian Arctic shamanism outside Siberia rather well: for instance, the Saami share the initiation ceremony of their Siberian colleagues (Bäckman 1986: 265 f.), but lack their ceremonial gown. This gown is restricted to Siberian shamans, and seems to be a late development.<sup>14</sup>

We must note, however, that features such as a *Tiermutter*, death and revival rituals (e.g. the ecstatic experience of dismemberment and revival of the shaman candidate), initiation rituals, ritual duels, shamanic drum and other paraphernalia are not necessarily indications that we are having to do with shamanism. The same might be said about spiritual possession, which, according to Hans Findeisen’s interpretation, should characterize Siberian shamanism.<sup>15</sup> Actually, shamanism with possession is not all that common in Siberia. This is not to deny that there is consistent spiritual possession in the case of some tribes in Siberia and vicinity, such as the Ainu. Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (1976: 178 f., 181, 183) notes that Ainu shamans have a passive role in shamanic séances. Perhaps one should, as Anna-Leena Siikala (1978: 334 f.) suggests, speak of “role identification” rather than of possession among Siberian shamans, since many séances are best interpreted as being on the borderline between inspirational and possessional shamanism.

---

<sup>12</sup> Vajda 1964: 291; Hultkrantz 1978: 29 f. These remarks will, I hope, answer Siikala’s criticism of my view of shamanism as a religious configuration; Siikala and Hoppál 1992: 19.

<sup>13</sup> See my discussion: Hultkrantz 1978: 29.

<sup>14</sup> Bäckman in Bäckman and Hultkrantz 1978: 78 f.; Lönnqvist 1987:150 ff., 156.

<sup>15</sup> Findeisen (1967: 43 ff.) calls the Siberian shaman a “priest of (spiritual) possession.” Cf. my discussion: Hultkrantz 1978: 43 ff.

Possession in a psychological sense is more characteristic of Tibet and Central Asia where, on the other hand, there is very little evidence of soul journeys—in Eliade’s opinion, the most typical shamanic trait (Basilov 1976: 149 ff.; Berglie 1978: 39 ff.).

The range of shamanic elements, thus, varies from region to region. As is clear from my definition of ‘shaman’, I consider trance, direct contact with spiritual beings and guardian spirits, together with the mediating role played by the shaman in a ritual setting, to constitute the minimum requirement for a case of shamanism. The presence of guardian spirits during the trance and following shamanic actions is, as I see it, a most necessary element, and one that delimits shamanic trance from other states of trance.<sup>16</sup> The above describes what I would call the salient features of “general shamanism,” the simple form of shamanism that we find everywhere,<sup>17</sup> in contradistinction to the more specialized shamanic pattern such as Arctic shamanism, Siberian shamanism, and Mongolian shamanism. Maybe general shamanism should be seen as a defoliated but nevertheless ideologically meaningful shamanism, a kind of spiritual platform from which the more specialized and developed forms of shamanism have grown. Its wide distribution over the world points to its being rooted in the world of hunters, as Andreas Lommel (1965: 7 ff.) suggested thirty years ago.<sup>18</sup>

Many specialized shamanic elements typical of Siberia may be found outside this area, probably as archaic residues or results of diffusion. This is the case in the Americas, where we certainly come across not only ecstasy, animal guardian spirits and a tripartite world, but also a notched tree with steps for the climbing shaman, as in Siberia—the tree being a ritual replica of the world pillar—and a drum that sometimes has the drum-skin painted with cosmic figures, exactly like the Siberian drum. Indeed, we even find an almost Siberian shamanic phenomenology among the Mapuche Indians in Chile (Hultkrantz 1991: 20 ff.).

---

<sup>16</sup> See also Waida 1984: 225 ff.

<sup>17</sup> Hultkrantz 1967: 35. In contradistinction to specialized and institutionalized shamanism I have also called it “lowly shamanism.” General shamanism should be distinguished from “general shamanizing” (see below).

<sup>18</sup> It is likely that this type of shamanism dates from the time when all humans were hunters, that is, paleolithic times. Ulla Johansen (1987 :11) cautiously points out that such an early age for shamanism cannot be proved. I agree. However, shamanism’s integration with the religion of the hunters points in that direction.

South American Indians have, otherwise, a vague shamanic pattern, where the role of the helping spirits is played down, their place as instigators of trance states being taken by psychotropic drugs.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the spirits show themselves as an effect of the drugs.

North American shamanism in many respects shows similarities to Siberian shamanism, particularly among the Eskimo groups and among the Indians of the American West, where cases of possession have been reported.<sup>20</sup> In large parts of North America, particularly on the Plains, shamanism has been outgrown, and replaced by individual ecstatic power acquisition.<sup>21</sup>

Such “democratized” shamanism (Lowie) is obviously a case of later, degenerated shamanism. We also find it in parts of Eurasia, where it takes the form of “family shamanism” among the Chuchee and the Koryak, and of guardian spirit belief among the Saami.<sup>22</sup> This “general shamanizing” does not represent the beginnings of shamanism, but rather its disintegration (Hultkrantz 1978: 34 f.). Nevertheless, it probably dates quite far back, as my American data suggest.

Our main task will, of course, be to examine traditional shamanism, whether it occurs in traditional or modernized societies. We should not forget, however, that there is today a dynamic new movement in modern societies, an attempt to synthesize the insights of shamanism with modern therapy. I refer to Michael Harner’s well-known “neo-shamanism.” This universal movement deviates from classical shamanism. As Harner points out, in neo-shamanism—or as he terms it, “shamanic counseling”—the shaman does not undertake a journey to the other world on behalf of his client, but the client is counselled to become his or her own shaman for this type of journey (Harner 1988: 179). This, however, does not exclude an experienced shaman’s helping other people in more traditional shamanic ways (Harner 1988: 185).

---

<sup>19</sup> See for instance Baer 1984: 199 ff.; and Luna 1986.

<sup>20</sup> On possession on the American Northwest Coast, see Hultkrantz 1992: 58 f.

<sup>21</sup> Hultkrantz 1986: 41 f. Not only shamanism but also beliefs in the supernatural masters of animals—so common in other parts of America—have been supplanted by general guardian spirit beliefs on the Plains and in surrounding areas. I refer here to my investigations for a coming book on North American Indian religious history.

<sup>22</sup> The Chuchee and Koryak cases are well-known. For the Saami, see Hultkrantz 1987: 110 ff.; and Bäckman 1975: 114 ff.

This is just a sampling of the types of problems that a student of shamanism, will encounter. A great many aspects of shamanism have been the objects of investigation in the past, and even more will arise. It is good to think that we now have a proper forum for discussion and for the presentation of new materials from the wonderful world of shamanism.

## References

- Arbman, Ernst 1963–70. *Ecstasy, or Religious Trance in the Experience of the Ecstatics and from the Psychological Point of View*. 3 vols. Stockholm: Svenska Bokförlaget.
- Atkinson, Jane Monning 1992. "Shamanisms Today." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21: 307–330.
- Bäckman, Louise 1975. *Sájva: föreställningar om hjälp- och skyddsväsen i heliga fjäll bland samerna*. Stockholm Studies in Comparative Religion 13. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International.
- . 1986. "The Initiation of the Saami (Lapp) Shaman, the Noaidie." In Ugo Bianchi (ed.) *Transition Rites: Cosmic, Social, and Individual Order*. Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider.
- Bäckman, Louise and Åke Hultkrantz 1978. *Studies in Lapp Shamanism*. Stockholm Studies in Comparative Religion 16. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International.
- Baer, Gerhard 1984. *Die Religion der Matsigenka, Ost-Peru*. Basel: Wepf & Co.
- Basilov, V. N. 1976. "Shamanism in Central Asia." In Agehananda Bharati (ed.) *The Realm of the Extra-Human: Agents and Audiences*. The Hague: Mouton.
- . 1984. "The Study of Shamanism in Soviet Ethnography." In Mihály Hoppál (ed.) *Shamanism in Eurasia*. 2 parts. Göttingen: Edition Herodot.
- Berglie, Per-Arne 1978. "On the Question of Tibetan Shamanism." In Martin Brauen and Per Kvaerne (eds.) *Tibetan Studies*. Zürich: Völkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich.
- Eliade, Mircea 1964. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Bollingen Series 76. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Findeisen, Hans 1967. *Schamanentum*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Flaherty, Gloria 1992. *Shamanism and the Eighteenth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hamayon, Roberte 1990. *La chasse à l'âme. Esquisse d'une théorie du chamanisme sibérien*. Mémoires de la Société d'ethnologie I. Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie.
- Harner, Michael 1988. "Shamanic Counseling." In Gary Doore (comp. and ed.) *Shaman's Path. Healing, Personal Growth and Empowerment*. Boston and London: Shambala.



- Hoppál, Mihály 1985. "Shamanism: An Archaic and/or Recent System of Beliefs." *Ural-Altäische Jahrbücher* 57: 121–140.
- . 1988. "Neue sowjetische Ergebnisse in der Erforschung des Schamanismus in Sibirien." In János Puzstay (ed.) *Specimina Sibirica*. Vol. 1. Quinque Ecclesiae [Pécs]: Janus Pannonius Universität.
- Hultkrantz, Åke 1967. "Spirit Lodge, a North American Shamanistic Séance." In Carl-Martin Edsman (ed.) *Studies in Shamanism*. Stockholm: The Donner Institute.
- . 1973. "A Definition of Shamanism." *Temenos* 9: 25–37.
- . 1977. "History of Religions in Anthropological Waters." *Temenos* 13: 81–97.
- . 1978. "Ecological and Phenomenological Aspects of Shamanism." In V. Diószegi and M. Hoppál (eds.) *Shamanism in Siberia*. Bibliotheca Uralica 1. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó. 27–58.
- . 1979. *The Religions of the American Indians*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- . 1985. "The Shaman and the Medicine-Man." *Social Science and Medicine* 20(5): 511–515.
- . 1986. "The American Indian Vision Quest." In Ugo Bianchi (ed.) *Transition Rites: Cosmic, Social, and Individual Order*. Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider.
- . 1987. "On Beliefs in Non-Shamanic Guardian Spirits among the Saamis." In Tore Ahlbäck (ed.) *Saami Religion*. Åbo: The Donner Institute.
- . 1989. "Health, Religion and Medicine in Native North American Traditions." In L. E. Sullivan (ed.) *Healing and Restoring*. New York: Macmillan.
- . 1991. "The Drum in Shamanism: Some Reflections." In Tore Ahlbäck and Jan Bergman (eds.) *The Saami Shaman Drum*. Åbo: The Donner Institute.
- . 1992. *Shamanic Healing and Ritual Drama*. New York: Crossroad.
- Humphrey, Caroline 1980. "Theories of North Asian Shamanism." In Ernest Gellner (ed.) *Soviet and Western Anthropology*. London: Duckworth.
- Johansen, Ulla 1987. "Zur Geschichte des Schamanismus." In Walther Heissig and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit (eds.) *Synkretismus in den Religionen Zentralasiens*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.
- Lewis, I. M. 1971. *Ecstatic Religion*. Hammondsworth: Penguin Books.
- . 1984. "What is a Shaman?" In Mihály Hoppál (ed.) *Shamanism in Eurasia*. 2 vols. Göttingen: Edition Herodot.
- Lommel, Andreas 1965. *Die Welt der frühen Jäger*. München: Callwey.
- . 1989. "Shamanism in Australia." In Mihály Hoppál and Otto von Sadovszky (eds.) *Shamanism: Past and Present*. 2 parts. ISTOR Books 1–2. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó; Los Angeles/Fullerton: International Society for Transoceanic Research.
- Lönnqvist, Bo 1987. "Schamanentrachten in Sibirien." In Tore Ahlbäck (ed.) *Saami Religion*. Åbo: The Donner Institute.
- Lubbock, Sir John 1870. *The Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man*. London: Longmans, Green and Co.

- Luna, L. E. 1986. *Vegetalismo: Shamanism among the Mestizo Population of the Peruvian Amazon*. Stockholm Studies in Comparative Religion 27. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International.
- Mikhaïlovskiĭ, V. M. 1892. "Shamanstvo. Sravnitel'no-étnograficheskie ocherki." *Izvestiia Imperatorskogo Obshchestva liubiteleiĭ estestvoznaniia, antropologii i étnografii pri Moskovskom universitete LXXV*. Trudy étnografii XII. 1.
- Obayashi, Taryo 1991. "The Shaman's Role in the Hunting Rituals of Northern Peoples." In *Proceedings of the 5th International Abashiri Symposium: Hunting Rituals of Northern Peoples*. Hokkaido.
- Ohlmarks, Åke 1939. *Studien zum Problem des Schamanismus*. Lund: Gleerup.
- Ohnuki-Tierney, Emiko 1976. "Shamanism and World View: The Case of the Ainu of the Northwest Coast of Southern Sakhalin." In Agehananda Bharati (ed.) *The Realm of the Extra-Human: Ideas and Actions*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Paulson, Ivar 1964. "Zur Phänomenologie des Schamanismus." *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 16(2): 175–200.
- Pentikäinen, Juha 1992. "Arktisten kansojen riippuvuus luonnonvaroista [The dependence of arctic peoples on natural resources]." *Arctic Centre Reports* 6. Rovaniemi. 59–74.
- Popov, A. A. 1932. *Materialy dlia bibliografii russkoĭ literatury po izucheniiu shamanstva Severo-Aziatskikh narodov* [Materials for the bibliography of Russian studies of shamanism among the North Asian peoples]. Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo narodov severa.
- Siikala, Anna-Leena 1978. *The Rite Technique of the Siberian Shaman*. FF Communications 220. Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, Akateeminen kirjakauppa.
- Siikala, Anna-Leena and Mihály Hoppál 1992. *Studies on Shamanism*. Helsinki: Finnish Anthropological Society; Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.
- Vajda, László 1964. "Zur phaseologischen Stellung des Schamanismus." In C. A. Schmitz (ed.) *Religions-Ethnologie*. Frankfurt am Main: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft.
- Voigt, Vilmos 1976. "Der Schamanismus als ethnologisches Forschungsproblem." In Vilmos Voigt (ed.) *Glaube und Inhalt. Drei Studien zur Volksüberlieferung*. Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem.
- . 1984. "Shaman – Person or Word?" In Mihály Hoppál (ed.) *Shamanism in Eurasia*. 2 vols. Göttingen: Edition Herodot.
- Waida, Manabu 1984. "Problems of Central Asian and Siberian Shamanism." *Numen* 30(2): 215–239.
- Walsh, R. N. 1989. "Mapping States of Consciousness: Comparing Shamanic, Schizophrenic, Insight Meditation and Yogic States." In Ruth-Inge Heinze (ed.) *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on the Study of Shamanism and Alternate Modes of Healing*. Berkeley: Independent Scholars of Asia.



## Are “Trance,” “Ecstasy” and Similar Concepts Appropriate in the Study of Shamanism?\*

ROBERTE N. HAMAYON

EPHE, PARIS

*The terms “trance” and “ecstasy” are used in many definitions of shamanism to mean both a culturally defined form of behavior and a specific correlative physical and mental state. In fact, however, there is no evidence to indicate that this identification is warranted. According to the symbolic representations of shamanistic societies, the shaman’s ritual behavior is the mode of his direct contact with his spirits, hence it is functional behavior that follows a prescribed pattern. The use of the word “trance” to describe the shaman’s behavior, associated as it is with a specific physical and psychological state, has given Western religions an excuse to condemn this type of behavior, the associated state being considered in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as wild and devilish, and later, as pathological. What is in fact condemned is the assumption implicit in shamanism, i.e. that man and the spirits are similar in essence and status, a hypothesis which is unacceptable to ideologies based on divine transcendence. The idealized view of “trance” that is fashionable nowadays also results from Western concerns. However, there is still much to do with the notion of “symbolic function.”*

Most definitions and descriptions of shamanism contain terms such as “trance” and “ecstasy,” and place shamanism in the same category of religious phenomena as spirit possession. Often, these terms are even used to characterize these phenomena, and appear in the titles of general works such as those of Mircea Eliade ([1951] 1968) and Ioan M. Lewis (1971), or of the collective book *Transe, chamanisme, possession*, the subtitle of which is *From Festival to Ecstasy*. However, the

---

\* This paper was presented at the 2nd Conference of the ISSR held July 11–17, 1993, Budapest, Hungary. I am very grateful to Margaret Buckner for her supervision of my English version of this paper. A longer version of this paper has been published in French (Hamayon 1995), and a continuation of it in English (Hamayon 1998).

meaning of these terms is rarely specified in detail,<sup>1</sup> nor is their use usually justified, as though their appropriateness had been established in advance once and for all.

Fortunately, Gilbert Rouget's work ([1980] 1990) is an exception to the last statement. The author carefully distinguishes the two terms with regard to their respective implications, these being situated mostly in the psycho-physiological domain.<sup>2</sup> He considers only "trance" to be appropriate to the shaman's behavior.

This paper is not aimed at discussing definitions of shamanism which use "trance" or "ecstasy," nor at comparing different uses of these terms. Its purpose is to call into question the presuppositions implied by their use. It will be necessary, first, to recall how shamanism was discovered and investigated. This will lead to the statement that the approach using such terms as "trance" and "ecstasy" for the study of shamanism is both an historical heritage and an obstacle to the anthropological analysis of shamanism. Finally, it will be suggested that the set of facts usually designated by these terms could fruitfully be examined from other points of view.

## Historical Survey

The first observers (orthodox priests) considered the shaman to be a religious figure, but in the devil's service rather than God's. The first of these, the archpriest Avvakum,<sup>3</sup> did so explicitly. He was exiled to

---

<sup>1</sup> Precisions are scarce, but do exist. Thus Luc de Heusch accounts for his use of "ecstatic religions" as an expression encompassing shamanism and possession (1971: 227), Heinze accounts for her respective use of "ecstasy" and "trance" (1988: 342, 362–363 & *passim*). Hultkrantz considers "trance" to be "medical" and "ecstasy" to be theological, but uses them "alternatingly, for they refer to the same state of mind" (1992: 18–19).

<sup>2</sup> In summarizing their respective features, Rouget (1985: 11) characterizes ecstasy by "immobility, silence, solitude, no crisis, sensory deprivation, recollection, hallucinations," and trance by "movement, noise, in company, crisis, sensory overstimulation, amnesia, no hallucinations." The author suggests that one of the reasons of the confusion between these two terms in Western languages comes from the absence of an adjective corresponding to "trance," whereas "ecstatic" does exist. I reviewed Rouget's book after its first edition (Hamayon 1981).

<sup>3</sup> See Pascal 1938.

Siberia at the end of the seventeenth century and introduced the word “shaman” into travel literature (Pascal 1938; Delaby 1976).

The next group of observers in Siberia, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, had other opinions. In addition to missionaries, there were travellers, colonial administrators, political convicts, and explorers sent by the Russian Academy of Sciences. In the meantime, the age of Enlightenment had progressed, along with the colonization process, which was overtaking native peoples who had been able up to that time to continue their traditional way of life. Thus, both observers and observed had changed.

The main points of view obtaining during this period fall into three categories. According to the first, which could be called Voltairian, the shaman is a “quack” who takes advantage of peoples’ credulousness, and, therefore, is more to be denounced than described. According to the second, issuing from a positivist state of mind, the shaman is the agent of an archaic religious form to be found among primitive societies almost everywhere in the world.<sup>4</sup> The problem becomes, then, that it is impossible to characterize shamanism as a religious form at a theoretical level, for it has neither dogma nor clergy, temples nor liturgy, and each shaman has his own manner of doing things, and this manner varies with each ritual. The third viewpoint was expressed primarily by doctors and administrators in the field. They were especially sensitive to the shaman’s healing activity, which indeed was expanding more and more as colonization proceeded. According to this view, the shaman is a sort of madman who, by keeping his own illness under control, is able to help other madmen.

All of this resulted, at the beginning of the twentieth century, in research being oriented towards the psychological profile of the shaman. This orientation can be recapitulated by Van Gennep’s statement, in 1903, that the shaman is “a certain kind of man,”<sup>5</sup> and it is echoed in 1973 by Lot-Falck’s expression: “[The nature of] man prevails [over

---

<sup>4</sup> For instance, Mikhailowski brings together Siberian data and similar practices observed in other parts of the world.

<sup>5</sup> “There can be no more question of shamanistic beliefs than of shamanic cult, therefore of shamanic religion. The reason why is simply that this word does not designate a set of beliefs expressed in a set of practices, but asserts only the existence of a certain kind of man who plays a social and religious role” (Van Gennep 1903: 52) (*my translation*).

social structure].” Throughout the 20th century, psychological interpretations have spread. They fall into two trends. First, a long-lasting psycho-pathological trend describes shamanism as a therapeutic practice of a psychoanalytic or para-psychoanalytic type. Second, a mystical trend, starting from an overinterpretation of Eliade’s book but extending far beyond this author’s views, especially from the sixties on, holds that shamanism is an exemplary kind of spiritual quest or a technique for seeking self-promoting “powers.”

It is the merging of these two tendencies, therapeutical and mystical, that “neoshamanistic” movements originate. In return, these tendencies are reinforced. Although anthropological literature abounds with good monographs, hardly have methodological and theoretical problems been really debated. They were mostly left aside to the benefit of descriptions, or even radically considered to be vain and void (shamanism is a “desiccated” category, wrote Geertz 1966). These problems were perpetuated through the continued use of the term “trance” to describe the shaman’s ritual behaviour for lack of attention. In addition, variegated literature on shamanism started blossoming disconcertingly since the late 1970s. The overview published by J. M. Atkinson in 1992 terminates in a call to anthropologists to face new developments. This author classifies the topics dealt with at that time in two categories with meaningful headings: “the psychologizing of shamanism” and “shamanism as therapy.” In this way, shamanism becomes the initial reference for varied trends, going from “return to Nature” to “self-actualization,” sharing a common understanding of shamanism as a “technique of ecstasy” attainable, as any other technique, through training.

## Trance in Question

For the sake of simplification, only the term “trance” will be examined here, although the same arguments could obtain against “ecstasy.” Not only is “trance” the most frequently used term, and, as Rouget stated, the only adequate one, but also, most authors who use the term “ecstasy” use it with the same general meaning as others ordinarily assign to “trance.”

This paper does not specifically seek to reject outright this type of terminology. Rather, through the very use of such terms, it has become obvious that they are unfit to serve, first, as descriptive tools, and,

secondly, as analytical concepts. The main objection springs from the underlying interpretative views they implicitly call into play.

One is hindered by the lack of descriptive precision (even if one agrees with the criteria established by Rouget). According to current descriptions, "the shaman is in trance, enters or falls into a trance," or, "in trance, the shaman calls forth spirit or performs ritual action," leaving the reader free to imagine exactly how the shaman behaves.<sup>6</sup> Innumerable questions arise as to one of the simplest criteria, that of movement: is the shaman shaking, whirling, jumping, or dancing? And if moving is a necessary criterion, what should be done with cataleptic trance,<sup>7</sup> during which the shaman lies motionless? Such troublesome questions can be followed by two general observations.

First, shamanic societies do not make use of native terms homologous to "trance," which comes from Latin *transire* 'to die, to go beyond, to pass from one state to another.'<sup>8</sup> They do not refer to a change of state to designate the shaman's ritual action, though they may qualify his behavior as enraged or furious during that time. It even seems that the very notion of "trance" is irrelevant for them. When asked whether the shaman is or is not "in trance," they are for the most part unable to answer. Certainly, this is not surprising in itself, since analytical categories and native categories do not necessarily coincide with each other. On the contrary, as a rule, ideologically important matters are not explicitly expressed. However, as an analytical concept, "trance" becomes open to two types of criticism, the first with respect to its appropriateness to its object, and the second insofar as it does not belong to the system of representations which is the ultimate subject matter of the anthropological analysis.

The second observation is that most shamanic societies interpret the ritual episode which observers have called "trance," in terms of

---

<sup>6</sup> Here are the principal symptoms listed by Rouget (1985: 13): "trembling, shuddering, horripilation, swooning, falling to the ground, yawning, lethargy, convulsions, foaming at the mouth, protruding eyes, large extrusions of the tongue, paralysis of a limb, thermal disturbances [. . .], insensitivity to pain, tics, noisy breathing, fixed stare, and so on."

<sup>7</sup> Lot-Falck distinguishes two types of "trance": dramatic and cataleptic (1973: 9–10). I have also made use of this terminology in earlier studies on shamanism (for instance 1978), but the progress of the analysis led me to get rid of it.

<sup>8</sup> This is the etymology on which Rouget's analysis is based.

relationships with supernatural entities or spirits<sup>9</sup> and make meaningful distinctions according to the type of physical behavior. In particular, the shaman's various gestures and movements are interpreted as expressing different types of relations with the spirits.

In short, the shaman's behavior, called "trance" by observers, is qualified by shamanic societies with reference not to a specific physical or psychic state, but to the shaman's being in *direct contact with the spirits*.<sup>10</sup> And no wonder, since, for his community, the shaman is primarily the *agent of a social function*, and contact with spirits is both the *means* and the *proof* of his carrying out this function. In this respect, one should not confuse *shamanizing* (i.e. indulging in an individual practice void of ritual value for the community), which is more or less open to everyone in most shamanic societies, and *acting as shaman*, which is reserved for those who have been recognized as such by their community. Shamanic societies never confuse the behavior of the shaman with that of the shamanizing individual.<sup>11</sup>

Next, one is hampered by the absence of explicit methodological and theoretical implications involved in the use of the word "trance." It is not a "falsifiable" concept as scientifically required. There are no connected considerations which would allow for verification. The very question "Is this shaman in trance?" can entail endless discussion and only be settled from a subjective point of view. The concept of trance spans several conceptual levels and is not precisely defined in any of them. Moreover, it has an underlying implication which threatens to distort analysis, as I will now attempt to show.

The main difficulty with the word "trance" comes from the fact that three different levels of considerations merge implicitly with its use: physical behavior (possible attitudes and gestures), psychic state (or

---

<sup>9</sup> In spite of semantic disadvantages, the term "spirit" has a well-defined and well-established meaning. Let us recall the main implication of its use: spirits are supernatural entities whose essence and status are similar to the human soul's (Hamayon 1993).

<sup>10</sup> "During the onset of the trance, her toes stiffen and curl. When the depth of her trance decreases and she permits a release of tension, her toes uncurl. [. . .] Her clients, however, look the 'god' in the face and do not pay any attention to his (or her) toes. They do not 'see' any difference." (Heinze 1992: 135)

<sup>11</sup> However this confusion is made by Western movements of "neo-shamanism" or "urban shamanism." Actually, these consist in adepts' training for shamanizing with the help of an "initiated" person.



state of consciousness<sup>12</sup>) and culturally-defined behavior. A link—of correlation if not of causality—is thus implied between body and mind on one hand, nature and culture on the other hand. However, such a link can be either acknowledged or denied, but it cannot be properly demonstrated. This means that the merging of the levels in question is forced. That this conceptual fusion of physical, psychological and cultural aspects occurs implicitly through the use of the word "trance" is born out in the literature by the frequent recurrence of two problems: that of specifying exactly what induces trance, and that of its authenticity or genuineness. Both these problems derive from the implied link between physical, psychological and cultural factors. They can be formulated by questions such as: How important are physical factors in bringing about the particular psychic state suited for the shaman's culturally-defined behavior? Does the expected psychic state necessarily accompany the culturally-defined behavior and, if not, can the rite be valid?

Rouget's book deals with the first problem extensively and thoroughly, even though this is not the author's main concern.<sup>13</sup> Examining the relations between music and trance, Rouget points out that music "does not physiologically determine trance," but "does organize and socialize the trance," "at the service of a creed," "within an inclusive situation" and in relation with "essential intellectual ideas."<sup>14</sup> His demonstration can be extended to all other possible factors of physiological determination. Starting from the statement that trance arises from a "natural

---

<sup>12</sup> Rouget (1985: 3) considers the "state of mind" to be primary in his definition of "trance." He starts the first chapter of his book with this statement: "Axiomatically, trance will be considered in this book as a state of consciousness composed of two components, one psycho-physiological, the other cultural."

<sup>13</sup> The main purpose of the book is to define the role of music, and its conclusion is quite clear in this respect: music does not cause trance.

<sup>14</sup> "The technique operates only because it is at the service of a belief, and because trance constitutes a cultural model integrated into a certain general representation of the world. Here we have an essential intellectual datum, which underlies both the psychology and physiology of trance. This is why entry into trance always seems to depend upon a kind of restrictive clause: however well prepared one may be, physically and psychologically, one must still be prepared intellectually, and have made the decision (more or less unconsciously) to succumb to the trance state." (Rouget 1985: 320–321)

predisposition,”<sup>15</sup> the author asserts that this disposition gives rise to trance only within the specific socio-cultural framework and with the appropriate ideological goal. Thus, there is no conditioning factor able to automatically trigger or induce a trance: one must believe in it, and give in to it. In other words, Rouget considers the underlying symbolic representations to be the crucial factor for inducing trance. In his opinion, it is the ideological conviction that, with or without external factors (such as beating drum, whirling round, or taking drugs), is determinant for bringing into play the natural propensity to trance lying in the structure of consciousness.<sup>16</sup> This is the reason why he insists that symbolic representations are the true subject matter of research on trance.

Moreover, in my opinion, cultural diversity is so great that the so-called natural propensity to trance becomes lost in generalities or inconsistencies. This is one more reason for studying representations, as a means to account for this diversity. Only through such study, in addition to sociological analysis, can we, for instance, account for the fact that in so many societies the ritual behavior known as trance is the prerogative of one sex, the other sex being either prohibited from indulging in such behavior or sanctioned with marginalization.

Yet, postulating natural propensity—to any extent—is not irrelevant *per se*. The point here is not that it means deciding in advance what are the respective parts of cognitive experience and mental structure in the elaboration of symbolic systems. The point is rather that it predetermines the interpretation of religious forms in which trance is present. The very fact that trance is held to be a mode of organizing, socializing and ritualizing a natural propensity makes the religious

---

<sup>15</sup> “The universality of trance indicates that it corresponds to a psychophysiological disposition innate in human nature, although, of course, developed to varying degrees in different individuals. The variability of its manifestations is the result of the variety of cultures by which it is conditioned.” (Rouget 1985: 3)

<sup>16</sup> “[. . .] in possession cults, [trance is] a socialized form of behavior resulting from the conjunction of several factors: 1) at the level of the individual: a given innate to the structure of consciousness making it susceptible of being invaded by an emotional event that submerges its normal state and leads to hysteriform behavior; 2) at the level of collective representations: (a) interpretation of this event as a sign of the will or presence of a spirit or divinity; (b) exploitation or [. . .] domestication of the event, with the intention of establishing it as a mode of communication with the divine; (c) identification of the entranced subject with the divinity held to be responsible for the trance; and (d) theatricalization of this identificatory behavior.” (Rouget 1985: 322)



elaboration *second* to the natural propensity. This amounts to implying that these religious forms (shamanism and spirit possession) are more or less *dependent* on nature (in that they either channel or exploit natural dispositions), that is, it denies primacy to representations. This happens implicitly, without the knowledge of the authors themselves, and therefore all the more insidiously. This aspect will be further dealt with below.

The second problem (genuineness) indirectly rejoins the first (inducement) and emphasizes its importance. It is often expressed through the choice between genuine or simulated trance: does the shaman (or the possessed individual) really meet with the spirits or does he only pretend to? We also find such statements as: "it is often difficult to decide whether the trance is real or feigned," "the trance can be effective as well when it is only feigned," "the ritual does not necessarily operate when the trance is authentic" and, conversely, "the ritual can be operative even if no trance is manifested at all." On the whole, such considerations amount to disqualifying "trance" as fit to characterize shamanism, since they show that it is *neither sufficient nor necessary* to shamanic ritual action. There are so many obvious examples that there seems to be no need to quote any of them.

Interestingly, the question of the genuineness of trance rests on a strong hypothesis about the notion of belief. Now, this hypothesis seems to reflect a twofold misunderstanding: it implies inferring first from representation to belief, and second from belief to reality. Representations, however, taken as constituents of the symbolic system and possible objects of belief, only *represent*—this is trivial to recall.<sup>17</sup> In other words, representations cannot be identified with what they express, for they do not coincide with what they express, but refer to something else. Holding to them—which is generally the case in traditional contexts, even though adhesion remains unconscious—does not make them stop being mere ideas. Certainly, representations may have the force of reality for those who adhere to them, but they are not of the same cognitive order as ordinary reality. If this were the case, it would denote a type of madness. Is not the inability to distinguish reality from fancy one of the most obvious signs of insanity?

---

<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Oosten (1989: 335) criticizing Merkur remarks: "All ritual behavior is symbolic behavior, and as such it does not coincide with the behavior it represents."

Surely everyone has at one time or another experienced the fact that it is not necessary to really believe to indulge in a religious practice. Conversely, believing corrupts knowing, as shown by Mannoni in his famous paper “I know that quite well, but nevertheless . . .” («Je sais bien, mais quand même.»)<sup>18</sup> Remember also Quesalid,<sup>19</sup> the Kwakiutl shaman described by Levi-Strauss, who was surprised by the confidence his healing inspired in others when he himself knew he was shamming, copying the traditional ways and cheating when exhibiting concrete causes of illness.<sup>20</sup> Everyone would also admit that somehow “believing” and “doubting” are close to each other (this is the case everywhere, though other cultures may not express it so strongly as Western societies), as shown by Pouillon (1979). Huizinga stresses that one can be “both knowing and dupe” at the same time. Could not the following sentences, written by Huizinga about a famous Christian, equally refer to a shaman meeting a spirit?

Saint Francis of Assisi worships Poverty, his bride, with the most intimate pious conviction, in holy ecstasy. But if we are asked whether he believed in a spiritual heavenly being named Poverty, therefore in a being who really was the idea of Poverty, we are stopped short. The mere asking this question in such purely logical terms forces the feeling conveyed by this idea. Francis both believed and did not believe. [. . .] The most fitting expression for this spiritual activity would be to say that Francis was playing with the figure of Poverty. (*my translation*) (Huizinga 1951: 228)

---

<sup>18</sup> “I know well that the *katchina* are not spirits, they are my fathers and uncles, but nevertheless the *katchina* are here when my fathers and uncles are dancing with masks” (*my translation*) (Mannoni 1969: 16). This argument is already present in Huizinga’s *Homo ludens*. In order to illustrate the fact that, when one plays, the one who plays knows that he is playing, Huizinga mentions the fearful distress of women when the masks come near them, although they know quite well who hides behind each mask. Huizinga underlines that the distress can be partly sincere, but that it is also a duty (Huizinga [1938] 1951: 50).

<sup>19</sup> The hero of Levi-Strauss’s (1958) famous paper “The sorcerer and his magic.”

<sup>20</sup> This is why one is surprised to read: “It can happen not only that the trance is feigned [. . .], but also that the extraordinary powers attributed to it are merely illusionist’s tricks. [. . .] They are indisputably cases of fraud.” (Rouget 1985: 328, note 34) There certainly are cases of trickery, but they cannot be decided by referring them to the fact that states which are supposed to give rise to “extraordinary” feats are simulated.

Why should it be easier to consider as real the spirits’ taking control of the possessed, or the shaman’s changing into an animal, than the Carmelites’ enjoying Christ, their Husband?<sup>21</sup> How would Christians react if non-believers took such words for matter of fact?<sup>22</sup>

Along these lines, let us recall a remarkable, eye-opening case, presented by Laurel Kendall. It took place during the second attempt to perform an initiation ritual on a young Korean girl named Chini.<sup>23</sup> She was so clumsy and stiff that she did not manage to move and speak in a way suitable to persuade the audience that the spirits took hold of her. First the old shamanesses who conducted the ritual encouraged her:

When you are jumping, when you feel an urge to grab a spirit’s costume, then grab it and jump like crazy. Today all you have to do is dance with the costume . . .

Then, facing Chini’s failure, they rebuked her:

Do you think that the spirits will show up if you just stand there waiting for them? [. . .] Hey, do you think some spirit would go so far as to move your tongue for you? [. . .] When the Heavenly King kept coming in your visions, may be you didn’t know enough to say “I am the Heavenly King, I need a crown,” but could not you at least have made the right gestures for a crown? [. . .] You cannot ignore that when you are divining.

And finally, they gave her the following hint:

---

<sup>21</sup> The sentence, quoted by Rouget (1985: 6) is the following: “Those who seek solitude in order to enjoy Christ, their Husband, have every possibility of living constantly in his company.” (Sainte Thérèse d’Avila, *Œuvres complètes* 1949: 413)

<sup>22</sup> To be ridden by a spirit as the possessed one is, to marry a spirit daughter as the shaman does, to have Poverty as a bride as Saint Francis of Assisi does, to enjoy Christ, their Husband, as the Carmelites do, all these are representations which are not to be taken for realities. However, their contents are not irrelevant; indeed, they are all the more relevant in that they are all in the same metaphorical series: love relationships. Let me ask, as an aside: could relationships with imaginary beings be other than metaphorical?

<sup>23</sup> Usually one has to perform several rituals before being considered to be an initiate. In some societies repeated failures are necessary, for the access to the function obeys a logic of overcoming hardships. As a rule, one claims no other apprenticeship than the one “directly provided by the spirits.”

[To-day] cry your heart out and next time do not cry, just give a terrific performance.<sup>24</sup>

In addition, some authors, intending to restore the native tone—which is quite sound and valuable from another point of view—write their descriptions exactly as if they shared local beliefs and, they present the spirits and their relations with humans as matters of fact: the spirits exist, attack the possessed, provoke the shaman, and the society does its best to react to their actions. Now, even if this merely results from translations, the very fact that authors use these representations directly in their descriptions and analyses results in hiding their symbolic character.<sup>25</sup> One is led to forget that spirits are an element of a world view, the product of collective imagination. Moving from representation to belief is not a self-evident inference. Stating that a type of cultural behavior is performed in a specific state of consciousness is a still more debatable inference. Not to mention the fact that such a determining relation between physical behaviour, state of mind and cultural gesture,

---

<sup>24</sup> It is worth quoting the footnote added by Kendall to this term: “The verb *nolda* subsumes notions of ‘play’, ‘amusement’ and ‘performance’. Shamans commonly describe the action of spirits at a *kut* as *nolda*, as in ‘The Supernatural Official’ plays well with me.” It is also worth bringing it together with the last sentence of Huizinga quoted above.

<sup>25</sup> The same way, the fact that one never recounts what happened during a “trance” in the end comes to be taken for a physical correlate of trance, amnesia. However, this may be a mere outcome of current ideas in shamanic societies, such as: (1) the spirits do not permit their Elected to disclose their relationships, nor do they like to be disturbed for no purpose, which is the case if one calls them forth outside the ritual framework; (2) since the shaman is then supposed to be “else” and “elsewhere,” recounting his “trance” in ordinary words would mean admitting his sham. Therefore, the question is more of a cultural prohibition than of amnesia. Such is the impression given by this remark made by Moréchand “No Hmong shaman will ever admit to remembering the trance he has just experienced.” (quoted by Rouget 1985: 9) Let me also quote a similar remark made by Leiris: “As soon as the *zâr* [the spirit] is supposed to act instead of the possessed human, obviously the latter can only appear ignorant of what the spirit supposed to speak and act in his place has effectively done and said; not to seem ignorant would mean admitting not to have been really possessed, in which case all gestures would remain meaningless agitation.” (Leiris [1938] 1980: 114).

would preclude social dissimulation, therefore make social life impossible, as underscored by Rodney Needham.<sup>26</sup>

On the whole, these two problems (inducement and genuineness) arise when the symbolic essence of the shaman’s behavior is not sufficiently taken into account. In taking it into account, one is prompted not to relate the cultural background of this behavior to either the shaman’s physical or psychic state. The question of the genuineness of the “trance” then vanishes (and with it, that of the shaman’s normalcy or pathology<sup>27</sup>). As a matter of fact, the shaman does nothing other than *respect the model of behavior prescribed for his function*. He takes up his *role* as a shaman,<sup>28</sup> a role that consists of portraying his contact with the spirits. The fact that his function is performed in a staged, ritual

---

<sup>26</sup> “Even when we are convinced that a person genuinely believes what he says he believes, our conviction is not based on objective evidence of a distinct inner state. If it were possible for us to have this knowledge, then all the social dissimulation would not matter, for in that case there would be a true archetype which the dissemblers artfully affected; but this is not so, and all we actually have are *assertions of belief* [*my emphasis*, R. H.] and the acts and postures which may conventionally accompany them. If these culturally formulated token of belief are taken away, or discounted, does anything remain?” (Needham 1972: 100–101)

<sup>27</sup> In most cases, this question has been left aside on other accounts: the shaman is normal outside the ritual performances; the fact that a community could entrust a madman with such a responsibility as the shaman’s is unbelievable.

<sup>28</sup> Such is the conclusion given by Siikala (1978) and Mitrani (1982), who, however, started from quite different points of view: Siikala from an ecstatic view of the shamanic practice, Mitrani from a view to bringing together shamanic healing and psychoanalysis. More recent works by Siikala (1992) suggest that this author does not conclude the same way I did when reading her book from her applying the notion of role to the shaman’s behavior. At least this did not lead her to leave aside the ecstatic approach of shamanism, which she attempts to combine with the notion of role.

Undoubtedly the fact that the role theory has so rarely and weakly been applied to shamanism has something to do with the very topic of this paper. However, several authors long ago tried to analyze the shaman’s behavior as a social role. Filliozat (1943: 79–80) did so as early as 1943 in his book *Magie et médecine*: “The shaman does not behave at random in his frenzy, everything is going on as if he were playing a frantic role the way an actor would, a role for which the unfolding of gestures and words would be decided in advance. However this is not inconsistent with a possession state. The possession which possessed people believe they are undergoing is indeed a role they play, but this does not prevent the role from being played quite sincerely, a role which consists both in adopting a definite type of behavior and believing that this behavior comes from an outside force.” (*my translation*)

framework reinforces the point that the shaman acts out a role and brings his behavior still closer to a dramatic performance.<sup>29</sup> The shaman “in trance” is like the actor on the stage. Debating about whether the shaman’s trance is sincere or shammed, about whether the actor believes or does not believe he is the character he plays, may enrich the study of their respective psychological profile, but will never allow us to understand what shamanism or theatre is. These cannot be defined by reference to the sincerity of the respective performers. Any social role requires nervous strain, energy, close attention, and at least some feeling of involvement,<sup>30</sup> but no role can be *justified* or *validated* by such factors. Only its symbolic *efficacy* can be influenced by them.<sup>31</sup>

It should be stated that comparing the shaman to an actor was only meant to illustrate how the shaman’s behavior is the acting out of the role assigned for his function. This does not at all mean likening the shaman to an actor, shamanism to theatre, ritual to play-acting.<sup>32</sup> The shaman’s actions address supernatural entities and not an audience, and aim at producing symbolic effects in other realms and not at merely entertaining or being an end in itself.

Let us return to the notion of role and to its implication that there can be no confusion between the person who plays a role and the character he is representing. “If [an actor] believes in the reality of his role, he becomes prone to alienation,” writes Caillois ([1958] 1967: 111), as if he were echoing shamanic societies’ opinion. Actually, these societies pay great attention to the management of relationships with spirits, for they believe these relationships are indispensable to their very existence as societies. This is why a community presses some of its members to

---

<sup>29</sup> Studies of Korean shamanism have best brought to light the theatrical aspect of shamanic ritual, especially when *mudang* represent the spirits they are supposed to embody (Laurel Kendall, Chungmoo Choi, etc.).

<sup>30</sup> One cannot be cynical with respect to one’s own role. Generalized cynicism would finally bring the role to an end. However this applies to all social roles and is not to be made into an element of definition in the case of “trance.” In that case, one would have to admit that trance characterizes the rock-singer as well as the shaman.

<sup>31</sup> Usually a successful practice is the condition for a shaman to be recognized as such. He may be deprived of his social role for lack of efficacy. In short, things turn bad if he does not take up the role, i.e. does not perform the appropriate ritual; but taking up his role is not sufficient for the situation to improve, he must play it well.

<sup>32</sup> I do not totally agree with the series of criteria for distinguishing between ritual and theater set up by Schechner 1976.



develop such relationships, yet, on the other hand, compels them to maintain these relationships only in the ritual framework culturally set up for that purpose, and keeps their practice under control. Conversely, a community keeps other members from doing the same. The exhibition of such relationships on their part would be seen as pathological.<sup>33</sup> Let us refer, as an example, to the hunting societies of the Siberian forest. Any community expects its shaman to obtain promises of game from the game-giving spirit. This is why it prompts the shaman to enter into a love relationship with a name-giving spirit's daughter or sister, envisioned as an elk or reindeer, the main species of game. Then it organizes rituals for sanctioning his "marriage" with this female-spirit and for reactualizing it periodically. In these rituals the shaman imitates the behavior of a male reindeer or elk in mating: he troats, prances, jumps, stamps his feet, snorts. The fact that he mimics a stag in rut is enough to explain the "wild" aspect of his movements stigmatized in descriptions.<sup>34</sup> Various members of the community, excepting the shaman himself, are responsible for fashioning his ritual gear and paraphernalia. If the shaman dressed and behaved as a spirit-spouse outside the ritual framework, he would be deemed mad, rejected and disqualified as shaman. On the other hand, a mere hunter is prevented from "going wild" out of love for game-giving spirit-girls and considered mad if he persists in such behavior (Hamayon 1990: 517–528). In short, relationships with spirits are possible only on the part of specialists recognized as such, within a ritual framework, and under the community's control.<sup>35</sup> This triple constraint allows us to state that the shaman's behavior is to be defined as the acting out of a *role* culturally defined and socially organized.

---

<sup>33</sup> As a rule, it would give rise to shamanic healing.

<sup>34</sup> The shaman's "animalisation" is also represented by his gear. The idea of sexual intercourse between the shaman and his supernatural wife also explains why he enjoys ample possibilities for improvisation, and therefore why the shaman's practice is reputed for having a personal touch.

<sup>35</sup> The statements made by Leiris ([1938] 1980: 41–42, 57) with respect to possession among the Ethiopians of Gondar illustrate such control: "Possession crises appear only after the healer's intervention. The healer trains the patient to manifest by his behavior the signs recognized as those of possession by such or such spirit. [. . .] Manifestations of possession obey a periodicity ruled by the calendar and coincide with the periods in the year when social relations are most intense. They disappear when seasonal conditions or economic circumstances hinder these relations." (*my translation*)

In a more general way, this Siberian example illustrates that physiological or psychological considerations are useless to explain the shaman's behavior. This behavior can better be accounted for by the conceptualization of the spirits and of the relationships entertained with them. This is what dictates to the shaman a particular physical manifestation. In other words, focusing the analysis on symbolic grounds is both necessary and sufficient. In this way, a starting question such as: "How are the spirits conceived of so as to justify the shaman's hysteria-like behavior when meeting them?" may lead us to understand the symbolic references of his behavior. His behavior is, first of all, the expression of the role prescribed by the conception of the spirits. As for any role, there are individuals who are better than others at acting out and getting involved in it. It is obvious that performing this role, as any role, has an effect on his performers' psyche, but this effect is secondary and contingent.

### Trance as a Tool of Deprecation: Devilization, Medicalization

According to the substantial data collected by Rouget, trance is not equally present all over the world. As a rule, it is condemned, marginalized or absorbed by all transcendental religions, whereas it is typical for all other religions.<sup>36</sup> In any context influenced by a world religion, trance can only be sectarian, deviant or peripheral as a religious form<sup>37</sup> or it is not religious at all. It is here that the ideological basis of the notion appears and it cannot be denied, unless one considers—probably an impudent and preposterous hypothesis—that meditation also expresses an alternative natural aptitude. After all, remaining still, kneeling, and bowing one's head, could also be considered as culturally defined behavior performed in a ritual framework with a musical accompaniment. The definition of trance as being based on latent

---

<sup>36</sup> Poly (1992) provides examples of condemnation of trance as "pagan" in the early Middle Age in France.

<sup>37</sup> "In the early days of Christianity, people in trances were called *energoumenoi* [. . .], a word still in current use in seventeenth-century France to designate people who were possessed, notably the nuns of Loudun" (Rouget 1985: 14).



natural propensity appears to serve to belittle peoples whose religious practice is based on trance. It leads to say that, if in a society trance is allowed and practiced, it is for channeling and organizing this innate aptitude, and hence interpretation easily slides towards “wildness” or nervous or mental pathology.<sup>38</sup> In other words, whoever goes into trance gives proof that he does not totally master his nature. As a representative of an ethnic group, he is primitive, as an individual, he is ill. Such is the ideological baggage of the term “trance” which, in my opinion, impedes anthropological analysis of the shaman’s behavior.

This is the reason why the definition of trance as based on an innate disposition could be used by world religions as an argument to condemn it ideologically and to exclude it from accepted practice, without opposing this innate disposition as such. To return briefly to the history of shamanistic studies, both of the two main approaches use the term “trance”: they can be characterized as *devilization* and *medicalization* respectively. The first consists in linking the shaman to the devil, and is derived from a *religious* point of view; it is based on the animal-like aspect of the shaman’s jumping, shouting and costume. Although purely secular, the second shows continuity with the first. This shift from devilization to medicalization was observed by Delaby (1986) and Hoppál (1989: 89) by examining figurative representations of the shaman. According to engravings of the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries, the shaman is a savage, retaining animal features, but nevertheless commands respect due to his quality as a magician. On the other hand, the realistic photographs of the twentieth century depict him as miserable and backward. In short, in Western opinion, characterization of the shaman has shifted from ideological to psychological “otherness.”

It should be mentioned that anthropological literature still retains a medical approach. Most authors still consider therapy to be shamanism’s *raison d’être*, and healing to be the shamanic ritual *par excellence*. Of course the therapeutic aspect of shamanism is obvious and cannot be denied. But it should be recalled<sup>39</sup> that healing is neither the model for the shaman’s activity in general nor the main substance of his social role.

---

<sup>38</sup> “The individual in a trance state is thus recognizable by the fact [. . .] [that] 3) he can fall prey to certain neurophysiological disturbances [. . .].” (Rouget 1985: 14) See also Heusch 1971: 227.

<sup>39</sup> I have developed this point many times (Hamayon 1982, 1990, 1992a: 153, 156–157).

With regard to the reasons why world religions condemn trance, Rouget offers a clue concerning spirit possession. He states that, on one hand, possession occurs only when the ritual is aimed at identifying the possessed individual with a spirit and that, on the other hand, “non-identificatory trance” is tied to transcendental religions.<sup>40</sup> And he remarks (1985: 28): “Would imitating Allah, Jehovah, or the Holy Ghost be conceivable? [. . .] There is no question of identifying with Him or imitating Him.”<sup>41</sup> A similar idea holds for shamanism. Although the type of contact in this case does not imply identification, it nevertheless also presupposes being on an equal footing with spirits. And shamanism is still more subversive than possession, since contact with spirits is stated as a means of acting upon them. Obviously such attitudes are contrary to the aloofness and respectful submission to God required in world religions. Transcendence precludes direct contact, identification and imitation, all which amount to denying it. This is the reason why Christian churches not only condemned shamanism and spirit possession, but have also had troubles with their own mystics.

## Trance as a Tool of Idealization of the Self

This is intended to characterize the Eliadian trend and some types of neo-shamanisms, particularly mystical and elitist. The modes of behaviour that were previously labelled “devilish” or “pathological” are now considered to be both means and tokens of self-expression, creativity, inner transformation, self-actualization. This characterization, as contingent as the previous two, is similarly derived from typically Western concerns. However, it becomes also popular among some formerly sha-

---

<sup>40</sup> “There is possession when the ritual is identificatory, and only in this case [. . .] Thus non-identificatory trance (inspiration or communion trance) appears to be characteristic of Islam, Christianity and Judaism. In other words, it seems to be linked with the logic of religions of transcendence.” (Rouget 1985: 28)

<sup>41</sup> However, some Christian sects did or do pretend to such identification. “Jeanne des Anges, the most notorious of the possessed nuns of Loudun, was described [. . .] as ‘possessed’. Jean Cavalier, the famous Camisard, was described [. . .] as ‘inspired’ — with the exception of the papists, who described him as possessed in order to make people believe that the devil was in fact possessing him.” (Rouget 1985: 25) The author also says: “It was apparently spiritism that first gave the word ‘trance’ the meaning it currently has today in the anthropology of religion.” (Rouget 1985: 7)

manic societies, as a correlate of both the emergence of the individual subject and the access to market economy in a modernizing context.

## The Conception of the Soul and Symbolic Function

Whereas the shaman's psychic state as such is not to be taken into account from an anthropological viewpoint, the idea that specific states are associated with meeting the spirits is relevant to the analysis of the underlying symbolic system. For instance, the shaman, as a rule, is supposed to become acquainted with his electing spirit in a *dream*. In many societies, certain states (dreaming, drunkenness, fasting, mental illness, sleeping, etc.<sup>42</sup>) are conceived of as modes of dissociating the soul from the body, and are thereby considered to favor direct contact with spirits. These states form a group on account of their common symbolic reference.

Although the conceptualization of the soul is not uniform among shamanic societies, in most of them, the soul (or a type of soul) is definable in terms of its link to the body and the body's life, and, conversely, in terms of its ability to part from the body. As a rule, this link is expressed and guaranteed by wakefulness, normal eating and speaking. In opposite states such as sleeping, dreaming, fasting or drunkenness, the soul is thought to be released from the body, hence to become similar to the spirits and be able to meet with them. Silence, shouting and some uses of the voice are also considered as evidence of contact with spirits. But it should be emphasized, first, that such states are relevant not as such but as representations regardless of and independent of psychic realities, second, that their point in common is that they are *different* from ordinary states. It is this difference from ordinary states which appears to be the condition for contact with the world of spirits, which differs from the ordinary world.

These other-than-ordinary states are considered to be signs of possible contact with spirits *only previous* to a shaman taking up his func-

---

<sup>42</sup> These states are usually called "altered states of consciousness," an expression which makes sense in psychiatry. Recently it has been replaced by "alternate states of consciousness" or "alternate states of feeling" in some works on shamanism. We prefer not to use it in order to avoid letting the psychic aspect interfere in the analysis of representations. On these questions, see also Bourguignon 1973.

tion, or outside the shaman's ritual activity. They are not constituent of the shaman's ritual. They are typical of the individual who shamanizes, not of the shaman acting as such. A shaman who got drunk in order to begin ritual would be deemed second-rate. As to the alleged fasting before a ritual, in reality it is rather a question of refraining from eating culturally prohibited food. If a shaman has to point out which spirit caused misfortune or to foretell what the weather will be like, he does not dream, but performs a divinatory ritual. More precisely, his ritual activity consists of *songs* and *dances*, and on these rests the efficacy of his practice. This does not prevent him from dreaming of spirits outside the ritual context. In short, *a shaman becomes trained to his function through certain states in private circumstances, and he carries out his function through specific actions in a public ritual framework.*

By way of conclusion, here are three proposed directions for furthering the analysis.

(1) From a functional perspective, one might try to define the respective technical properties assigned to the various states suitable for direct contact with spirits. For instance, is a particular state more likely to help to "see" or "hear" or "feel" in the world of spirits? Answers to such questions could lead to typological precisions, depending, for instance, on whether one is supposed to have "visions," "calls" or "revelations." Then one could seek correlation between the type of state associated with the access to the function, and the type of divination associated with its practice. A certain type of preparatory state might be associated with a practice focusing more on singing, on dancing or on miming.

(2) From a formal perspective, it is tempting to try to apply to the shaman's ritual behavior the model of analysis set up by Caillois with respect to the notion of "play." The notion of playing is widely used to qualify the shaman's or the possessed individual's action towards the spirits, the latter's action towards the former, or both (Yakut *oyun*, Buriat *naadaxa*, Korean *nolda*, Hindi *k(h)elna*, etc.). All religious or ritual *playing* has been condemned by world religions on account of its being opposed to *praying*.<sup>43</sup> The notion of play encompasses the main

---

<sup>43</sup> See for instance Bakhtine 1970; Lhôte 1976: 71; Le Goff 1990; Poly 1992; Van der Veer 1992; Hamayon 1992a, etc.

features of the shaman's ritual behavior, while also indicating that he acts out a role, and is both "conscious and dupe" of his role.

(3) From a symbolic perspective, the analysis could focus on the very simple idea that everything in the shaman's qualifying procedure and ritual behavior is other-than-ordinary (state, voice, gesture, expression, etc.) and thereby gives him legitimacy and efficacy for acting in a realm which is also other-than-ordinary (be it called, sacred, ritual, symbolic, religious or other).<sup>44</sup> This also fulfills one of the main operative conditions of symbolic function.

## References

- Atkinson, Jane Monnig 1992. "Shamanisms Today." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21: 307–330.
- Bakhtine, Mikhaïl 1970. *L'œuvre de François Rabelais et la culture populaire au Moyen âge et sous la Renaissance*. Tel. Paris: Gallimard.
- Bourguignon, Erika 1973. "Introduction: A Framework for the Comparative Study of Altered States of Consciousness." In Erika Bourguignon (ed.) *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness and Social Change*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Caillois, Roger [1958] 1967. *Les jeux et les hommes*. Folio. Essais. Paris: Gallimard.
- Choi, Chungmoo 1989. "The Recruitment of Shamans in Korea: The Symbiosis between Cultural Idiom and Performing Arts." In Mihály Hoppál and Otto von Sadovsky (eds.) *Shamanism: Past and Present*. 2 parts. Budapest: Ethnographic Institute, Hungarian Academy of Sciences; Los Angeles/Fullerton: International Society for Transoceanic Research. 283–295.
- Delaby, Laurence 1976. "Chamanes toungouses." *Etudes mongoles et sibériennes* 7. Nanterre.
- . 1986. "Aperçu sur le chamanisme des Toungouses aux XVII–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles." In *Transe, chamanisme, possession: de la fête à l'extase: Actes des deuxièmes Rencontres internationales sur la fête et la communication, Nice Acropolis 24–28 avril 1985*. Paris: Editions Serre, Nice-Animation.

---

<sup>44</sup> In my review of the first edition of Rouget's book (Hamayon 1981), I suggested that the constituents of the shaman's behavior can be compared to similar constituents of the ordinary realm: the ritual state is to the ordinary state as dancing is to walking and as singing to speaking.

- Eliade, Mircea [1951] 1968. *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase*. Paris: Payot.
- Filliozat, Jean 1943. *Magie et médecine*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Geertz, Clifford 1966. "Religion as a Cultural System." In Michael Banton (ed.) *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*. A.S.A. Monographs 3. London: Tavistock.
- Hamayon, Roberte 1978. "Les heros de service." *L'Homme* XVIII(3-4): 17-45.
- . 1981. "Parler à la tête et aux jambes. A propos de: Gilbert Rouget." *La musique et la transe* [. . .] *Le temps de la réflexion* II. Paris: Gallimard. 528-537.
- . 1982. "Des chamanes au chamanisme. Introduction." *Voyages chamaniques Deux. L'Ethnographie*. 87-88, 13-48.
- . 1990. *La chasse à l'âme. Esquisse d'une théorie du chamanisme sibérien*. Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie.
- . 1992. "Postface. Chamanes et chamanismes au seuil du nouveau millénaire." *Diogène* 158: 161-160.
- . 1993. "Religions de l'Asie septentrionale." *Annuaire de l'EPHE 5<sup>e</sup> section*. 100: 69-77.
- . 1995. "Pour en finir avec la «transe» et l'«extase» dans l'étude du chamanisme." *Variation chamanique. Études mongoles et sibériennes* 26: 155-190.
- . 1998. "Ecstasy' or the West-dreamt Siberian shaman." In Helmut Wautischer (ed.) *Tribal Epistemologies. Essays in the Philosophy of Anthropology*. Avebury Series in Philosophy. Aldershot and Brookfield: Ashgate. 175-187.
- Heinze, Ruth-Inge 1988. *Trance and Healing in Southeast Asia Today*. Bangkok: White Lotus; Berkeley: Independent Scholars of Asia.
- . 1992. "The role and functions of contemporary shamans in South-East Asia." *Diogenes* 158: 133-144.
- Heusch, Luc de 1971. *Pourquoi l'épouser? Et autres essais*. Bibliothèque des sciences humaines. Paris: Gallimard.
- Hoppál, Mihály 1989. "Changing Image of the Eurasian Shamans." In Mihály Hoppál and Otto von Sadvosky (eds.) *Shamanism: Past and Present*. 2 parts. Budapest: Ethnographic Institute, Hungarian Academy of Sciences; Los Angeles/Fullerton: International Society for Transoceanic Research. 75-90.
- . [1990] 1992. "Pain in Shamanic Initiation." In Anna-Leena Siikala and Mihály Hoppál (eds.) *Studies on Shamanism*. *Ethnologica Uralica* 2. Helsinki: Finnish Anthropological Society; Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó. 150-155.
- Huizinga, [1938] 1951. *Homo ludens. Essai sur la fonction sociale du jeu*. Transl. from Dutch. Tel. Paris: Gallimard.
- Hultkrantz, Åke 1992. *Shamanic Healing and Ritual Drama. Health and Medicine in Native North-American Religious Traditions*. New York: Crossroad.
- Kendall, Laurel 1996. "Initiating performance. The story of Chini, a Korean shaman." In Carol Laderman and Marina Roseman (eds.) *The Performance of*



- Healing*. New York: Routledge. 17–58.
- Le Goff, Jacques 1990. “Le rire dans les règles monastiques du haut Moyen Âge.” In *Mélanges Pierre Riché. Haut Moyen Âge. Culture, éducation et société*. Nanterre: Publidix, La Garenne-Colombes. Ed. Erasme. 93–103.
- Lee, Du-Hyun 1990. “Korean Shamans: Role Playing through Trance Possession.” In Richard Schechner and Willa Appel (eds.) *By Means of Performance. Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Leiris, Michel [1938, 1958] 1980. *La possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar*, précédé de *La croyance aux génies Zar en Éthiopie du Nord*. Paris: Le Sycomore.
- Levi-Strauss, Claude 1958. *Anthropologie structurale*. Paris: Plon.
- Lewis, Ioan M. 1971. *Ecstatic Religion. An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism*. Baltimore and Schapera: Penguin Books.
- Lhôte, Jean-Marie 1976. *Le symbolisme des jeux*. Paris: Berg-Bélibaste.
- Lot-Falck, Eveline 1973. “Le chamanisme en Sibérie: essai de mise au point.” *Asie du Sud-Est et Monde Indonésien* 4(3): 1–10.
- Mannoni, Octave [1964] 1969. *Clefs pour l’imaginaire ou l’autre Scène*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.
- Métraux, Alfred 1955. “La comédie rituelle dans la possession.” *Diogenes* 11: 26–49.
- Mikhaïlovskiï, V. M. 1892. “Shamanstvo. Svravnitel’no-étnograficheskie ocherki.” *Izvestiia Imperatorskogo Obshchestva liubitelei estestvoznaniia, antropologii i étnografii pri Moskovskom universitete* LXXV. Trudy étnografii XII. 1.
- Mikhailowski, V. M. 1894. “Shamanism in Siberia and European Russia.” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 24: 62–100, 126–158.
- Mitrani, Philippe 1982. “Aperçu critique des approches psychiatriques du chamanisme.” *L’Ethnographie* LXXVIII (87–88): 241–257 (*Voyages chamanniques Deux*).
- Needham, Rodney 1972. *Belief, Language and Experience*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Oosten, Jarich 1989. “Theoretical Problems in the Study of Inuit Shamanism.” In Mihály Hoppál and Otto von Sadovsky (eds.) *Shamanism: Past and Present*. 2 parts. Budapest: Ethnographic Institute, Hungarian Academy of Sciences; Los Angeles/Fullerton: International Society for Transoceanic Research. 331–341.
- Pascal, Pierre (Trad., introd. et notes de) 1938. *La vie de l’archiprêtre Avvakum par lui-même*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Poly, Jean-Pierre 1992. “Masques et Talemasesques. Les tours des femmes de Champagne.” In *Histoire et société. Mélanges offerts à Georges Duby. Textes réunis par les médiévistes de l’Université de Provence*. Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l’Université de Provence.

- Pouillon, Jean 1979. "Remarques sur le verbe croire." In Michel Izard et Pierre Smith (réunis par) *La fonction symbolique. Essays d'anthropologie*. Paris: Gallimard. 43–51.
- Rouget, Gilbert [1980] 1990. *La musique et la transe. Esquisse d'une théorie générale des relations de la musique de la possession*. Paris: Gallimard.
- . 1985. *Music and Trance. A Theory of the Relations between Music and Possession*. Translation from the French by Brunhilde Biebuyck. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Schechner, Richard 1976. "From Ritual to Theater and back." In Richard Schechner and Mady Schuman (eds.) *Ritual, Play and Performance. Readings in the Social Sciences (Theatre)*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Siikala, Anna-Lena 1978. *The Rite Technique of the Siberian Shaman*. Folklore Fellows Communications 220. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
- Siikala, Anna-Leena and Mihály Hopál 1992. *Studies on Shamanism*. Ethnologica Uralica 2. Helsinki: Finnish Anthropological Society; Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.
- Transe, chamanisme, possession: de la fête à l'extase: Actes des deuxièmes Rencontres internationales sur la fête et la communication, Nice Acropolis 24–28 avril 1985*. Paris: Editions Serre, Nice-Animation.
- Van der Veer, Peter 1992. "Playing or Praying. A Sufi Saint's Day in Surat." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 51(3): 545–564.
- Van Gennep, Arnold 1903. "De l'emploi du mot 'chamanisme'." *Revue de l'histoire des religions* XLVII: 51–57.
- Verger, Pierre 1954. *Dieux d'Afrique*. Paris: Paul Hartmann.

ROBERTE N. HAMAYON is a professor at the Department of Religious Studies of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (EPHE), Sorbonne, Paris. Her fieldwork has taken her mainly to Mongolia and Buriatia. She is the founder of the Centre d'études mongoles et sibériennes, and its journal *Etudes mongoles et sibériennes* (EPHE). Her main books concern shamanism (*La chasse à l'âme*. Nanterre, 1990; *Chamanismes*. Paris PUF, 2003). She organised the fifth conference of the ISSR, held in Chantilly, France in 1997.



## Some Hyperpragmatic Patterns in Tamang Shamanic Recitations, Nepal\*

ANDRÁS HÖFER

HEIDELBERG UNIVERSITY

*The article focusses on the classificatory logic in the oral poetry of the Tamang shamans in Nepal. Three types of specific phraseological configurations are examined to demonstrate how and to what extent “doctrinal content” of extra-textual provenance and intra-textual phonic–prosodic potentials interact. This interaction, it is argued, results in poetic qualities which are likely to enhance the persuasive effect of the text in performance, and also to condition the formation of the text as part of an oral tradition. The discussion concludes with a plea for a more text-based approach to shamanism in ethnography and comparative research.*

Anthropologists tend to neglect the formal aspects of a given text. They leave the task of dealing with phraseology, rhythm, meter and prosody in general to folklorists or literary scientists. In the anthropologists’ approach to oral ritual texts, there is often a tacit assumption that texts constitute a rather passive vehicle of ideas or concepts. Language is treated as a medium to express these concepts, as if any linguistic configuration owed its existence to an authorial referentiality or meaning that is preexistent to this configuration as such. This is tantamount to saying that the “content” is invariably prior to what we usually call “form.” In this article, I shall try to show that the reverse can also be the case—in some instances at least.

Three typical patterns should be examined, namely enumeration, crasis (ellipsis) and binarism.

---

\* This article is based on a paper read at the meeting of the Himalayan Oral Traditions Study Group (established at the French–German Conference on the History and Anthropology of Nepal in Arc-et-Senans, France, in 1990) in January 1993 in Heidelberg. I wish to thank Patricia Klammerth for kindly correcting my English.

## Enumeration

As a rule, we find in the Tamang shaman's texts<sup>1</sup> very few abstractions for reducing the manifold to something like a "sum," a "generic term" or a "lowest common denominator." Among these few abstractions are *rèkki lumbu*, 'the whole world'; *dəbge*, 'multitude'; *thamjye*, 'all'; etc. Otherwise, the texts show a conspicuous concern for a listing of the parts which make up a whole, a concern for detailing and completing. This concern becomes manifest, among other things, in the preference for enumerations of various kinds. Enumerations play an important role because the bulk of the recitation is a divinatory procedure in that the shaman enumerates all sorts of possible illnesses and all sorts of possible remedies to find out the "right ones" applying to an individual patient's case.

Three types of enumerations may be distinguished:

(1) *Itinerary* enumerations consisting in long recitations of names of places and divine beings following a more or less fixed route. This corresponds to what is called "ritual journey" in the literature.

(2) *Categorical* enumerations. They contain (a) names of superhuman beings and ritual implements representing superhuman beings; (b) species of animals, plants, kinds of illnesses and their causes, kinds and devices of black magic, kinds of magic substances or energies, categories of superhuman beings, kin categories, etc.; then (c) parts of a whole: parts or organs of the human or animal body, components of the physical environment (lowland versus upland, etc.); and finally (d) "properties" or "attributes" of superhuman beings or ritual implements. The following quotation from the shaman's search for the soul of a woman patient may serve as an example:

---

<sup>1</sup> Most of the (exclusively oral) texts include parts recited in Nepali. From the viewpoint of vocabulary and morphology, the language of the parts recited in Tamang is somewhat different from modern colloquial Tamang and has also been influenced by Tibetan, the ritual language of the Tamang lamas. – The various Tamang dialects belong to the Gurung Branch of the Bodish Section within the Bodic Division of Sino-Tibetan (Shafer 1974: 123 ff.). – Nepali is transliterated according to the method of R. L. Turner; the transliteration of Tibetan follows the Pelliot system. In the transcription of Tamang, ʈ, ɖ = retroflex; ñ = palatal nasal ("ny"); ɳ = velar nasal; lexical pitches: à, è, etc. = high-falling (tense vowel); á, é, etc. = mid-falling (breathy vowel); ǎ, ǝ, etc. = low-level (breathy vowel); the high-level pitch (tense vowel) is unmarked.

Has the soul of the mistress been carried off to the place  
(of) a harmful agent which inhabits the sphere of the  
homestead?

Has it been carried off to the place (of) a harmful agent  
which inhabits the sphere of the fields? [. . .]

Has it been carried off to the place (of) a harmful agent  
which roams above?

Has it been carried off to the place (of) a harmful agent  
which roams below?

Has it been carried off to the place (of) a harmful agent  
which roars with (like) the leopard?

Has it been carried off to the place (of) a harmful agent  
which roars with (like) the wild boar?

Has it been carried off to the place (of) the magic arrow  
(made) of the *sadañ.sò*: wood?

Has it been carried off to the place (of) the harming charm  
(conveyed by means of the magic arrow made) of the *sadañ.sò*: wood?

Has it been carried off to the place (of) the harmful agent  
which roams above?

Has it been carried off to the place (of) a harmful agent  
which roams below?

Has it been carried off to the place (of) a harmful agent of  
the upper crossroads?

Has it been carried off to the place (of) a harmful agent of  
the lower crossroads? [. . .]

(3) The third type may be termed *cumulative* enumerations. They contain (a) an accumulation of synonyms; or (b) an accumulation of the various names and epithets of a divinity, etc. In such cumulative enumerations we often find names which are etymologically or conceptually rather obscure and which cannot therefore be treated as epithets or other unequivocally functional or categorical specifications. The cumulative tendency is particularly manifest in the case of the “wild hunter” god Dḁbla (< Tibetan *dgra-lha/dgra-bla*) in that some of the various names of this divinity are obviously combined to provide further names. Thus, in

an invocation, we have *Hīsyē Ḍābla* and *Phola Ḍābla*,<sup>2</sup> on the one hand, and their combination into *Hīsyē Phola Ḍābla*, on the other. The same tendency seems to have led to the “invention” of names which are non-sensical from the etymological viewpoint at least. Such an “invention” occurs when the epithet *Ṭha:duñ*—deriving from Tibetan *khrag-’thuñ*, lit. ‘blood-drinking’—becomes completed by a *Syaduñ* (< Tibetan \**ša-’thuñ*) which would literally mean ‘flesh-drinking’.

## Crisis, Ellipsis

In other configurations, the reverse is the case: something is omitted or subtracted. Thus, a conspicuous feature of categorical enumerations is the frequent omission of suffixes (crisis). For example, the genitive suffix *-i/-gi* is consistently suppressed in all phrases of the type

“*noccyen gl̥:ri khurjyi wa:’?*” (instead of “*noccyengi gl̥:ri. . .*”) =  
 ‘has (the soul) been carried off to the place [of] the harmful agent?’

This is as if one said: “the harmful agent-place,” instead of “the place *of* the harmful agent.” This kind of composite would be rather unusual in Tamang, however. So to suppress the suffix is to suppress or at least to de-specify the relationship between the two, namely the ‘agent’ and the ‘place’. This becomes evident if one considers the types of relationships which would be possible in the Tamang concept of pantheon:

<i>possessed</i>	<i>relationship</i>	<i>possessor</i>
the place ( <i>gl̥:</i> ) is	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{place of origin of?} \\ \text{abode of?} \\ \text{controlled by?} \\ \text{like? etc.} \end{array} \right\}$	the harmful agent ( <i>noccyen</i> )

---

<sup>2</sup> Etymologically, *Hīsyē* < Tibetan *ye-šes*, ‘divine wisdom’, and *Phola* < Tibetan *pho-la*, lit. ‘male god’ (tutelary divinity).

Which of these relational modalities is meant is left open.<sup>3</sup> We thus may perhaps say that due to the crasis, a fusion between the ‘harmful agent’ and the ‘place’ is asserted. But why is this so?

We may assume that the crasis has an economizing function in that it facilitates the concentration on the actual task to be tackled by the shaman. The “compression” allows of a particularly trenchant listing to the effect that the enumeration remains exhaustive with regard to what is essential at the present stage of the ritual and leaves the rest implicit, to be explicated elsewhere in the text or to be completed by the exegetic knowledge of the listener. The shaman’s task, at this point of the recitation, is to “scan” a complete list of possible harmful agents. In a sense, what stands in the foreground (in the actual context) is not the particular place as such where the soul is being kept, but the specific harmful agent which keeps the soul in captivity in a place which, in turn, is specific to this harmful agent. In other words, it is sufficient to identify the harmful agent by enumerating his/her/its distinctive, functional epithets (‘the one who roams above’, etc.) in order to identify the place which is specific to the former.

And yet, this conclusion states the *effect*, rather than the *origin* of the crasis. In other words, while the suppression of the suffix in *noccyen[gi]* is to be considered a metaplasm, its origin cannot be imputed with certainty to referential intention alone; it cannot be imputed to something like an original authorial intention to generate—purposely—such an effect on the listener, or to facilitate—purposely—the task for the shaman. The—possibly gradual—disappearance of the suffix might have also been conditioned by prosodic factors alone in that a rapid pronunciation resulted in compression. And this compression appears to be justified by the fact that the suffix *-gi* was felt to be sufficiently represented by the subsequent *g-* in the word *gl̥a:ri*. Graphically illustrated:

noccyen([gi]  $\xrightarrow{g}$ )l̥a:ri, since *-gi*  $\varepsilon$  *g-*

---

<sup>3</sup> Normally, to specify these modalities, a further “relator” would be necessary, such as, for example, *thuñbi* in the phrase “yara khyugpai noccyen *thuñbi* gl̥a:ri” = ‘to the place of *origin* of the harmful agent who roams above’.

In this instance, once the suffix had been abraded, the resulting crasis might have become an established “manner of saying,” a kind of stylistic convention.

## Binarisms

For the purpose of the present discussion, I use the term “binarism” in a wider sense, namely for any coupling of two units (terms, phrases) into a pair justified as such by any structuring principle whatsoever. I treat as binarisms (a) binomials and echo-words such as

*gyuma-gyuser* = ‘entrails’, *luwa-buwa* = ‘downy hairs/feathers’;  
*mán-muñ* = ‘spirits’ (‘mán and related superhuman beings’);  
 Ajimā-Bajimā = name of a goddess, etc.;

and (b) a number of paratactic configurations which in some instances are identical with parallelisms, such as

“*khañsai* noccyen wa:? (+) *syñsai* noccyen wa:?” =  
 ‘is it a harmful agent which inhabits the sphere of the *homestead*?  
 (+) is it a harmful agent which inhabits the sphere of the *fields*?’

Binarisms in this sense occur frequently together with what we have termed categorical enumerations, and they are obviously resorted to in order to break down the listings into smaller units. One may say that binarisms subdivide the text into sub-totalities, enhance its organizational transparency and supersede, to some extent, conscious analysis (cf. Jakobson 1979: 253 ff.). One may even say that in our examples, binarisms prove to do more than simply marking off sub-totalities; they also *perform*, as it were, these sub-totalities and make them “experientible” through the operations which set, amplify and accommodate all that is empirically disparate in oppositions and/or complementarities. This dynamic character of theirs provides an additional illustration of Jakobson’s (1979: 254) thesis that grammatical figures can be a substitute for the tropes proper.

More often than not, binary units are clearly audible as a kind of two-stroke modulation in the recitation. This does not mean that their existence is conditioned by prosody, verbal or musical, alone. On the



contrary, what “holds them together” is basically a semantic relationship: either they draw on oppositions, such as above/below, front/back, earth/sky, good/bad, male/female, etc.; or they suggest the exploitation of some complementary relationship.

Nevertheless, many binarisms prove to be secondary patterns that seem to result from the autodynamics of a general tendency to “make two out of one.” Thus, we have the pairings (with reference to the sacrificial animal)

“nagu (+) mi:gu” = ‘nose’/‘beak’ (+) ‘eyes’,

and

“kaṅba (+) lakpa” = ‘legs’ (+) ‘hands’/‘wings’.

These terms sound contracted into *nagu-mi:gu* and *kaṅba-lakpa* in the recitation, and it is indeed difficult to decide as to whether they are to be seen as complementary pairs (‘nose and eyes’ standing for the totality of head, etc.) or simply as a product of a prosodic contamination by the overriding binary modulation in the textual environment. If they are a product of such contamination, these pairs lack any semantic justification.

By contrast, the term *sabda-luṅen* (clearly articulated as a compound) seems to owe its existence to such a contamination alone. From the etymological viewpoint, this is the result of a metanalysis. The compound results from some sort of a creative misunderstanding in that *sabda-luṅen* ultimately derives from a standard enumeration in Tibetan, namely “*sa-bdag, klu, gñan*.” This enumeration, originally denoting three different kinds of superhuman beings,<sup>4</sup> has become in Tamang a compound term that denotes one single kind of being.<sup>5</sup> Now the compound is not a binarism because it conveys no parallels, no opposition and no complementarity recognizable as such. Still, *sabda-luṅen* is a by-product of the same contractive tendency to form pairs—a tendency which facilitates the emergence of binary patterns in general.

---

<sup>4</sup> Three classes of superhuman beings of the genius loci-type: the malevolent, subterranean *sa-bdag* (lit. ‘lord of the soil’); the aquatic *klu* (often identified with the serpent-bodied *nāgas* of the Indian pantheon); and the *gñan*, demons dwelling in rocks and trees, and causing plagues.

<sup>5</sup> Tamang informants described *sabda-luṅen* as an aquatic-subterranean being, but could not comment on its specific identity.

A similar precedence of the structural over the conceptual might have resulted in a genuine binarism in

“*yāra syelne*, (+) *māra syelne*” =  
 lit. ‘rinsing-up, (+) rinsing-down’, for ‘vomiting’ + ‘diarrhoea’,  
 that is, the symptoms of cholera or gastro-enteritis.

In this example, *yāra syelne* appears to be a later addition to complete *māra syelne* for the sake of a polar totality ‘up’ versus ‘down’.<sup>6</sup>

Let us examine a few more cases. The two phrases

“*phoi līndo salba*, (+) *dōi nemba gēlba*” =  
 ‘to heal the *phoi līndo*, (+) to destroy the *dōi nemba*’

also sound contracted in the recitation, but inasmuch as the meaning of *phoi līndo* is unknown, its opposition or complementarity to *dōi nemba* cannot be ascertained semantically. All one can state is that an opposition is established by what is different between the two phrases (3 words versus 3 other words), and that what makes them cohere consists in a homoeophony of *phoi* and *dōi*, the end echo *-oi* being common to both (homoiopoton).

As the following examples show, repetition is applied with the aim of amplifying an entity. This is the case with the names of (partly obscure) divinities, such as

Thā-Thākāli Māi, Laṅga-Laṅgaṭā, Gubhā-Gubhāju, etc.

Here, the first members, such as “Thā-,” “Laṅga-” and “Gubhā-” are each a part of the wholes, namely of “Thākāli,” “Laṅgaṭā” and “Gubhāju.” What these reduplications express is not a complementarity between parts, but—conspicuously—a complementarity between the whole, on the one hand, and just one part of this whole, on the other.

These binomials have most probably been influenced by those typical compound names which either include both the male and the female partner

---

<sup>6</sup> The steps of the process were probably as follows: Tibetan \**dmar-bšal-nad*, ‘red-diarrhoea-illness’ = ‘dysentery’, > Tamang *mār(a) syelne*, wherein Tibetan *dmar*, ‘red’ (for ‘blood’) was “misunderstood” for Tibetan *ma(r)*, ‘below’ = Tamang *mār(a)* ‘below’. The process might have been facilitated by the fact that the Tamang words *mār(a)*, ‘below,’ and *mār(bo)* (= Tibetan *dmar-po*), ‘red’, have the same pitch.

of a divine couple, such as Bhāṭ-Bhaṭeni, or particularize a divinity by indicating its specific attribute, the locality of its worship, etc., such as, say, Kālo Bhairaw or Gorkhā Kālikā.<sup>7</sup> While Thā- in Thā-Thākāli<sup>8</sup> resists any further attempt at analysis, Laṅga-Laṅgaṭā and Gubhā-Gubhāju, by contrast, seem to derive their “right of existence” from associations with phonetically similar terms of religious significance. That is, both binomials draw on a semantic plasma to make the reduplication appear less playful, less arbitrary, since Laṅga, “grafted on to” Laṅgaṭā (< Nepali *laṅarolaṅgaṭā*, lit. ‘lame’), does occur elsewhere in the texts as an obvious derivate of Laṅkā (Ceylon, as an important site of Hindu mythology); and Gubhā, “grafted on to” Gubhāju (Newar Buddhist priest), is likely to evoke the Nepali word *guphā* (lit. ‘cave’) in the idiomatic expression for ‘initiation’ (*guphā pasne*).<sup>9</sup>

There is also a contrasting of two repetitions. This is the case in

“*saṅsam saṅbai temrul pheñi*, (+) *ñensam ñembai temrul pheñi!*” =  
 ‘if it is a good omen, *let us go and get at the good omen*,  
 (+) if it is a bad omen, *let us go and get at the bad omen!*’

The contrasting lends not only additional rhetoric emphasis to the resoluteness of facing both possibilities, come what may. It also stresses the opposition between these possibilities, and accommodates this opposition, at the same time, in a complementary relationship by means of the double repetition, namely the repetition of the differing and the repetition of the common. That is, while the polyptotonic repetitions (*saṅsam saṅbai* + *ñensam ñembai*) aggrandize the difference between good and bad (*saṅba* versus *ñemba*), the repetition of the common element, namely *temrul pheñi*, connects good and bad as antithetic qualities so as to make them appear as parts constitutive of a whole.

The repetition can also involve a positional change. This is the case in the invocation (in which the shaman, reciting in Nepali, urges the

---

<sup>7</sup> Bhāṭ-Bhaṭeni is the name of a deified Brahmin couple who protect children and whose temple is in the old city of Kāṭhmāṅḍu. Kālo Bhairaw = the “black (*kālo*) manifestation” of the god Bhairava. Gorkhā Kālikā is the local manifestation of the goddess Kālikā worshipped in Gorkhā, western central Nepal.

<sup>8</sup> Thā-Thākāli < Thākāli, the Nepali name of the inhabitants of the Thāk Kholā region in northern Nepal.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Strickland (1982: 103) on the importance of such “collateral information” for the analysis of partly obscure pairings in the narrative texts of the Gurung of Nepal.

tutelary divinity to help him find out which botanical species of flower corresponds to a woman patient's metaphysical "life-flower"):

“phulai phul, (+) phul phulai jagāileu!” =  
 ‘awaken and bring all the flowers, (+) every flower!’

This example shows how “two is made out of one” by the inversion

phulai phul → phul phulai.

This inversion takes advantage of the repetition of the emphatic particle *-ai* in Nepali. While the expression ‘all the flowers’ delimitates a multitude in its exclusive completeness, as it were, the ‘every flower’ specifies what this multitude contains and suggests a counting or checking “one by one.” Here the complementarity of the two operations is turned into an opposition precisely by the chiasmic position that results from the inversion.

To sum up, these few examples seem to show how “content” and “form” exploit each other for the benefit of each. There is a specific expressive intention, namely a kind of “thinking in contrasts,”<sup>10</sup> a “striving for completeness,” on the one hand, and the phonic-prosodic potential of the language, on the other. We see how the expressive content gains in plasticity thanks to the phonic-prosodic potential; and we see, vice versa, how the phonic-prosodic potential often develops its autodynamics in producing certain configurations. Of particular interest are those cases in which formal or structural constraints stimulate the “invention” of a new term, or a new configuration of terms, which is then—gradually, tentatively—provided with a (new) meaning, as the examples of *sabda-luñen* (resulting from a metanalysis), *syaduñ* (completing *ṭha:duñ*) and *yara syelne* (completing *māra syelne*) seem to suggest.

This is not to say, of course, that “content” and “form” can be neatly isolated as such. All we can perceive is a subtle interaction between the

---

<sup>10</sup> It might be recalled that for some authors, a thinking in balances, antitheses, appositions and parallelisms is intrinsic to oral tradition in general (cf., e.g., Finnegan 1977: 128 ff.). – This is not the place to discuss the issue of “formulaic composition” in the Tamang texts.

two—an interaction in which “the aesthetic play drive of man”<sup>11</sup> is at work. Indeed, neither listeners nor even reciters can ever determine with certainty where exactly the autonomy of the structural (“form”) begins and where it stops being valid. Not only does this conform to the specificity of shamanic performance with its often ludic permutations; it is also that what makes up the genuinely poetic component in the self-organization of binary patterns in particular and of the texts of the Tamang shaman in general. What Moore and Myerhoff remark on ritual in general, also applies to the Tamang shaman’s propensity for overdetermination through detailing and multiplying, completing and compressing: whether they are found accessible to exegesis or obscurely playful, the configurations in his texts are “a good *form* for conveying a message as if it were unquestionable, [. . .] to communicate those very things which are most in doubt.”<sup>12</sup>

This preliminary analysis invites us to give more consideration to texts as works of orature in order to arrive at a better understanding of how shamanic performances “work” and of what shamanic traditions *are*. (a) It suggests that the aesthetic or formal aspects should not be treated as some sort of a residual category,<sup>13</sup> since poetic stereotypification in general and (verbal and musical) prosody in particular may turn out to be quite powerful tools of textual pragmatics and to have as much impact on the audience as that doctrinal meaning which some current (often almost theological or crudely reductionist sociological) approaches try to isolate as such. (b) Taking advantage of the growing awareness, in recent literature, of the dialogic or interperformative<sup>14</sup> character of oral tradition, a more text-oriented approach can enable us to explore the formation of ritual texts by showing how they have been constituting themselves *by reference to* other texts

---

<sup>11</sup> “Der ästhetische Spieltrieb des Menschen,” which in Schiller’s theory is to mediate between freedom and necessity, between reason and sensuousness (Schiller n.d.: 48 f., 52 ff.). – It may be recalled that the notion of “innere Form” (as developed by Herder, Goethe and others) was central to nineteenth century poetry. As the Hungarian poet János Arany wrote in 1856: “Form—not iambus and trochaeus—but that ‘inner form’ which is nearly identical with the subject. . .” (quoted by Voinovich n.d.: 22).

<sup>12</sup> Moore and Myerhoff (1977: 24), *emphasis mine*. Cf. also Zimmermann’s (1982: 150 ff.) stimulating discussion of the intimate linkage between logic and poetry in Ayurvedic classifications.

<sup>13</sup> Even though it is true that shamanic performance can also fulfill the function of *entertaining* its audience.

<sup>14</sup> Haring’s (1992: 192 ff., 199) “interperformance” corresponds to the notion of intertextuality with regard to the relationship between literary texts.

within one and the same tradition and/or in other—high-cultural, regional or local—traditions.

## References

- Finnegan, Ruth 1977. *Oral Poetry. Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Haring, Lee 1992. *Verbal Arts in Madagascar. Performance in Historical Perspective*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Jakobson, Roman 1979. *Aufsätze zur Linguistik und Poetik*. Frankfurt: Ullstein Verlag.
- Moore, Sally F. and Barbara G. Myerhoff 1977. "Secular Ritual: Forms and Meanings." In Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff (eds.) *Secular Ritual*. Assen: Van Gorcum. 3–24.
- Schiller, Friedrich (n.d.). "Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen." In *Schillers Werke. Achter Teil*. Berlin, etc.: Deutsches Verlagshaus Bong & Co.
- Shafer, Robert 1974. *Introduction to Sino-Tibetan*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.
- Strickland, Simon S. 1982. "Beliefs, Practices and Legends: A Study in the Narrative Poetry of the Gurungs of Nepal." Cambridge (unpubl. Ph.D. thesis).
- Voinovich, Géza (ed.) (n.d.). *Arany János összes kisebb költeményei*. Budapest: Franklin-Társulat.
- Zimmermann, Francis 1982. *La jungle et le fumet des viandes. Un thème écologique dans la médecine hindou*. Paris: Gallimard, Le Seuil.

ANDRÁS HÖFER is retired Associate Professor of Asian Anthropology at the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University, Germany. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Vienna, Austria, and was a post-doctoral student at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes and the Ecole Nationale des Langues Vivantes Orientales in Paris. Between 1968 and 1983, he carried out field research chiefly among a Tamang group in Nepal. His more recent publications include *A recitation of the Tamang shaman in Nepal* (Bonn: VGH Wissenschaftsverlag 1994), *Tamang ritual texts II. Ethnographic studies in the oral tradition and folk-religion of an ethnic minority in Nepal* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag 1997), and *The caste hierarchy and the State in Nepal: A study of the Muluki Ain of 1854* (Kathmandu: Himal Books 2004, 2nd revised edition).



## The Shaman in Myths and Tales

ÅKE HULTKRANTZ

STOCKHOLM

*This article points out two different types of folk tales that have been grown up around shamans. Where shamanism occurs among simple hunting peoples the shaman is likely to be spoken of as a gifted and distinctive individual, and will, perhaps, be considered to be more mysterious after his/her death. However, as a rule, he/she is still considered to be a human being. Among the nomads of northern Siberia, however, the shaman is part of a more complex society: after death, he/she may be the object of a regular cult, and the tales told will make him/her into a hero/heroine of divine status. The tales, thus, become myths, and the shamans are transformed into gods.*

1. There is among today's "shamanologists" a growing interest in the oral traditions surrounding shamans and their activities. Shamanic folklore has been studied since the last century, but there has never been as lively a scholarly interest in the topic as in the last while. The poetry born in the course of shamanic séances—which Meuli (1975. 2: 865) has characterized as "the primeval forms [Urformen] of poetry"—is one of the areas that has been assiduously investigated.<sup>1</sup> I shall, for the moment, disregard this creative mode, where the shaman himself plays the role of poet and singer,<sup>2</sup> not because it is unimportant—for it is not—but because as a researcher of shamanism as a religio-magical complex, I have more to gain from the study of the prose traditions of shamanism. What follows here is a synopsis of the ways in which such traditions from different parts of the world reflect the contemporary notions of shamans and shamanism.

---

<sup>1</sup> Diószegi (1968: 169) characterizes this creativity as follows: "If there ever was a freely associative creation at all, then it is the shaman chant." Cf. also Diószegi 1960.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Siikala 1992c: 41 ff. and Hoppál 1992a: 127 ff. For ethnic examples, see Hajdú 1978; Joki 1978 and Simoncsics 1978.

The study of prose traditions surrounding shamanism is a new trend in shamanistic research, and a product of many developments. Some of the most important ones will be mentioned here. First of all, there is the new theoretical interest in shamanism. Mircea Eliade (1951) opened wider vistas when, ignoring the common restriction of shamanism to Siberia and the Arctic regions, he included the Americas, the Indo-Europeans, Southeastern Asia and Oceania in his discussions of the phenomenology of shamanism. His symbolistic approach was no less of an innovation.<sup>3</sup> Anna-Leena Siikala (1992b: 24 f.) sees as Eliade's finest contribution his establishing of shamanism as an integrative concept of "the basic religious experience of mankind." The great Romanian scholar has certainly argued convincingly for the significance of shamanic ideas for our understanding of a number of religious manifestations.

Eliade's opus has inspired an intensified study of shamanic ideology, and a fresh dedication to further research in the field. Today, shamanistic studies are being conducted in many countries where little interest in shamanism has been shown in the past.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the study of shamanism has acquired a new impetus in countries that have a legacy of shamanistic research, such as Russia, Hungary, Germany, Finland and Sweden. The Hungarian efforts to escalate all phases of research on shamanism and to coordinate the work being done in different countries deserves particular attention.<sup>5</sup> All this means that there is now the chance that shamanic phenomena, including oral narratives and recollections of shamans, will be fully covered.

Secondly, there has been an increase in the popular interest in shamanism. It seems that the general public has discovered the shaman as a vatic personality, as well as his enormous importance for the formation of religion. Today, shamans, or persons who consider themselves shamans, travel widely throughout the countries of the West where

---

<sup>3</sup> See the evaluation of Eliade's theories on shamanism by Narr 1983; Ozols 1983; Hultkrantz 1983; Lewis 1983; Ridington 1983; Basilov 1983 and Te Paske 1983. The theoretical implications of the more recent research on shamanism, including Eliade's, have been analyzed by Motzki 1977.

<sup>4</sup> Italy could be mentioned as a good example, with names such as Ernesto de Martino, Ugo Marazzi, Marcello Massenzio, Roberto Mastromattei and Elémire Zolla.

<sup>5</sup> Among present-day Hungarian scholars, we need to mention Vilmos Diószegi, Mihály Hoppál, László Vajda and Vilmos Voigt.

until recently shamanism was next to unknown. All over the world, the anthropologist Michael Harner has introduced what may be called “the new shamanism,” an opportunity for everybody to regain harmony and health through exercises modeled on the practices of traditional folk shamans.<sup>6</sup> In this connection, both narratives and eye-witness reports have proved valuable.

Thirdly, the disappearance of old-time shamanism has given rise to what might be called shamanic “memory folklore” (patterned after “memory ethnography”). Whatever we might think about the present state of shamanism and its future, it is, without a doubt, an institution that is on the verge of becoming eclipsed by magic arts of a more simple kind in many cultures, if it has not already disappeared. From the time of my own investigations among the Wind River Shoshoni of Wyoming, North America, I recall that there were stories circulating about some really great shamans who lived at the beginning of this century. They were credited with having undertaken soul journeys in a deep trance even to the realm of the dead, whilst their latter-day successors who lack this ability could, at best, be characterized as mediocre medicine men. Of course, there was inevitably a certain degree of aggrandizement in the story-tellers’ description of the perfection and dexterity of the old-time shamans, and the stories probably had little basis in reality. However, that fact itself would bear out what we have found to be the case time and again: when shamanic abilities decline and disappear, the inspiration to create legends will flourish.

Folkloristic and linguistic methods allow the investigation of narratives dealing with shamans and shamanic deeds from a great many points of view. In this study, we shall adopt an anthropological and religio-scientific perspective, and address the issue of how various types of stories correlate with the various types of shamanism.

2. Since shamanism is so widespread, it is self-evident that the tales told about shamans will be colored by the narrative traits and modes of cultural expression specific to the various regions. In this respect, shaman tales tally with the other tales investigated by folklorists. From our point of view, there is one important difference that is directly related to the kind of shamanism that happens to be prevalent in a particular

---

<sup>6</sup> See Harner 1980; Ingerman 1991; Horwitz 1989: 373 ff. and Hoppál 1992b: 200 ff.

region: the difference between the rather inchoate, “spontaneous” shamanism of most hunting societies, and the fairly institutionalized and ritualized shamanism of the Siberian and North Eurasian peoples. Siberian shamanism in particular is quite sophisticated: it tends to be a more dominant cultural force than shamanism elsewhere, bearing as it does the imprint of a higher civilization and its religions (Buddhism and Lamaism).<sup>7</sup> In part, the difference between the two kinds of shamanism corresponds to the distinction between hunting shamanism and pastoral shamanism in Roberte N. Hamayon’s system.<sup>8</sup> The structural differences between these two forms of shamanism—which are not always clearly delimited from one another—are mirrored in the types of oral traditions.<sup>9</sup>

Most of the recorded oral narratives about shamans are part of the Siberian and Eskimo legacy of developed shamanism. However, there are also some fascinating shamanic tales that have come down to us from that historical cradle of shamanism, the palaeolithic and mesolithic hunting religions of America and Eurasia.<sup>10</sup> Let us first look at the kind of prose traditions that they afford us.

Very often we find among hunting peoples tales of shamanic wonder workers who have passed on and whose abilities grow more miraculous with every telling as time goes by. The tales told by the Guajiro Indians living on the border between Colombia and Venezuela are certainly a case in point. As the ethnographer, Michel Perrin (1992: 22), tells us, the local raconteur even exaggerates the feats of living shamans: he multiplies their powers, and magnifies their deeds. We could say that the tendency to mythologization is already there, but since the shaman referred to is still living there are limits to the fantasy.

The raconteur has greater liberty if the shaman has been dead for some years. Perrin tells us how a young Guajiro recounted the deeds of a shaman who died in the 1960s, some time before he himself first

---

<sup>7</sup> Hultkrantz 1978: 53 ff., cf. also Hultkrantz 1992: 83.

<sup>8</sup> See Hamayon 1994. Mme Hamayon further refers to a third category of shamanism found in more acculturated societies; see also Basilov 1976: 149 ff.

<sup>9</sup> See further Hamayon 1990:151 ff.

<sup>10</sup> The establishment of the age of shamanism does not allow us to infer the age of shamanic tales. Eliade assesses the story of the “magic flight” as “probably the oldest narrative motif” in shamanism; see Eliade 1961: 154. Eliade interprets the story as representing ascension ecstasy. However, there is no certainty about its age.

visited Guajiro country. The events that the Indian described transpired in a milieu which Perrin has described as the place where “mythology has its roots.”

Eeyasi, so the story goes, was a very powerful shaman, ready to help out the people of his local group. Among them was an old couple who were close to starvation. They went way up into the mountains to gather cactus fruit. Equipped with a sack, they reached the place, picked the fruit and ate it. However, Pulowi, the mistress of animals and wild plants, dwelt there underground. In the shape of a gigantic snake she devoured the elderly couple. Soon their neighbors back home missed them and started to search for them. They searched the mountains with torches, but did not find the lost couple. The old shaman was, however, a man with great powers, and discovered the remains of the man and his wife. All at once the giant snake Pulowi who lived close by showed her enormous head. He shot her with his arrows, and she died after much writhing and coiling. The shaman should have died too, for he had seen Pulowi; but he did not, so much power had he.

We would say that the old couple died of hunger, adds Perrin (1992: 167 ff.), but to the Indians the story was confirmation of their belief in the great power of the shaman. Similar stories abound among Native American peoples in different parts of the Americas. For instance, we are told that at the beginning of the last century, a famous Tlingit shaman from Sitka (on the northwest coast) wanted to acquire a new guardian spirit. It is said that he allowed himself to be thrown into the sea. He was first wrapped in a mat and tied with an otter-skin strap, this animal being his shamanic power. Thereafter he was lowered into the sea. He had been fastened to a line at the end of which his shipmates had tied the bladder of a land otter. However, he sank to the bottom faster than a stone, and there was no further sign of life from him. His friends gave him up for dead. On the fourth day after the event, however, they heard the sound of a shamanic drum and saw the shaman hanging on a steep cliff, his face streaming with blood. His friends took care of him, and he regained consciousness and returned home. He had acquired a new spirit.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Krause 1956: 196, in the German original 1885: 286 f.

In this tale the treatment the shaman endures, particularly his being wrapped up and bound, reminds us of the Shaking Tent and Spirit Lodge shamanic ceremonies.<sup>12</sup>

The interesting Orpheus tradition, widely diffused in North America, has a shamanic background. This story, which generally involves a human married couple (and thus may be termed a tale), but sometimes portrays the relationship between a god and his consort (and thus should be called a myth) varies, naturally, from culture to culture, but usually expresses one central theme: a loving husband's pursuit of his deceased young wife as her soul steers toward the land of the dead. Sometimes he succeeds in bringing her back to life, sometimes, like the Greek Orpheus, he does not, and this is the most common version. The tale is an important source for our knowledge of North American Indian eschatology. It is evidently built on the experiences of the shaman who discharges his soul to the realm of the dead in order to fetch a sick person's soul. For the details of this thesis, I refer the reader to my exposition in a book on the American Orpheus tradition (Hultkrantz 1957: 229 ff., 240 ff.).

I know of only one other tale of shamanic origin that has had such popularity outside the Siberian and Central Asian area, and that is the tale about the first shaman and the sun. This tale is known from northern Asia to the Eskimo and American Indians (Thalbitzer 1928: 419 ff.).

3. We may designate Siberia with Mongolia and Central Asia as an area of intensified shamanism with features that reveal influences from southern and eastern high cultures (Hultkrantz 1978: 54). In this vast area one can find inspired tales of shamanic magic and of the great shamanic figures of the past. Such tales are often shrouded in mystery, and endow their heroic shamans with a consequence more or less akin to that of princes, spirits and gods. It is from this large area that the myths of the first shaman (*Urschaman*) have been recorded. The long historical perspective has certainly contributed to this mystification. However, it seems that these myths have developed on the basis of the cult of shamans.

---

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Hultkrantz 1967: 32 ff., see also 1992: 37 ff., 96 ff.



The cult of shamans is a form of the cult of ethnic heroes that is widespread among the Volga Finns and the Siberian peoples.<sup>13</sup> In these areas, great ancestors, political and military leaders and shamans were remembered and hallowed by sacrifices of horses, cows and sheep. The heroes were considered to be protective spirits or gods who cared about the welfare of the community, its corn fields and cattle. Shamans who had passed on were brought to mind with the help of idols or simple images in sacred groves or lodges (Holmberg 1927: 140 f.). Sometimes these images come close to the pictures used in elementary ancestor worship. When a shaman of the Yurak Samoyed dies, a manlike doll is made out of a plank of his coffin to represent him. The family gives this doll food for five or six years and then places it beside the coffin. Some of these dolls have their own little hut. Now and then people visit the doll, make offerings to it and ask it to counsel them on important matters of daily life (Lehtisalo 1924: 141 ff.).

The dead shamans are often powerful supernatural beings. Among the Buriat, for example, both male and female shamans were worshipped after their death. Their images, or *ongon*, were placed on the heights where they were buried. They were thought to be protective spirits (Holmberg 1927: 499). The guardian spirits of the Yakut shaman, or *ämägät*, are dead shamans.<sup>14</sup>

Cults and ideas of this kind have given rise to the supernatural aura surrounding North and Central Eurasian shamans in oral tradition. The longer such a shaman has been dead, the more mysterious and powerful he (or she) becomes. The same rule holds here for shamans as for princes and chiefs of extraordinary qualities. The high social position of the shaman is a fact all over the Arctic area, but has certainly been enhanced in parts of Siberia through the growth of clan organization and, in places, of chiefdoms.<sup>15</sup> The exalted political role played by some Mongolian shamans in medieval times was part and parcel of the Mongolian imperialistic expansion of those days.

The myths of the first shaman are an obvious expression of these cultic and socio-political conditions. The first shaman is often portrayed as begotten by heavenly powers and capable of performing the most impossible feats. We hear, for instance, of a Yakut shaman whose

---

<sup>13</sup> Holmberg 1927: 139 ff.; Honko 1971. 1: 192 ff.

<sup>14</sup> Holmberg 1927: 497 f.; cf. also Friedrich and Buddruss (eds.) 1955: 36 f.

<sup>15</sup> Graburn and Strong 1973: 36 f., 51 f.; Siikala 1992a: 2 ff.

father was the son of the god of heaven. He was capable of transforming himself into other shapes, and easily healed himself and others from mortal wounds and diseases.<sup>16</sup> A Buriat tradition tells us that the gods sent an eagle—which in many tales in Siberia and North America is supposed to be the messenger of the gods—down to earth to help the first human beings rid themselves of the diseases with which the evil spirits plagued them. Man, however, did not appreciate the presence of the eagle, so he had to return to heaven. At the order of the gods, the eagle then approached a woman sleeping under a tree; she conceived, and gave birth to a son. The rest of the story has a number of variations: some say the woman, some say her son could see spirits, and was the first shaman.<sup>17</sup>

The first shaman, thus, is attributed direct heavenly descent in many quarters. No wonder, therefore, if he was a master of magic. An example was Dokh, the first shaman of the Ket (or Yenisei Ostiak). He was a great shaman and lived in mythical times, it is said. Once the death goddess of the underworld devoured one of his sons. In great anger he demanded that his people make an iron hammer and some cord of iron for him. However, all they delivered was a wooden hammer and some cord made of roots. Equipped with these, the shaman went to the island at the mouth of the Yenisei River where the goddess of death lived. He attacked her with his hammer, but it split into a thousand pieces. Then he threw the cord around her neck to choke her, but the brittle cord broke. Through the failure of his own tribesmen, death had come to stay.

At the order of the goddess the shaman and half of his people sacrificed a hundred reindeer, made new fur coats and fur boots, and steered their new sledges to the land of the sky. They wanted to build tents there, but there was no wood in that place.<sup>18</sup> Dokh then beat his drum until the spirits arrived, and made trees grow. Now the Ket could construct their tent. However, after a fortnight, they were, struck by thunder and lightning so terrible that it destroyed them all, except for Dokh's wife, who became a star in the sky.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Friedrich and Buddrus 1955: 107 ff., cf. 115 ff.

<sup>17</sup> Holmberg 1927: 505, quoting N. N. Agapitov and M. N. Changalov.

<sup>18</sup> The tents of the Ket are covered with strips of birch bark.

<sup>19</sup> Findeisen (ed.) 1970: 333 f.

Wondrous stories of this type are myths rather than legends, if we may use the terminology I have been following in my works: myths are stories (sometimes sacred stories) of gods and spirits operating at the beginning of time; legends are stories of spirits, animals and humans from supposedly historical times (Hultkrantz 1984: 152–156). Myths often set the patterns of life, as in the Ket tradition just mentioned: we are told how the failure of the first shaman to bring his dead son back to life, or to kill the goddess of death, decided the mortality of mankind.<sup>20</sup> In similar myths from other parts of the world, the party at fault is usually a divinity of some sort, such as a primordial trickster (Boas 1917). In this light, the first shaman appears as more or less an equal of the gods, a divine person.<sup>21</sup>

Several Siberian and Central Asian myths illustrate how shamans could widen their specific sphere to nature mythology. The Samoyed relate that a young man who was hunting in the taiga met a man in a white blanket. The man admonished him to sacrifice seven reindeer to Num, the god of heaven. The young man did so. His father realized that the son was now a shaman and gave him a drum. The new shaman started a journey to the sky through the smoke-hole. He arrived up there and saw the white-clad old man he had met in the taiga. The man, who was evidently a spirit, guided the young shaman through the different heavens until they reached the seventh golden heaven where Num was sitting in his golden tent. So dazzling was his light that the shaman could not bear to look at him. The god of heaven told him that he wanted to install him as a god of the earth, as a gesture of gratitude for the sacrifices. Then the young shaman fell through the heavens for seven days and landed at the upper part of the Ob.<sup>22</sup>

The tale gives a good picture of the Samoyed upper world, with the high god seated in the uppermost of the seven heavens. It is to this upper world that the shaman has access by flying through the smoke-hole in ecstasy. The tradition also establishes how a shaman was

---

<sup>20</sup> The connection between the first shaman and the origin of death is told in several Siberian myths; cf. Massenzio 1984: 203 ff., 207 ff. On the general connection between shamanism and death, see also Mastromattei 1981: 1 ff.

<sup>21</sup> Dokh is actually represented in one mythological tale as the god of the great primeval waters; see Campbell 1959: 275 (after V. I. Anuchin). See also Hultkrantz 1978: 54, note 145.

<sup>22</sup> Lehtisalo 1924: 92 ff.

selected to become the local supernatural ruler of the earth. This is the highest rank that a mythic shaman could achieve. It is no mere coincidence that the tradition of such a divine transformation comes from the highly shamanic North Eurasian area.

Though in ways that are difficult to identify, the divinization of the shaman in mythology may even have played a role in high-cultural areas. The presence of this mythologem seems to be conspicuous in Japan where, as Manabu Waida has pointed out, the emperor's ceremonial dress is almost identical with the Siberian (Tungus) shaman's.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, there is the possibility that both the shaman dress and the imperial dress originated in the stream of southern elements that flowed up with the expansion of high cultures.<sup>24</sup>

In fact, shamanic mythology may be behind some of the expressions found in ancient Near Eastern mythology. A. T. Hatto recognizes shamanic traits in the Sumerian myth of Gilgamesh. He reminds us that Gilgamesh went to fight the leafless tree of the goddess Inanna, a tree which housed a serpent at its roots and an eagle in its crown, and the wind demon Lilith on its trunk. Gilgamesh handed the tree over to the goddess who, it is said, made a drum from the roots and a drumstick from the crown.<sup>25</sup> It is obvious that the whole scene is shamanic. Here we find the world-tree with its antagonistic forces, the eagle and the serpent, a dualistic concept spread from Scandinavia over Siberia, North America and Mexico. There is also the North Eurasian idea of the drum being created from the sacred tree. Thus, behind the myth we can see the beginnings shrouded in a shamanic milieu in the Middle East, fantastic as this notion might seem. As Hatto (1970: 19) has pointed out, "Most if not all high religions owe something to historic shamanism, so that when the shamanistic cultures of Northern Asia were overtaken by high religions, a refusion of elements, like to like, took place."

If, now, we turn to the legends and common tales of shamans of the alleged historical past we shall find that they are legion. Many of them "improve" the reputation of well-known shamans, particularly of shamans who lived long ago and had no living descendants with reminiscences of their own. The two main sources of these tales are the recollections of the shaman's accounts of his trances and ritual

---

<sup>23</sup> Waida 1976: 103, 107., cf. Hultkrantz 1989: 48.

<sup>24</sup> See for instance Eliade 1951: 501 f.

<sup>25</sup> Hatto 1970: 3 f. The text is taken from Kramer 1963: 197 ff.

experiences, and the observations and imaginings of the people who had attended shamanic acts.

The tales of shamanic soul flights do not always reflect a particular shaman's experiences; they may generalize shamanic experience. An example of this is the Tungus tale of the sky-journey of a young man's soul. To escape a cannibal who had devoured his brothers and sisters, his shaman father, his mother the young man hid in a sack. Peeking out of it after a while, he found that he was in the sky where the Thunder lived. However, nobody noticed him, for he was now a soul. Only when he lay down beside Thunder's beautiful daughter did she see him. She recognized him as being a great shaman, since he had managed to enter the upper world. The girl gave him a horse on which he could ride back to earth. Alas, the cannibal, in disguise, was awaiting him, and devoured him.<sup>26</sup>

In the above, we see the shamanic soul-journey function as the background to the dramatic action, but no particular shaman can be referred to since the hero died before returning to life.

Another Tungus tale narrated by the same story teller furnishes evidence of how legendary interpretation can permeate modern shamanic accounts. A nephew of the narrator, himself a young shaman, went out for the autumn hunt. He met another Tungusian shaman, and the two of them decided to compete in flying as high as the trees. They both flew up, and each landed in a tree top. The contest went on the whole night; they flew like squirrels from top to top. By early morning they were tired and went to sleep on the ground. The woodland god then appeared and killed them. The story teller commented that everybody knew that shamans can no more fly than other human beings. But those two shamans had vaunted their powers, and were, therefore, killed by the god, he added.<sup>27</sup>

If the story teller was not just having a little joke on the field researcher, it certainly testifies to the speed with which historical shamans turn into miraculous beings after their death.

Reminiscences of shamanic soul-flights of yore probably lie behind a well-known story current among the Saami (Lapps) since the middle of

---

<sup>26</sup> Suslov and Menges 1983: 85 ff.

<sup>27</sup> Suslov and Menges 1983: 94. Suslov found a living shaman who had the widespread reputation of being able to leave his tent through the smoke-hole by flying (Suslov and Menges 1983: 73).

the nineteenth century. The Swedish Archbishop of Uppsala, together with a small clerical commission, stayed some days with a rich and reputable Saami conjurer in Lapland. The Saami offered his guests a demonstration of his magical powers. He would, he said, send his soul to the archbishop's home to see what the church leader's wife was doing. At the same time, he would leave evidence of his having been there. The archbishop accepted the man's proposal. After having inhaled the smoke of some charred herbs, the Saami sank into a trance and was gone for an hour. Then he revived, and recounted what had happened to him. He had visited the archbishop's residence and found the latter's wife busy in the kitchen. While she was preparing the meal, her wedding ring slipped off her finger. The invisible Saami picked it up and hid it in the coal box. Then he returned to where his body was. Having heard this report, the archbishop wrote a letter to his wife asking her what had happened to her that morning. Fourteen days later he received a reply to his letter. She confessed that at that time she had lost her ring and could not find it again. She was afraid that it might have been stolen by a well-dressed Saami who had suddenly come into the kitchen and then left without saying what errand he was on. Some time later, the ring was recovered in the coal box.<sup>28</sup>

Some shamanic legends associate to the supposed initiation rites of the new shaman—rites that took place not in this world, but were part of the shaman's dream-fulfillment. One famous tale concerns the Yakut shaman Bükäsh Ülläyän, himself the son of a legendary shaman. The story runs as follows. Before he became a shaman, Bükäsh Ülläyän and a fellow traveller were in a boat making their way to an island. Dark clouds arose in the west; rain, thunder and lightning followed. The two travellers were obliged to wait on the beach for the storm to abate. However, a frightful burst of thunder suddenly exploded, and Bükäsh Ülläyän was torn apart. His companion collected the strewn pieces and went to call the others to help bury the corpse. Some time later, he returned together with another tribesman. To their surprise, the two found the dead man alive and well at a camp fire. He explained to them that he had revived. The Thunder god had come down from the sky and reduced him to pieces, but had then put him together again and made him a shaman.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Arbman 1955: 52 ff., 84 f.

<sup>29</sup> Friedrich and Buddruss (eds.) 1955: 175 ff.; Findeisen 1970: 339 ff.



This tale is a mythological interpretation of the idea common in Siberia that in order to function as a shaman, a person has to be reduced to a heap of bones, or to pieces of flesh, and then be reborn. As is well known, this transformation expresses the belief that a would-be shaman has to go through a death and resurrection experience in order to be accepted as a shaman.<sup>30</sup> In North America, the same thought has been supplanted by the belief that the spirit plants a precious stone, such as a quartz crystal, in the shaman candidate's body.<sup>31</sup>

In areas where shamanism has long been a thing of the past, many tales contain only vague, piecemeal or inaccurate recollections of shamans and their like. The whole North Eurasian field offers illustrations aplenty. I have chosen here an example from the Saami, one of many. In the southern Lapmarks, there is a big copper kettle, called the magic kettle of Atjiken. It is said that the Saami who put it there was rich, powerful and highly skilled in magic. He wanted a kettle big enough to serve him and his neighbors at feasts. So he went to the coastal town of Umeå and ordered a kettle of the appropriate size. When the kettle was ready, remarkable things started to occur. The first Thursday evening, there was a ticking inside the kettle.<sup>32</sup> The second Thursday, it lifted slightly off the ground, and the third Thursday evening it flew out of the tinker's house and travelled with the speed of the wind westward to the place among the mountains where the powerful shaman lived.<sup>33</sup>

This story instances the idea of the shaman as a wonder worker, but his relationship to the kettle is not explained, and I do not know of similar moves of big kettles through the agency of shamans in the extant literary material.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> For a brief introduction to the subject, see Eliade 1951: 158–165.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Okladnikova 1989: 343 ff.

<sup>32</sup> Thursday was a holy day among ancient Scandinavians and Saami, the day of the Thunder god.

<sup>33</sup> Pettersson 1979: 79 f.

<sup>34</sup> Another characteristic Saami story deals with a bear who turns into a human person, and vice versa. This transformation story could be a changeover from an original soul-flight story if, as Juha Pentikäinen (1978: 223 f.) thinks (I presume correctly), the bear man involved is supposed to be a shaman. The current Saami ideas of the bear's anthropomorphism (his features when skinned, his behaviour) may have contributed to the story. So also possibly has the circumpolar legend of the marriage between a human and a bear, see Edsman 1956: 36 ff.

4. Our cursory survey of the types of folktale surrounding shamanism shows that there is a characteristic difference between the tales current where shamanism is a more democratic institution—where the shaman is distinguished only by his distinctive nervous disposition and talents—and the tales told in a structurally more differentiated society, which also reflect the shaman's superior status. In the former case, we are dealing with the lowly shamanism of primarily hunting societies;<sup>35</sup> in the latter case, with the professional and ritually developed shamanism found in hunter and nomad societies that have, for the most part, been strongly influenced by high civilizations. Such peripheral groups as the Saami and the Eskimo we can count among the latter societies although their shamanism was touched by higher civilizations only tangentially. In Siberia, shamanism has such strong hold that many authors refer to the entire religious system of the North Siberian peoples as shamanism. No wonder that the person of the shaman has received so much attention in the myths and legends of this area: cult and myth have elevated him to divine rank.

In the simpler forms of shamanism, its representatives are regarded with a certain awe, but they have never been deified. It is another matter that in some cultures, shamans, like other human beings, may achieve status as powerful spirits after death.

## References

- Arbman, Ernst 1955. "Shamanen, extatisk andebesvärjare och visionär." In Åke Hultkrantz (ed.) *Primitiv religion och magi*. Stockholm: Svenska Bokförlaget.
- Basilov, Vladimir N. 1976. "Shamanism in Central Asia." In Agehananda Bharati (ed.) *The Realm of the Extra-Human: Agents and Audiences*. The Hague: Mouton.
- . 1983. "Zur Erforschung der Überreste von Schamanismus in Zentralasien." In Hans Peter Duerr (ed.) 1983. *Sehnsucht nach dem Ursprung: Zu Mircea Eliade*. Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat.
- Boas, Franz 1917. "The Origin of Death." *Journal of American Folklore* 30: 486–491.
- Campbell, Joseph 1959. *The Masks of God*. New York: The Viking Press.

---

<sup>35</sup> This form of shamanism should not be confused with what I have called "general shamanism" which refers to the activities of any medicine man (who is not necessarily an ecstatic shaman); see Hultkrantz 1967: 35 f. The "lowly shamanism" is a more genuine form of shamanism, but could be classified under general shamanism.

- Diószegi, Vilmos 1960. "Schamanenlieder der Mandschu." *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 11(1–3): 89–104.
- . 1968. *Tracing Shamans in Siberia. The Story of an Ethnographical Research Expedition*. Transl. from the Hungarian by Anita Balkay Babó. Oosterhout: Anthropological Publications.
- Diószegi, V. and M. Hoppál (eds.) 1978. *Shamanism in Siberia*. Bibliotheca Uralica 1. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.
- Duerr, Hans Peter (ed.) 1983. *Sehnsucht nach dem Ursprung: Zu Mircea Eliade*. Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat.
- Edsman, Carl-Martin 1956. "The Story of the Bear Wife in Nordic Tradition." *Ethnos* 21: 36–56.
- Eliade, Mircea 1951. *Le Chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase*. Paris: Payot. English edition, 1964, New York: Bollingen Foundation.
- . 1961. "Recent Works on Shamanism: A Review Article." *History of Religions* 1(1): 152–186.
- Findeisen, Hans (ed.) 1970. *Dokumente urtümlicher Weltanschauung der Völker Nordeurasiens*. Studien und Materialien aus dem Institut für Menschen- und Menschheitskunde 1. Oosterhout: Anthropological Publications.
- Friedrich, Adolf and Georg Buddruss (eds.) 1955. *Schamanengeschichten aus Sibirien*. München: Otto Wilhelm Barth Verlag.
- Graburn, Nelson H. H. and B. Stephen Strong 1973. *Circumpolar Peoples: An Anthropological Perspective*. Pacific Palisades: Goodyear Publishing Co.
- Hajdú, Péter 1978. "The Nenets Shaman Song and its Text." In V. Diószegi and M. Hoppál (eds.) *Shamanism in Siberia*. Bibliotheca Uralica 1. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó. 355–372.
- Hamayon, Roberte N. 1990. *La chasse à l'âme. Esquisse d'une théorie du chamanisme sibérien*. Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie.
- . 1994. "Shamanism in Siberia: From Partnership in Supernature to Counterpower in Society." In Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphrey (eds.) *Shamanism, History, and the State*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Harner, Michael 1980. *The Way of the Shaman. A Guide to Power and Healing*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Hatto, A. T. 1970. Shamanism and Epic Poetry in Northern Asia. Foundation Day Lecture. London: University of London (School of Oriental and African Studies).
- Holmberg (Harva) Uno 1927. "Finno-Ugric, Siberian [Mythology]." In *The Mythology of All Races*. Edited by J. A. MacCulloch. Vol. IV. Boston: Archaeological Institute of America, Marshall Jones.
- Honko, Lauri 1971. "Religion der finnisch-ugrischen Völker." In Jes Peder Asmussen and Jørgen Laessøe (eds.) *Handbuch der Religionsgeschichte*. Vol. 1. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht.
- Hoppál, Mihály 1992a. "Shamanism: An Archaic and/or Recent System of Beliefs." In Anna-Leena Siikala and Mihály Hoppál. *Studies on Shamanism*.

- Ethnologica Uralica 2. Helsinki: Finnish Anthropological Society; Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó. 117–131.
- . 1992b. “Urban Shamans. A Cultural Revival in the Postmodern World.” In Anna-Leena Siikala and Mihály Hoppál. *Studies on Shamanism*. Ethnologica Uralica 2. Helsinki: Finnish Anthropological Society; Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó. 197–209.
- Horwitz, Jonathan 1989. “On Experiential Shamanic Journeying.” In Mihály Hoppál and Otto von Sadvoszky (eds.) *Shamanism Past and Present*. 2 parts. ISTOR Books 1–2. Budapest: Ethnographic Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences; Los Angeles/Fullerton: International Society for Trans-Oceanic Research. 373–376.
- Hultkrantz, Åke 1957. *The North American Indian Orpheus Tradition*. Statens Etnografiska Museum. Monograph Series 2. Stockholm: Statens Etnografiska Museum.
- . 1967. “Spirit Lodge, a North American Shamanistic Séance.” In Carl-Martin Edsman (ed.) *Studies in Shamanism*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell.
- . 1978. “Ecological and Phenomenological Aspects of Shamanism.” In V. Diószegi and M. Hoppál (eds.) *Shamanism in Siberia*. Bibliotheca Uralica 1. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó. 27–58.
- . 1983. “Mircea Eliade: Schamanologe oder Zauberlehrling.” In Hans Peter Duerr (ed.) *Sehnsucht nach dem Ursprung: Zu Mircea Eliade*. Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat.
- . 1984. “An Ideological Dichotomy: Myths and Folk Beliefs among the Shoshoni.” In Alan Dundes (ed.) *Sacred Narrative. Readings in the Theory of Myth*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1989. “The Place of Shamanism in the History of Religions.” In Mihály Hoppál and Otto von Sadvoszky (eds.) *Shamanism Past and Present*. 2 parts. ISTOR Books 1–2. Budapest: Ethnographic Institute, Hungarian Academy of Sciences; Los Angeles/Fullerton: International Society for Trans-Oceanic Research. 43–52.
- . 1992. *Shamanic Healing and Ritual Drama*. New York: Crossroad.
- Ingerman, Sandra 1991. *Soul Retrieval*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Joki, Aulis J. 1978. “Notes on Selkup Shamanism.” In V. Diószegi and M. Hoppál (eds.) *Shamanism in Siberia*. Bibliotheca Uralica 1. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó. 373–386.
- Kramer, S. N. 1963. *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Krause, Aurel 1885. *Die Tlinkit-Indianer. Ergebnisse einer Reise nach der Nordwestküste von Amerika und der Beringstrasse*. Jena: Hermann Costenoble.
- . 1956. *The Tlingit Indians. Results of a Trip to the Northeast Coast of America and the Bering Straits*. Transl. by Erna Gunther. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

- Lehtisalo, Tiovo 1924. *Entwurf einer Mythologie der Jurak-Samojeden*. Mémoires de la Société Finno-ougrienne 53. Helsinki: Société Finno-ougrienne.
- Lewis, Ioan M. 1983. "Die Berufung des Schamanen." In Hans Peter Duerr (ed.) *Sehnsucht nach dem Ursprung: Zu Mircea Eliade*. Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat.
- Massenzio, Marcello 1984. "Variations on the Mythical Origins of Shamanism and Death." In Mihály Hoppál (ed.) *Shamanism in Eurasia*. 2 parts. Göttingen: Edition Herodot.
- Mastromattei, Roberto 1981. "Oral Tradition and Shamanic Recitals." In Bruno Gentili and Giuseppe Paionoi (eds.) *Oralità: Cultura, Letteratura, Discorso*. Urbino: Alenco.
- Meuli, Karl 1975. *Gesammelte Schriften*. 2 vols. Hrg. von Thomas Gelzer. Basel and Stuttgart: Schwabe.
- Motzki, Harald 1977. *Schamanismus als Problem religionswissenschaftlicher Terminologie*. Köln: E. J. Brill.
- Narr, Karl J. 1983. "Felsbild und Weltbild. Zu Magie und Schamanismus im jungpaläolithischen Jägertum." In Hans Peter Duerr (ed.) *Sehnsucht nach dem Ursprung: Zu Mircea Eliade*. Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat.
- Okladnikova, E. A. 1989. "The Shamanistic Aspect of the Crystal Magic." In Mihály Hoppál and Otto von Sadvoszky (eds.) *Shamanism Past and Present*. 2 parts. ISTOR Books 1–2. Budapest: Ethnographic Institute, Hungarian Academy of Sciences; Los Angeles/Fullerton: International Society for Trans-Oceanic Research. 343–348.
- Ozols, Jacob T. 1983. "Zur Altersfrage des Schamanismus." In Hans Peter Duerr (ed.) *Sehnsucht nach dem Ursprung: Zu Mircea Eliade*. Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat.
- Pentikäinen, Juha 1978. *Oral Repertoire and World View: An Anthropological Study of Marina Takalo's Life History*. FF Communications 219. Helsinki: Suolamalainen Tiedeakademeia.
- Perrin, Michel 1992. *Les praticiens du rêve, un exemple de chamanisme*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Pettersson, Olof P. 1979. *Kristoffer Sjulssons minnen. Om vapstenlapparna i börian af 1800-talet*. Edited by Louise Bäckman and Rolf Kjellström. Acta Lapponica 20. Stockholm: Nordiska museet.
- Ridington, Robin 1983. "Reflexionen über die schamanistische Vorstellung vom modernen Leben." In Hans Peter Duerr (ed.) *Sehnsucht nach dem Ursprung: Zu Mircea Eliade*. Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat.
- Siikala, Anna-Leena 1992a. "Siberian and Inner Asian Shamanism." In Anna-Leena Siikala and Mihály Hoppál (eds.) *Studies on Shamanism*. Ethnologica Uralica 2. Helsinki: Finnish Anthropological Society; Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó. 1–14.
- . 1992b. "The Interpretation of Siberian and Central Asian Shamanism." In Anna-Leena Siikala and Mihály Hoppál (eds.) *Studies on Shamanism*.



- Ethnologica Uralica 2. Helsinki: Finnish Anthropological Society; Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó. 15–25.
- Siikala, Anna-Leena 1992c. “Two Types of Shamanizing and Categories of Shamanic Songs: A Chukchi Case.” In Anna-Leena Siikala and Mihály Hoppál (eds.) *Studies on Shamanism*. Ethnologica Uralica 2. Helsinki: Finnish Anthropological Society; Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó. 41–55.
- Simoncsics, Péter 1978. “The Structure of a Nenets Magic Chant.” In V. Diószegi and M. Hoppál (eds.) *Shamanism in Siberia*. Bibliotheca Uralica 1. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó. 387–402.
- Suslov, I. M. (gesammelt und aufgezeichnet) and K. H. Menges (eingeleitet, übersetzt.) 1983. *Materialien zum Schamanismus der Ewenki-Tungusen an der mittleren und unteren Tunguska*. Studies in Oriental Religions 8. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.
- Te Paske, B.A. 1983. “Schamanismus und archaische Ekstasetechnik: Mircea Eliades Beitrag zur analytischen Psychologie.” In Hans Peter Duerr (ed.) *Sehnsucht nach dem Ursprung: Zu Mircea Eliade*. Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat.
- Thalbitzer, William 1928. “Die kultischen Gottheiten der Eskimos.” *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 26.
- Waida, Manabu 1976. “Conceptions of State and Kingship in Early Japan.” *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 28(2): 97–112.

ÅKE HULTKRANTZ, Ph.D. Stockholm University (1953), Hon. Dr. of Theology, University of Helsinki (1997). He was Professor in Comparative Religion, Stockholm University, from 1958 to 1986. He also served as Visiting Professor at Brandeis University, MA, 1958, the University of California (Los Angeles and Santa Barbara), CA, 1973, 1977, 1980 and 1990, and at the Universities of Budapest (1970), Vienna (1973) and Aberdeen (1976). He was an occasional lecturer at many European, African, North American and Japanese universities. He won prizes for scientific accomplishments in 1980 (Americanist Congress in Winnipeg) and 1993 (International Society for Shamanistic Research, Budapest). He served as Chairman of the Swedish Americanist Society. He published some twenty-five books and up to 400 articles on American Indians, Lapps and other Arctic peoples, shamanism and general ethnographical and religio-historical problems. He also gave the Gifford Lectures at Aberdeen University (1981, 1982), and the Foerster Lecture at the University of California, Berkeley (1983). Åke Hultkrantz served as Honorary Editor-in-Chief of this journal from 1993 until his death in 2006.



## The Kun-ning-gung Palace in Peking: The Manchu Dynasty's Shaman Centre in the "Forbidden City"

TATIANA A. PANG

ST PETERSBURG

*The Kun-ning-gung, located behind the main palaces of the "Forbidden City," was—together with the Tangzi temple—the Qing court's centre for shamanic rituals. While the Tangzi has been completely destroyed, the Kun-ning-gung palace is still open to the public: visitors to the main hall will find some shamanic furniture, and can then proceed to the kitchen where the sacrificial meat was cooked. The rituals celebrated in this hall were carefully described in the Manchu Imperial Ritual (in Manchu Hesei tokto-buha Manjusai wecere metere kooli bithe) completed in 1747; it is the most significant passages and prayers of this ritual that are translated here.*

The Kun-ning-gung or "Palace of Earthly Tranquillity," together with the complex called *Tangse* in Manchu, was one of the two centres of the shamanic cult of the Qing dynasty in Peking. While the *Tangse* (in Chinese *tangzi*) has completely disappeared today, the Kun-ning-gung, situated at the rear of the National Palace Museum, is still one of the attractions of the former "Forbidden City."

Almost all of the cultic furnishings<sup>1</sup> have disappeared, and only the kitchen area with its large cooking-pots used for the preparation of the sacrificial food bears witness to the shamanic rites celebrated during the reign of the Manchu dynasty.<sup>2</sup>

Even now, little is known about these rites, and the only available source is the so-called *Manchu Imperial Ritual*, completed in 1747 by order of Qianlong and first published in Manchu in 1778 under the

---

<sup>1</sup> Detailed photographic documentation is found in Ishibashi 1934.

<sup>2</sup> While no detailed studies in Western languages are available, a number of Chinese studies on the Kun-ning-gung have been published recently: see Fu 1988; Du 1990 and Jiang 1992. For Japanese research findings, see Inoue 1950.

title *Hesei toktobuha Manjusai wecere metere kooli bithe* (in Chinese *Qinding Manzhou jishen jitian dianli*). Two French translations<sup>3</sup> exist, one incomplete and the other much too free a translation, whilst an excellent and carefully annotated Russian translation by A.V. Grebenshchikov has never been published.<sup>4</sup>

The visitor to the large, gloomy hall of the Kun-ning-gung thus wonders what these “secret” rites were, rites in which only the Manchu were allowed to take part.

As we shall see, the *Imperial Ritual* provides us with a schematic description. We find that the various ceremonies followed rites which were often symbolic and codified down to the smallest detail. These ceremonies are described in the first chapter of the *Imperial Ritual*, entitled *Kun-ning-gung de biyadari wecere dorolon-i ejebun* “Description of the monthly sacrificial rites [celebrated] in the Kun-ning-gung.”

The most important ceremonies took place, as the text informs us, “on the third day of the first month of the year, and on the first day of [all other] months” (*aniyai biyai ice ilan biyadari ice inenggi*), in the morning and in the evening:<sup>5</sup>

A yellow silk curtain edged with red silk brocade is strung on a yellow cotton rope, and the two ends hung on red-lacquered triangular frames covered in gilt paper and decorated with dragons’ heads which are attached to the western wall.

Two pieces of clean paper are folded in four and four circles are cut out and hung dangling at the two ends of the curtain.

On a table, on the southern end is placed a little shrine covered in gilt paper, inside which is a gilt Buddha; the shrine door is left open.

Then the images of Bodhisattva and Guwan Mafa Enduri<sup>6</sup> are hung on a curtain, and everything is then hung, facing eastwards, above the big oven-bed.

Two large, low, red-lacquered tables are placed on the oven-bed. Three incense burners are then placed on the tables, as are three glasses of sweet

---

<sup>3</sup> Langlès 1804a: 241–308; also as an extra volume: Langlès 1804b; and De Harlez 1887.

<sup>4</sup> See Pan 1991.

<sup>5</sup> Translated from *Hesei toktobuha Manjurai wecere metere kooli bithe*, ch. 2, pp. la ss.

<sup>6</sup> “God ‘Grandfather’ (or ‘Ancestor’, or ‘Old Man’) Guwan,” corresponds to “Guan-di shen” (God “Emperor Guan”) in the Chinese version; De Harlez (1887: 84) translated ‘ancêtre domestique’. For Guan-di, see Werner 1961: 227–230.

wine, nine plates with seasonal fruit and nine plates with ten *fešen efen*<sup>7</sup> cakes cut into small squares. One plate is placed under the northern corner of the table. [Only] in the seventh month are the *miyeku efen* cakes<sup>8</sup> used, [cut] in the same way as the other one. A red carpet decorated with yellow flowers is rolled out, and a bottle of sweet wine is placed under the corner of the oven-bed. A long, low table is placed in front of the bottle, for the wine sacrifice. Two large yellow china cups are placed on the table. Sweet wine is poured into one cup; the other cup remains empty. The eunuchs in charge of the sacrificial food had previously laid on the floor in front of the cooking-pots of the main room two sheets of thick Korean greaseproof paper, and had had two large red-lacquered tables with zinc-plated surfaces brought inside. These are placed parallel in a westerly direction on the Korean greaseproof paper. At the right moment, the person responsible for the incense lights it.

The eunuchs in charge of the sacrificial food<sup>9</sup> and the person responsible for the sacrificial food have two pigs brought in and place them outside the Kun-ning-gung door, so that their heads are turned towards the door and facing north. Then two eunuchs in charge of the sacrificial food, the official in charge of the sacrificial food, eight men in charge of the sacrificial food and two head eunuchs in charge of the sacrificial food come forward in order to play the three-stringed lutes<sup>10</sup> and the four-stringed lutes.<sup>11</sup> In front of the three-stringed lutes and the four-stringed lutes there sit, in two rows and with their legs crossed, ten men [with their faces] looking upwards, and then they [begin to] play the three-stringed lutes and the four-stringed lutes and to hit the wooden clappers. Then the Manchus in charge of the sacrificial food kneel down on one knee and clap their hands. The shaman himself takes his place in front of the sacrificial table with the wine and kneels.

The person responsible for the incense raises a glass with a saucer and gives it to the shaman. The shaman takes it and offers the wine six times [to

---

<sup>7</sup> A kind of steamed bread, *mantou*.

<sup>8</sup> A pastry made of glutinous millet.

<sup>9</sup> The following literal translation of the various officers' Manchu designations is used: *amsun-i taigiyan* 'eunuch in charge of the sacrificial food'; *amsun-i urse (niyalma)* 'men in charge of the sacrificial food'; *amsun-i janggin* 'officer in charge of the sacrificial food'; *da taigiyan* 'head eunuch'; *hiyan-i da* 'person responsible for the incense'; *hiyan-i hehesi* 'women in charge of the incense'.

<sup>10</sup> In Manchu *tenggeri*, i.e. the Chinese *sanxian*.

<sup>11</sup> In Manchu *fifan*, i.e. the Chinese *pipa*.

the gods]. During the sacrifice he pours the offered wine into the empty cup. Then he adds some new wine from the bottle of sweet wine, pouring it into two glasses and offers them [to the gods]. During the offering the person responsible for the sacrificial food recites the prayers.

After making the offering six times, the shaman returns the glass with the saucer to the person responsible for the incense, bows once, gets up and joins his hands in prayer. The sound of the three-stringed lutes, of the four-stringed lutes and of the clappers stops at the same time. The person responsible for the incense and the women in charge of the incense put the two cups of wine and the sacrificial table back on the small low table, in front of which the shaman bows.

The person responsible for the incense hands the shaman the magic sword (*halmari*). The shaman takes the sword and as he advances, the men in charge of the sacrificial food play the three-stringed lutes, the four-stringed lutes, the clappers and clap their hands. The shaman bows once and gets up, while the men in charge of the sacrificial food recite the prayers. The shaman performs some magic rites three times with the sword and sings prayers. During the rites with the sword, the men in charge of the sacrificial food also recite the prayers. After having performed the rites nine times in this way, and after having recited the prayers three times, the shaman kneels down, bows once, gets up and performs the rites three more times. Then he gives the sword back to the person responsible for the incense. The men who have played the three-stringed lutes, the four-stringed lutes and the clappers get up and retire on both sides.

If the Emperor carries out the ceremonies himself, then the person responsible for the incense moves the little low table—in front of which the shaman bows—to the north side. The Emperor takes the shamanic hat, and—in the morning—presents himself to the gods, standing in the centre and looking upwards. The shaman kneels down as before. The Emperor kneels down and, after the shaman has turned towards him, the Emperor performs the rites once. Then he gets up and withdraws. The shaman bows, gets up and joins his hands in prayer.

When the rites are carried out in the presence of the Empress, then the Emperor goes in front and the Empress behind. The official in charge of the sacrificial food and all the males in charge of the sacrificial food are escorted outside, and only the women in charge of the sacrificial food and the eunuchs remain.

On the days when the Emperor and Empress do not carry out the rites in person, the shaman bows and after this the person responsible for the incense takes away the two glasses of wine placed in front of Buddha and Bodhi-

sattva. He then closes the door of the small Buddha shrine, rolls up the image of Bodhisattva and puts it into the receptacle of yellow-coloured wood.

The eunuchs in charge of the sacrificial food reverently lift up the small Buddha shrine and carry it out the door, along with two incense burners. [The shrine] is placed at the western end of the Kun-ning-gung, in a large pavilion, [where] the incense-burners are also placed.

The table of the little shrine is moved back, the curtain is moved slightly to the south, and the image of Guwan Mafa is moved to the centre. All the small cups with the wine and the incense-burners are placed in the centre. The bottle containing the wine is covered with a clean cloth. The players of the three-stringed lutes, the four-stringed lutes and clappers come forward and sit where they were before. The women in charge of the incense fold a carpet three times and place it near the oven-bed. The person responsible for the incense hands the shaman a glass with a saucer. The eunuchs in charge of the sacrificial food lift up a pig, carry it through the door and place it near the oven-bed, with its head turned towards the west.

A Manchu in charge of the sacrificial food kneels on one knee and holds the pig down.

While the officer in charge of the sacrificial food, the men in charge of the sacrificial food, the head-eunuch and the eunuchs play the three-stringed lutes, the four-stringed lutes and the clappers, and clap their hands, the shaman kneels down on the red carpet folded in three in front of the oven-bed, facing southwest, and holds up a glass with a saucer. While he offers it once, the men in charge of the sacrificial food recite the usual prayers. After the offering, the shaman prays, and pours the wine from two glasses into one glass. The Manchu in charge of the sacrificial food holds open one of the pig's ears and the shaman pours a liquid<sup>12</sup> into the pig's ear. Then he returns the glass with the saucer to the person responsible for the incense and bows once.

The three-stringed lutes, the four-stringed lutes and the clappers are put down for a while.

After the Manchu in charge of the sacrificial food has taken hold of the pigs by their tails and has turned their heads to face east, the eunuchs in charge of the sacrificial food come forward, lift up the pigs and stand them up on the zinc-plated table. The person responsible for the incense offers the glass with

---

<sup>12</sup> This liquid, water or wine, is called *jungšun*: if the pig's ear twitches the sacrifice is accepted by the divinities.

the saucer to the shaman. The shaman takes the glass with the saucer and then they bring in the rest of the pigs, and proceed as during the previous sacrifice: the three-stringed lutes, the four-stringed lutes and the clappers are played and the prayers are recited, while [the shaman] pours the liquid [into the pigs' ears]. Then he bows once, gets up and withdraws. At the end of the playing of the three-stringed lutes, the four-stringed lutes and the clappers everyone gets up and withdraws. The heads of the two pigs on the large zinc-plated table are turned towards the west and they are stood up. Then they kill [the pigs]. Two women in charge of the sacrificial food, near the table, lift up two silvery containers and collect the blood. The women in charge of the incense roll up the carpet, pick up a long red-lacquered table and place it in front of the oven-bed. Then they place on the high table the containers with the pigs' blood and take away the cakes, wine and fruit. When the pigs are dead, the men in charge of the sacrificial food place the pigs to the right of the table, upright, with their heads facing south. After the hairs are cleaned off, [the pigs] are cooked in the large cooking-pots. The heads, paws and tails are not cooked [together]. They are cooked in a large cooking-pot only after the hairs are cleaned off by scorching them over the fire. The intestines are placed in a zinc-plated container, are carried outside, and cleaned in another building. They are then placed, together with the blood, on the ground. A Manchu in charge of the sacrificial food comes forward, kneels down on one knee in front of the large table, mixes the intestines with the blood and puts them to boil in a large cooking-pot. The eunuchs in charge of the sacrificial food put the hairs in the appropriate container, and bring the two high, zinc-plated tables and thick Korean greaseproof paper.

After having put the bile and paws on small plates of red-lacquered wood, they put them down on the northern side of a large table placed on the oven-bed. When the meat is cooked, the sacrificial meat is cut into strips on a plate; they add a pair of chopsticks and [everything] is placed in the centre of the large, low table. The meat of the two pigs, [that is] the flesh of the front paws and thighs, is placed at the four corners [of the table], the breast is placed at the front. The pigs' heads are placed on top, and the spleen and all the fat is placed on the snout. It is all put onto a large, low table facing the gods.

The person responsible for the incense lights the incense. After the women in charge of the incense have laid out the red carpet decorated with yellow flowers, one of those in charge of the incense lifts up a glass of sweet wine, and the person in charge of the incense lifts up an empty glass. Both come forward and stop. Then those in charge of the incense hand over the glasses



with the saucers to the shaman. The shaman comes forward, kneels down and offers the sacrifice of wine [to the gods] three times.

During this sacrifice—that is, while the wine is being poured, while the eunuchs in charge of the sacrificial food play the three-stringed lutes and the four-stringed lutes, while the men in charge of the sacrificial food play the clappers, and the Manchu in charge of the sacrificial food are clapping their hands—the prayers are recited three times as before.

After having performed the rite of offering three times, [the shaman] gives the glass with the saucer back to the person responsible for the incense, bows once, gets up and joins his hands in prayer.

When the Emperor and Empress offer the sacrifice in person, the procedure is as before.

After they have bowed before the meat, the meat offered [to the gods] is taken back without taking it out the door; it is placed on plates which are put in a row at the front of the long table. Then the Emperor and Empress, or the princes and high dignitaries, are allowed to eat the meat.

On days when the Emperor does not eat the meat, the high dignitaries and Imperial bodyguards are invited in groups, and they eat it. After the feast, the eunuchs in charge of the sacrificial food take out the skin and bones and bring them back into the kitchen. The official in charge of the sacrificial food takes the bones, bile and paws and carries them to a clean place, burns them and throws [the ashes] into a river. [. . .]

When the sacrifice to the gods takes place in the evening, first a black silk curtain edged in red satin is hung on a black-painted frame.

Seven large and small bells are hung with [strips of?] yellow leather to the west of the frame beam at the far end of a birch pole. [The image of the] god Murigan is hung to the right of the frame, the images of the divinities are attached to the centre of the curtain, while the Mongolian divinities are placed to the left on chairs painted black. All of this is hung above the northern oven-bed, facing south. Five incense-burners are placed on the table, five glasses with sweet wine, nine plates with seasonal fruit and nine plates with ten *fešen efen* cakes. One plate is put under the western side of the table. A bottle of sweet wine is put under the oven-bed.

Before the pigs are brought in, two incense-burners for Buddha and Bodhisatva are taken outside and placed in the large pavilion on the western side. In the meantime, the eunuchs in charge of the sacrificial food bring some greaseproof paper and some tables. The sacrifice takes place in the same way as the morning

sacrifice. At the right moment, the pigs are brought in and placed in the usual position. The person responsible for the incense lights the incense. After the performance of the shaman, the women in charge of the incense place a black-lacquered stool in front of the divinities. A eunuch places a drum (*tungken*) near the stool. The shaman wears a multi-coloured skirt (*alha hūsihan*), ties the bells (*siša*) around his waist, takes the hand-drum (*untun*) and the drumsticks and stands in front of the gods. Two eunuchs in charge of the sacrificial food come forward and remain standing, facing westward. A eunuch beats the drum, another eunuch plays the clappers. The shaman sits on the stool, facing the divinities, and beats the hand-drum. While he thus invites the divinities, a eunuch beats the drum with one hand in time to the sound of the hand-drum. Then the shaman gets up, takes one step backwards, and gives a performance, playing the bells attached to his waist. A eunuch hits the drum three times with both hands. While the shaman goes forward playing the bells, the eunuch hits [his] drum five times in time to the [shaman's] hand-drum. Then the shaman stops and while he prays, singing, the drum is hit five times and the clappers are played three times. [The shaman] withdraws for the second time, turns southward, and while he gives a performance playing the bells, the drum is beaten seven times. Then when the shaman stops and prays singing, the drum is hit five times as usual, and the clappers are played three times. While he carries out a third performance, the drum is beaten ten times. Then the shaman gets up and prays, singing, for the third time, while the drum is hit four times. At the end, the two drumsticks are crossed, and the clappers are played three times. At the end of the third prayer and after having finished beating the drum four times, the shaman withdraws. He gives the drum and drumsticks back to the women in charge of the incense and takes off the skirt and the bells.

The various prayers recited during the above-mentioned ceremonies are based on one basic text which remains unaltered, while the invocations directed to the different divinities change from case to case.<sup>13</sup>

This basic text, found also in the prayers of many other Manchu clans, reads:

---

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed discussion see Stary 1980; the verse-technique of these prayers is discussed in Stary 1985 (especially on pages 200–201).



Fig 1. The shrine in the Kun-ning-gung Palace (f. 33a).

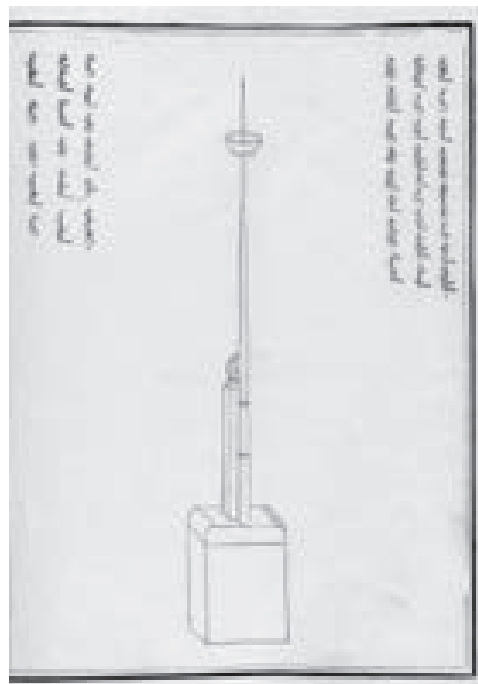


Fig 2. Shamanic pole erected in front of the palace (f. 33b).

From the blockprint *Hesei tokto buha Manjusai wecere metere kooli bithe*, kept in the Manuscript Department of the Saint Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, call-number C 70xyl, fascicle 6.

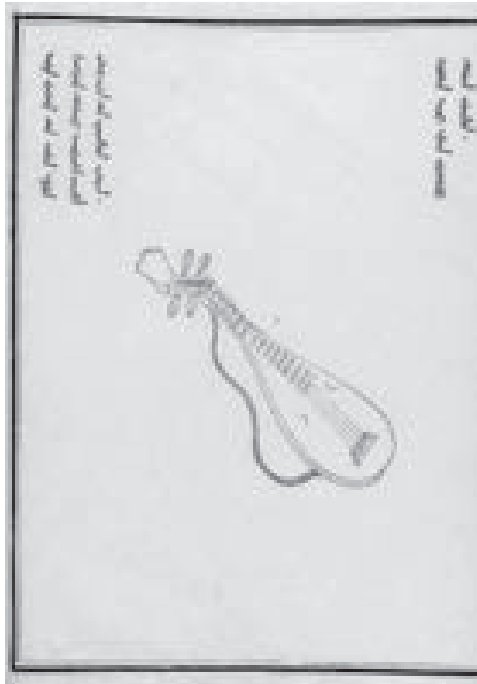


Fig 3. One of the musical instruments used during shamanic sessions (f. 39a).

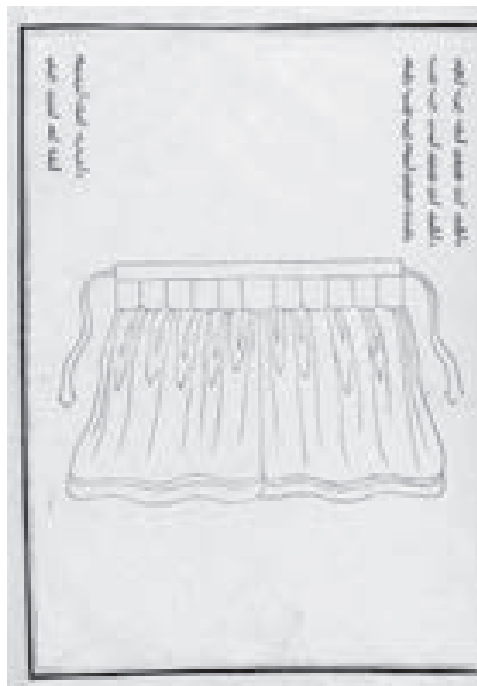


Fig 4. The apron of a shaman (f. 43a).

From the blockprint *Hesei toktobuha Manjusai wecere metere kooli bithe*, kept in the Manuscript Department of the Saint Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, call-number C 70xyl, fascicle 6.

*tere aniyangga osokon beye  
tere aniyangga osokon beye-i  
julefun gingnembi.  
uju de ukufi.  
meiren de fehufi.  
juleri dalime.  
amala alime.  
urgun sain-i acabu.  
uju-i funiyehe šarambu.  
angga-i weihe sorombu.  
aniya ambula.  
se labdu.  
jalgan golmin.  
fulehe šumin.  
enduri eršeme.  
weceku wehiyeme.  
aniya se be labdu bahabuki.*

The humble person [born] in a certain year,  
on behalf of a humble person [born] in a certain year,<sup>14</sup>  
offers a sacrifice.

After gathering around [his] head,  
after covering [his] shoulders,  
protecting [him] in front,  
supporting [him] from behind,  
accord [him] joy and benevolence!  
May the hair on [his] head become white,  
may the teeth in [his] mouth become yellow!  
Many years,  
long life,  
old age,  
deep roots,  
may [You] gods procure [for him],

---

<sup>14</sup> An addition in small letters explains that the names of those who are officiating the sacrifice and their year of birth should be mentioned here: *wei jalin wececi. wei banjaha da aniya be hūlambi.*

may [You] deities present [him],  
 may [You] give [him] many years!

A very brief prayer is recited when the liquid (*jungšun*) is poured into the pig's ear. After having invoked some divinities and pronounced the name of the person celebrating the rite, they add:

*julefun gingnere*  
*šusu be urgun sain-i alime gaiki.*

offering on behalf of . . .  
 may [You] accept joyfully and  
 benevolently this meal!<sup>15</sup>

Only in two cases are different prayers recited, ones characterized by an introduction formula, the latter part of which is used as a refrain after every single verse. This particular kind of prayer is called *tuibumbi*, that is 'to recite a prayer with the lights extinguished'.<sup>16</sup> The first prayer, accompanied by the sound of bells, reads:

*Je.*  
*irehu je narhūn.*  
*uce fa be dalifi solimbi narhūn.*  
*mucen-i sukdun. jun-i tuwa be gidafi solimbi narhūn.*  
*soluha be dahame. soorin de wasiki narhūn.*  
*tuibuhe be dahame tusergen de wasiki narhūn.*  
*nadan daihūn nanggišame wasiki narhūn.*  
*jorgon junggi jorime wasiki narhūn.*  
*oron honggon de oksofi ebuki narhūn.*  
*siren honggon de sišafi ebuki narhūn.*  
*Je!*  
*Irehuje narhūn!*

---

<sup>15</sup> In the Chinese version, ch. 1, p. 21b. (Last reprint: *Liaohai congshu*. Shenyang. 1985. Vol. V.) the Manchu word *šusu* is translated as *can*, i.e. 'meal, food': see footnote 17.

<sup>16</sup> On this prayer, see Giovanni Stary's article in the present volume of *Shaman*.



After having closed doors and windows, we are inviting [You], *narhūn!*  
After having removed the pots' steam and the oven's fire, we are inviting  
[You], *narhūn!*  
Having been invited, come down to the throne, *narhūn!*  
Having been prayed to in the darkness, come down to the table, *narhūn!*  
Nadan Daihūn, being enticed, come down, *narhūn!*  
Jorgon Junggi, revealing [yourself], come down, *narhūn!*  
Escorted by magic bells, get down, *narhūn!*  
Called by magical bells,<sup>17</sup> get down, *narhūn!*

The second prayer recites:

*je.*  
*irehu je gu-i šongkon.*  
*tusergen dere be tukiyeŋi solimbi gu-i šongkon.*  
*šufangga šusu be sindaŋi solimbi gu-i šongkon.*  
*soliha be dahame soorin de wasiki gu-i šongkon.*  
*tuibuhe be dahame. tusergen de wasiki gu-i šongkon.*  
*asha dethe be acinggiyame wasiki gu-i šongkon.*  
*siren siša de sišame wasiki gu-i šongkon.*  
*Je!*  
*Irehu je gu-i šongkon!*

After having offered tables, we are inviting You, *gu-i šongkon!*  
After having prepared pure meal [or millet?],<sup>18</sup> we are inviting [You],  
*gu-i šongkon!*  
Having been invited, come down to the throne, *gu-i šongkon!*  
Having been prayed to in the darkness, come down to the table,  
*gu-i šongkon!*  
Moving wings and pinions, come down, *gu-i šongkon!*  
Called by magical bells, come down, *gu-i šongkon!*

---

<sup>17</sup> Both *oron honggon* and *siren honggon* are translated as *shenling* ('magic bells') in the Chinese version, ch. 1. p. 22a.

<sup>18</sup> In the Chinese version *šusu* is translated now with *zi*, i.e. '[sacrificial] millet'. The word *šufangga* meaning 'pure' is found in the Chinese version as *jie* (ch. 1. p. 22a).

These were thus some of the main rites celebrated in the Kun-ning-gung, as they have been codified in the *Manchu Imperial Ritual*. There is no trace in our source of the rites referred to by Arlington (1935: 48–49):

These shamanic rites were very secret; they took place in the early hours of the morning between 3 and 4 a.m., and none but Manchus were allowed to take part in them. They were held on the birthdays of Emperors or Empresses, as also on the 1st of the 1st Moon. The ceremony was opened by the “Guardian of the Nine Gates” giving the signal for a man to crack a long whip three times, when the huge drum in front of the T’ai Ho Tien was beaten three times, the music struck up, and the Emperor ascended his throne. Troops of men, from sixteen to thirty-two in number, arranged in two rows, then gave a kind of mimic performance. One such pantomime, called *Mi-hu-ma-hu*, referred to a legend, that Nurhachu, the real founder of the Manchu dynasty (1559–1626), had in his youth destroyed tigers and bears that devoured children. Killing the tigers was called *mi-hu* and killing the bears *ma-hu*. The performers, half of them dressed in black sheep-skins and half in bear-skins, were drawn up in two lines facing each other; each man wore a mask of the animal he was to represent, and a high hat with feathers. The leader of the troupe who took the part of Nurhachu, in a high helmet and fantastic costume, rode on a horse between the lines, firing arrows at the opposing “animals.” One of these, supposed to be hit, then fell down, and the others ran off, as if terror-stricken.

Another display was that of *Yang Shang Shu* (Lamb up a Tree). This, too, originated with a story about Nurhachu who is said to have hung a lamb on a tree and waited for a tiger to come, when he shot him with an arrow thus saving the lamb. A third, curious play was that called *Kua Po Chi* (Scraping the Winnowing Fan), also taken from the life of Nurhachu who once met a tiger in a farmyard and, having no weapon to hand, picked up a winnowing-fan, scraped it with a stick and thus scared the beast away. Still another ceremony was that of riding on hobby-horses which were supposed to represent the Eight Banner Corps. The riders each wore a different costume and a different-coloured flag stuck at the back of their necks, with stilts on their feet covered with small bells which set up a jingling, as they pranced about on their hobby-

horses and imitated the neighing of their steeds. During these ceremonies the band played martial airs, and at the end of each play, the performers made obeisance to the Emperor or Empress.

Finally, some further information on the bureaucratic structure of the shamanic service in the Kun-ning-gung is to be found in Brunnert and Hagelstrom (1912: 210).<sup>19</sup>

. . . The staff of shamanic priestesses of the Court numbers twelve; they are usually the wives of members of the Imperial Bodyguards. For their services they receive nothing but the dresses used and they are called, officially, Ssy Chu, Readers of Prayers. Also, there are: 1. 36 Ssu Tsu Fu Jên, shamanic Sub-priestesses or Supervisors of Sacrificial Attributes, 2. 37 Ssu Tui Fu Jên, Supervisors of Powdering of Bark, and 3. 19 Ssu Hsiang Fu Jên, Supervisors of the Preparation of Incense (for shamanic services); these are wives of the Palace soldiers and receive from one half a tael to two taels and a bag of rice per month from the Court.

In 1747 a mass-book for the shamanic service was published (in the Manchu language) called “Hosei T’okt’opuha Manchu-sai Vechere Medere Cooli Pitho.

A new translation of this work, i.e. our *Hesei toktobuba Manjusai wecere metere kooli bithe*, which would take account of A. V. Grebenshchikov’s commentary, would be a great step toward a better understanding of Manchu shamanism in general, and of “court shamanism” in particular.

## References

- Arlington L. C. and William Lewisohn [1935] 1987. *In Search of Old Peking*. Peking: Henri Vetch. Reprint, Hong Kong, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brunnert, H. S. and V. V. Hagelstrom [1912] 1971. *Present Day Political Organization in China*. Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh. Reprint, Taipei: Ch’eng Wen Publishing Company.
- De Harlez, Charles 1887. *La religion nationale des Tartares orientaux. Mandchous et Mongols, comparée à la religion des anciens Chinois*. Bruxelles:

---

<sup>19</sup> See also the entry *sa-man t’ai-t’ai* (Shamaness) in Hucker (1985: 395, note 4827).

- Académie Royale de Belgique.
- Du Jiaji 1990. "Cong Qingdai de gong zhong jisi ho tangzi jisi kan saman jiao." *Manzu yanjiu* 1: 45–49.
- Fu Yuguang 1988. "Qing gong tangzi jisi biankao." *Shehui kexue zhanxian* 4: 204–210, 211.
- Hucker, Charles O. 1985. *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Inoue Ichii 1950. "Shinchō kyūtei shamankyō shiden ni tsuite." In *Asiatic Studies in Honour of Tōru Haneda on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday, May 15, MCMXLII*. Kyōto: Tōyōshi Kenkyūkai.
- Ishibashi, Ushio 1934. *Peipin no shamankyō ni tsuite*. Tōkyō.
- Jiang Xiangshun 1992. "Qing gong saman jisi zhong xisheng jipin he gewu de gongxian." *Manzu yanjiu* 3: 35–43.
- Langlès, Louis 1804a. "Recueil des usages et cérémonies établis pour les offrandes et les sacrifices des Mantchoux." *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque du Roi . . . VII* (An. 12, pt. 1). Paris. 241–308.
- . 1804b. *Rituel des Tartars-Mantchoux, rédigé par l'ordre de l'Empereur Kienlong . . .* Paris: L'imprimerie de la republique.
- Pan, Tatiana Aleksandrovna 1991. "Arkhivnye materialy A. V. Grebenshchikova po shamanstvu man'chzhurov." In *XXII nauchnaia konferentsiia "Obshchestvo i gosudarstvo v Kitae."* *Tezisy dokladov*. Chast' 3. Moskva: Nauka.
- Sary, Giovanni 1980. "Mandschurische Schamanengebete." *Zentralasiatische Studien* 14(2): 7–28.
- . 1985. "Fundamental Principles of Manchu Poetry." In Ch'en Chieh-hsien (ed.) *Proceedings of the International Conference on China Border Area Studies*. Taipei: Guo li zheng zhi da xue.
- Werner E. T. C. 1961. *A Dictionary of Chinese Mythology*. New York: The Julian Press.

PANG TATIANA ALEKSANDROVNA earned a Ph.D. in history, and is currently Head of the Department of the Far East, Saint Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences. Her main interests include the history, culture, religion and literature of the Manchu and Sibe peoples, the history of Manchu Studies, and missionary work in Manchu China. She teaches a course entitled Introduction to Manchu Studies at the Saint Petersburg State University.

## “Praying in the Darkness”: New Texts for a Little-Known Manchu Shamanic Rite

GIOVANNI STARY

VENICE

*Tuibumbi is a technical term for special prayers, which are recited at the end of Manchu shamanic rites, when the lanterns have already been extinguished. It is, therefore, possible to paraphrase it as “praying in the darkness.” The origin of this ceremony is still unknown, though some explanation can be found for it in Manchu folk tales. These prayers are generally addressed to female divinities, and some examples are already known from the Manchu dynasty’s “Imperial Shamanic Ritual” Manjusai wecere metere kooli bihe. In this paper, the author gives a translation and a critical analysis of some newly discovered tuibumbi-prayers, collected mostly in 1981 in Jilin province, Manchuria.*

“Praying in the darkness”—this is how the Manchu verb *tuibumbi* is translated based on the explanation given of it in the Manchu dictionaries: *yamji wecere wajifi dengjan mukiyebufi. dasame emu jergi baire be tuibumbi sembi*—“to pray again when, in the evening the sacrifices have come to an end and the lanterns have been extinguished, this is called ‘tuibumbi’.”<sup>1</sup>

These special prayers are usually dedicated to the female divinities of the Manchu pantheon, but—as we shall see—there is no lack of direct invocation to other spirits and connections with particular constellations.

---

<sup>1</sup> For the etymology see Jurchen *t’ui-pèn* ‘bitten’ (Grube 1896: 23, Nr. 441, and 101); also *tuibun*—same meaning (Jin Qicong 1984: 21 and 89). See also *ôren tuibumbi* ‘Kleid und Hut des Toten am Grabe verbrennen’ (Hauer 1952–55: 744). Note that the translation ‘to pray with the lanterns carried on the back’ (literally from the Chinese correspondent *beideng ji*) is to be considered wrong. See also the definition given in *Manzu dacidian* 1990: 506–507.



Fig 1. *Dengjan mukiyebufi tuibire durun* “Praying in the darknes after having extinguished the lanterns” (after Pozzi 1992: 146)

The sources available regarding these rites are few and are limited to the imperial Aisin Gioro clan; only recently have we seen the addition of documentation relative to the Šušu Gioro clan.<sup>2</sup>

Great scientific value is thus attributed to a recent collection of Manchu shamanic prayers published in 1992 and containing, along with a

---

<sup>2</sup> For the Aisin Gioro clan see the “Imperial Shamanic Ritual” (bibliographical references and translation of the most significant prayers in Tatiana A. Pang’s article in the present volume of *Shaman*). For the Šušu Gioro clan see Pozzi 1992. Finally, see Mitamura 1958: 536–550.



thorough analysis of the present situation of Manchu shamanism complete with magnificent photographic documentation, also 57 prayers and invocations in the original language.<sup>3</sup> The majority of these were collected in 1981 in the villages of the province of Jilin, in Manchuria. The prayers, of various sources, are like the *tuibumbi* some of them are very fragmentary and characterized by “local” terms which makes them very difficult to understand. The Chinese translation which accompanies all the prayers is of little help because it is almost always limited to a very concise and approximate paraphrase. Given these premises, even our translation is sometimes to be considered more interpretative than literal.

The text of the first prayer, probably recited at the start of the rite, has been provided by the shaman Gao Qishan belonging to the Guwalgiya (“Gao”) clan of the White Bordered Manchu Banner, at Wulajie Manzuxiang Gao tuncun, district of Yongji, province of Jilin, in July 1981. As in the case of many *tuibumbi* prayers (including those already known of the imperial clan), it is characterized by a constant refrain at the end of every verse:

*erin akū dobori naluhū naluhū.*  
*tucike šun-i tucin tuhe erin oho naluhū naluhū.*  
*eldengge šun-i omilehe [erin?] oho naluhū naluhū.*  
*minggan da usiha oiloho erin oho naluhū naluhū.*  
*indahūn feyede gayaha tomoho erin oho naluhū naluhū.*

Night without time – naluhū naluhū.

It is the hour in which the risen sun starts to set – naluhū naluhū.

[It is the hour in which] the shining sun hides – naluhū naluhū.

It is the hour in which a thousand stars appear – naluhū naluhū.

It is the hour in which the dog, curled up in [its] den, sleeps  
 – naluhū naluhū.<sup>4</sup>

A variant of this opening of the sacrifice, spoken by the same shaman, stands out first of all for its different refrain:

---

<sup>3</sup> See Li Shutian, Shi Guangwei and Liu Housheng 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Linguistic remarks: *tuhe* = *tukehe* (Li Shutian et al. 1992: 138); see also *tucintuha* in the last prayer. *Omilehe* (not attested in dictionaries) is translated in Chinese with *yinni* ‘to hide oneself’; *gayaha* = *hayaha*.

*an tucike šun tukehe erin oho hu jan o. hu jan o.*  
*elden šun-i omilehe erin oho. hu jan o. hu jan o.*  
*minggan da usiha mitalaha erin oho. hu jan o. hu jan o.*  
*indahūn feyede hayaha tomoho erin oho. hu jan o. hu jan o.*

It is the hour in which the sun, risen as usual, sets – hu jan o. hu jan o.  
 It is the hour in which the shining sun hides – hu jan o. hu jan o.  
 It is the hour in which a thousand stars appear – hu jan o. hu jan o.  
 It is the hour in which the dog, curled up in [its] den, sleeps – hu jan o.  
 hu jan o.<sup>5</sup>

The following text is an invocation addressed to various divinities, whose names, although they are distorted, can be identified with certain divinities also invoked in the “Imperial Shamanic Ritual” (as follows and indicated in brackets):

*niyeze-i enduri.*  
*ecu-i ayala*  
*muliyān-i munahū*  
*nadan-i naihū*  
*naluhū enduri seme*  
*katun-i monggolo*  
*baibu janyan*  
*geren-i enduri*  
*gebu be nike seki.*<sup>6</sup>

Niyeze-i enduri [Niyansi enduri]!  
 Ecu-i ayala [Ancun Ayara]!  
 Muliyān-i Munahū [Muri Muriha ?]!  
 Nadan-i Naihū [Nadan Weihuri ?]!<sup>7</sup>  
 Naluhū enduri [?]  
 Katun-i Monggolo [Katun Noyan]!<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Remarks: *mitalaha* (*miltanaha* in the last prayer) is not attested in the dictionaries, but see *mīlarambi* ‘sich entfalten’ (Hauer 1952–55: 656).

<sup>6</sup> “Nike seki” suggests an association with *nikembi* ‘to lean [on],’ ‘to depend on’ and ‘to rely on’.

<sup>7</sup> Lit. ‘Seven Stars’ i.e. the Big Dipper, Ursa Major.

<sup>8</sup> In the Manchu pantheon there are two “Mongolian divinities” (*monggo weceku*).

Baibu Janyan [Baiman Janggin ?]!  
We trust in the repute  
of all [these] divinities.

The following prayer appears to be the most important one in the rite and consists of an invitation to the gods to descend to the dark and vapourless hall. The informant was the shaman Guan Borong of the Guwalgiya clan, belonging to the Red Bordered Manchu Banner, resident in Wulajie Manzuxiang Han cuntun, Yongji district, Province of Jilin. The transcription dates back to the month of July 1981. Published next to it is a variant recited in the Guwalgiya clan of the previously mentioned village of Wulajie Manzuxiang Gao cuntun, but transcribed a hundred years earlier, in 1892.

[1981]

*uce fa be unkuḟi*<sup>9</sup>.  
*hūlan šanggiyan gukeḟi*<sup>10</sup>.  
*jun de yaha gidafi*.  
*niyalma jilgan gidafi*.  
*dai yaha gidafi*.  
*aisin koko meifen bukdaḟi*.  
*indahūn jilgan mikeḟi*<sup>11</sup>  
*ihan morin erin kai*.  
*deyere gasha fekume erin kai*.  
*hayaha weihun erin kai*<sup>12</sup>  
*feksime gurgu dekhe*<sup>13</sup> *erin kai*.  
*tumen usiha tucike erin kai*.  
*minggan usiha mitaha*<sup>14</sup> *erin kai*.

---

<sup>9</sup> *ungkuḟi* can be a dialectal variant of *ungkeḟi* ‘to turn over’; in Manchu houses the windows were in fact “drop windows.” (See also *ungkuleḟi* in the last prayer).

<sup>10</sup> *gukeḟi* is not attested in the dictionaries; see the corresponding *mukiyefi* ‘to extinguish’ in the second variant.

<sup>11</sup> *mikeḟi* is not attested in the dictionaries; see the corresponding *mimifi* ‘to close’ in the second variant.

<sup>12</sup> This verse is untranslatable with traditional dictionaries, where *weihun* ‘alive’; we thus translate according to the Chinese paraphrase *mangshe panrao*.

<sup>13</sup> *dekhe* = *tehe*, second variant?

<sup>14</sup> See note 5.

ilan usiha ilaha erin kai.  
 nadan usiha nariha<sup>15</sup> erin kai.  
 ejeku<sup>16</sup> usiha eldeke erin kai.  
 nadan narhūn hiyangci enduri be soliki.  
 ahūn niyan ci enduri be soliki.  
 hūlara beise enduri be soliki.  
 nekeliyen sefu enduri be soliki.  
 daimin gasha enduri be soliki.  
 hasuri<sup>17</sup> hala guwaligiya hala elende<sup>18</sup>  
 aha angga seme aljafi.  
 heheri seme gisurefi.  
 amba amsun arafi.  
 hatan nure dobofi.  
 fahūn de falifi.  
 ufuhu de uliki.<sup>19</sup>  
 enduri kesi de.  
 saman seme wajifi.  
 siranduhai taciki.  
 enduri foriha gisun ejeki.  
 yaruha gisun tebuki.  
 enduri fafun dahafi.

Doors and windows are closed.  
 The smoke of the chimney is spent.  
 The coal in the stove has been extinguished.

---

<sup>15</sup> *nariha* is not attested in the dictionaries; the Chinese text translates *shanshuo* ‘to shine’. In the variant the term *nicuśaha* means ‘to blink’.

<sup>16</sup> *ejeku* ‘secretary’, *usiha* corresponds in the variant to *eriku usiha* ‘comet’.

<sup>17</sup> *hasuri* (also *hasure*) *hala*, attested in many prayers (see as well as Mitamura 1958 and Pozzi 1992, also Stary 1983: 119–124) remains up until now an enigmatic term. The only attempt to interpret it was made by Xue Hong (in the introduction to the *Manzu saman* . . ., see Li Shutian et al. 1992: 6–7), translating it with *mu shizu de xingshi* (Family name of the mother’s clan). However, the term has nothing to do with the Hasuri clan, as stated by Meyer (1989: 232, note 27).

<sup>18</sup> *elende* (*elun* in other texts: see Pozzi 1992), can be linked to *ele* ‘all’. An association with *elen* ‘sufficiency’ does not make sense.

<sup>19</sup> According to the Chinese paraphrase these two verses which are difficult to understand mean *pigan lidan*, that is ‘to open the heart to someone’.

The voice of men is silenced.  
The coal has been extinguished.  
The golden hens have turned their necks.  
The voice of the dogs has quieted.  
It is the hour of the bulls and horses.  
It is the hour in which the birds jump [on the trees]  
[and] the snakes coil up.  
It is the hour in which the galloping animals lie down.  
It is the hour in which 10,000 stars come up.  
It is the hour in which 1,000 stars appear.  
It is the hour in which 3 stars come out.  
It is the hour in which 7 stars sparkle.  
It is the hour in which the comets shine.  
We invite the god Nadan Narhūn Hiyangci.  
We invite the god Ahūn Niyān-ci.  
We invite the god Hūlara Beise.  
We invite the god Nekeliyen Sefu.  
We invite the god Daimin gasha.  
The maternal clan,<sup>20</sup> all the Guwalgiya clan,  
we slaves have voiced our promise,  
we have said it solemnly.  
We have prepared much sacrificial food,  
we have provided a strong brandy.  
We have joined together with [our] liver,  
we have offered ourselves with [our] lungs<sup>21</sup>  
for the grace of the gods.  
The shaman has reached the end,  
one after the other we shall begin [the rites].  
We shall note the words indicated by the gods,  
we shall preserve the words which will guide us,  
we shall follow the laws of the gods.

[1892]

*uce fa be ungkefi.*

*hūlan šanggiyan mukiyefi.*

---

<sup>20</sup> See note 17.

<sup>21</sup> See note 19.

jun tuwa yaha gidafi.  
 niyalma jilgan gidafi.  
 aisin koko meifen bukdafi.  
 indahūn jilgan mimifi.  
 ihan morin bederehe erin kai.  
 deyere gasha hayaha erin kai.  
 feksire gurgu tehe erin kai.  
 tumen usiha tucike erin kai.  
 minggan usiha mitaha erin kai.  
 ilan usiha ilaha erin kai.  
 nadan usiha nicuśaha erin kai.  
 eriku usiha eldehe erin kai.  
 nadan narhūn hiyancu enduri be soliki.  
 ahūn niyansi enduri be soliki.  
 hūlara beise enduri be soliki.  
 nekeliyan sefu enduri be soliki.  
 daimin-i gūnin enduri be soliki.  
 juwe soorin weceku be soliki.  
 hebe be acafi.  
 daimin gasha enduri be soliki.  
 hasuri hala guwalgiya hala elende.  
 aha angga seme aljafi.  
 heheri seme gisurefi.  
 amba amsun arafi.  
 hatan nure tebufi.  
 fahūn de falifi.  
 ufuhu de uliki.  
 enduri kesi de isifi.  
 sakda saman sakdafi.  
 ajige saman taciki.  
 enduri joriha gisun ejeki.  
 yaruka gisun  
 enduri fafun dahaki.



Doors and windows are closed.  
The smoke of the chimney is spent.  
The coal’s fire in the stove has been extinguished.  
The voice of men is silenced.  
The golden hens have turned their necks.  
The voice of the dogs has quieted.  
It is the hour in which bulls and horses return [to the stable].  
It is the hour in which the birds curl up.  
It is the hour in which the galloping animals lie down.  
It is the hour in which 10,000 stars come up.  
It is the hour in which 1,000 stars appear.  
It is the hour in which 3 stars come out.  
It is the hour in which 7 stars shine.  
It is the hour in which the comets shine.  
We invite the god Nadan Narhūn Hiyancu.  
We invite the god Ahūn Niyansi.  
We invite the god Hūlara Beise.  
We invite the god Nekeliyan Sefu.  
We invite the god Daimin-i Gūnin.  
We invite the divinities of the two thrones.  
After a meeting to consult [with each other].  
We invite the god Daimin gasha.  
The maternal clan, all the Guwalgiya clan,  
we slaves have voiced our promise,  
we have said it solemnly.  
We have prepared much sacrificial food,  
we have distilled a strong brandy.  
We have joined together with [our] liver,  
we have offered ourselves with [our] lungs  
to obtain the grace of the gods.  
The old shaman has grown [too] old,  
the young shaman will begin [the rites].  
We shall note the words indicated by the gods,  
we shall preserve the words which will guide us,  
we shall follow the laws of the gods.

The following text is an invitation to the gods to descend (*ebenju* = *ebunju*) from the heavens and to accept the sacrifice. It was recited in

July 1981 by the shaman Yan Zhenkuan, at Wulajiezhen, district of Yongji, province of Jilin. The text, characterized by the refrain *nara ula* which underlines the rhythmicity of it, is very difficult, and for this reason the Chinese editors have only provided a very concise paraphrase.

*ai dabe nara ula. erin de ebenju nara ula.*  
*erin eyen nara ula. erin de ebenju nara ula.*  
*he-i webe nara ula. heling de ebenju nara ula.*  
*esei webe nara ula. erin de ebenju nara ula.*  
*he-i webe nara ula. erin de ebenju nara ula.*  
*sain webe nara ula. erin de ebenju nara ula.*  
*ai ai be nara ula. ai ebenju nara ula.*  
*sain erin nara ula. sain ebenju nara ula.*  
*he se webe nara ula. erin de ebenju nara ula.*  
*he-i webe nara ula. he erin de ebenju nara ula.*  
*sain webe nara ula. sain ebenju nara ula.*  
*he-i webe nara ula. helingge ebenju nara ula.*  
*sain webe nara ula. sain ebenju nara ula.*  
*sain webe nara ula. jalingga ebenju nara ula.*  
*sain wasin nara ula. kesi sa ebenju nara ula.*

Given the impossibility of translating it literally, the text being based for the most part on a play on words and vocalics, the following is a translation of the Chinese paraphrase which will give an idea of the contents of the invocation:

We respectfully pray to the gods to descend from heaven,  
 to give to the good [people] the goodness they deserve,  
 to punish the wicked and to keep evil at bay.  
 We pray to the gods to grant us their benevolence,  
 so that our children and grandchildren may enjoy peace and tranquility.  
 We respectfully pray to the gods to descend from heaven.

The following prayer, this also being characterized in part by incomprehensible verses and an opening refrain, was recited in July 1981 by the shaman Xi Kuihai of the Xi clan, belonging to the Plain Blue Manchu Banner, in the village of Wulajie Manzuxiang Yafucun, district of Yongji, province of Jilin.

*nara akū huli akū*  
*fudeme sefu fudeli dei dei.*  
*eiten solin kucan nara akū huli akū.*  
*fe biya be fudefi, ice biya be alifi.*  
*inenggi ice de biya bolgonde.*  
*amba amsun be arafi doборе<sup>22</sup> de belhefi.*  
*sucungga derede jukteme dobofi.*  
*ayan hiyan be na de dobofi.*  
*juru hiyan be julergi de dobofi.*  
*hatan-i arki be hanci ba de dobofi.*  
*suwayan-i nure be soorin sade dobofi.*  
*soorin jalu dobofi.*  
*sain jalu faidafi.*  
*gingguleme gingnefi.*  
*ujuleme baimbi.*  
*gingneme tubihe sefu urhun amba urhusa.*  
*uyun be alifi.*  
*jukteme sain saliki yabure furgid sain saliki.*

Nara akū huli akū!

All the Sefu – fudeli dei dei

we welcome with reverence.<sup>23</sup>

We have said farewell to the old month, the new month has begun.

On the first day, in the light of the moon,

we have prepared much sacrificial food, we have prepared it by night.

We offer it [to you] sacrificing it on the main table.

We offer the incense<sup>24</sup> laid out on the floor,

we offer the incense<sup>25</sup> placed in front.

We offer a strong brandy in a place nearby,

we offer a yellow wine on [your] thrones.

We offer the thrones full [of offerings],

---

<sup>22</sup> *dobore = dobori.*

<sup>23</sup> Given the impossibility of translating these two verses literally, the translation of the Chinese paraphrase is given.

<sup>24</sup> *ayan hiyan* is a type of incense ‘zwei Pflanzen, deren Blätter zu Räucherwerk verarbeitet werden’ (Hauer 1952–55: 63).

<sup>25</sup> *juru hiyan* is a type of incense which it not mentioned in the dictionaries; the Chinese text translates it with *hanxian* ‘Chinese incense’.



Fig 2. “How to pray in the darkness” (from the “Genealogical Tables” of the Guwalgiya clan, published in *Liaobinta Manzu jiaji*. Shenyang 1991: 74)

we have prepared an abundance of good things.  
 With reverence we offer them to you,  
 with respect<sup>26</sup> we pray to you.  
 That the Sefu . . .  
 after accepting the sacrifice<sup>27</sup>  
 may appreciate the good things . . .<sup>28</sup>

The following prayer, coming from “a Manchu village of the Guwalgiya clan at Wulajie, Yongji district in Jilin,” is characterized by the phrase *soro de obofi* used, we think, as a refrain. Its literal translation means “already

<sup>26</sup> *ujuleme* = *ujeleme*.

<sup>27</sup> For *yun*, see Meyer 1989.

<sup>28</sup> Only the general meaning of these last three verses can be given.

washed with a jujube,” and this is how it is also freely translated in the Chinese paraphrase (*xianhong de shanzao yijing xijing* “washed by a red mountain-jujube”). The meaning, nonetheless, remains enigmatic.

*enduri be solifi. soro de obofi.*  
*nadan narhūn enduri.*  
*narhun hiyangci enduri be solifi. soro de obofi.*  
*ahūn niyanci enduri be solifi. soro de obofi.*  
*hūlara beise enduri be solifi. soro de obofi.*  
*nekeliyen sefu enduri be solifi. soro de obofi.*  
*daimin-i gūnin enduri be. soro de obofi.*  
*enduri be soro de obofi.*  
*juwe soorin weceku enduri be solifi. soro de obofi.*  
*daimin gasha enduri be solifi. soro de obofi.*  
*fe biya be fudefi.*  
*ice biya be alifi.*  
*sain inenggi sonjofi.*  
*saman seme tacifi.*  
*muduri aniya aha bifhe tuwame taciki.*  
*enduri eršeki daifu gala bargiyaki.*  
*iui huwang gala aliki.*  
*enduri kesi de isifi.*  
*hiyan fuwa be aliki.*

We have invited the gods – soro de obofi.  
We have invited the god Nadan Narhūn [– soro de obofi]  
[and] the god Narhūn Hiyangci – soro de obofi.  
We have invited the god Ahūn Niyanci – soro de obofi.  
We have invited the god Hūlara Beise – soro de obofi.  
We have invited the god Nekeliyen Sefu – soro de obofi.  
We have invited the god Dailin-i Gūnin – soro de obofi.  
[and other] gods – soro de obofi.  
We have invited the gods and the divinities of the two thrones – soro de obofi.  
We have invited the god Daimin Gasha – soro de obofi.  
We have said farewell to the old month,  
we have welcomed the new month.  
We have chosen an appropriate day.

The shaman has begun [the rites].

[I,] the slave [born] in the year of the dragon will begin [the rites] by reading the texts.

May the gods help us and protect us from the hand of the doctors,  
 may the hand of Lui Huwang<sup>29</sup> support us,  
 may the gods reach us with [their] benevolence!  
 They will receive incense and fire.

The following prayer is taken from a shaman manuscript of the Xu clan, dated, it seems, “the 3rd day of the 12th month of the 11th year of Tongzhi” (1st January, 1873), kept in the Institute of Art in Jilin (*Jilin sheng Yishu yanjiu suo*). Coming from the area of Wulajie, district of Yongji, it contains elements of the first, second and fourth prayers, differing from them, however, in its long opening refrain.

*narhū narhū. hohoro hohoro. tucike šun kai. tuheke erin kai.*  
*narhū narhū. hohoro hohoro. ilan-i usiha ilan eldehe erin kai.*  
*narhū narhū. hohoro hohoro. eriku usiha eldembuhe erin kai.*  
*narhū narhū. hohoro hohoro. minggan usiha miltanaha erin kai.*  
*narhū narhū. hohoro hohoro. feksire gurgu kai fekure erin kai.*  
*narhū narhū. hohoro hohoro. aisin koko mariha erin kai.*  
*narhū narhū. hohoro hohoro. indahūn ihan bethe suilaha erin kai.*  
*narhū narhū. hohoro hohoro. dengjan-i la be mukiyebuha erin kai.*  
*narhū narhū. hohoro hohoro. mukdeke šon kai. mukiyeye erin kai.*  
*narhū narhū. hohoro hohoro. nadan usiha nadan eldehe erin kai.*  
*narhū narhū. hohoro hohoro. tumen usiha tucituha erin kai.*  
*narhū narhū. hohoro hohoro. eiten usiha eldembuhe erin kai.*  
*narhū narhū. hohoro hohoro. deyere gasha kai. deduhe erin kai.*  
*narhū narhū. hohoro hohoro. menggun koko meifen mariha erin kai.*  
*narhū narhū. hohoro hohoro. uce fa be unpkulehe erin kai.*  
*narhū narhū. hohoro hohoro. mucen-i sukdun de samsiha erin kai.*  
*fe aniya be fudefi.*  
*ice aniya be alifi.*  
*niyengniyeri forgon de*  
*byan mene bolgonde*

---

<sup>29</sup> Yuhuang, the greatest divinity of Taoism.



*inenggi ice de sain inenggi be sonjoft.*

*amsun be arafi.*

*duleke aniya de tariha jeku be wekji ara be anafi.*

*ayan amsun belhefi.*

*suran be suitafi suwayan amsun belhefi.*

Narhū narhū, hohoro hohoro. – It is the hour in which the risen sun sets.

narhū narhū, hohoro hohoro. – It is the hour in which the 3 stars shine.

narhū narhū, hohoro hohoro. – It is the hour in which the comets shine.

narhū narhū, hohoro hohoro. – It is the hour in which 1,000 stars appear.

narhū narhū, hohoro hohoro. – It is the hour in which the galloping animals retire.

narhū narhū, hohoro hohoro. – It is the hour in which the golden rooster returns.

narhū narhū, hohoro hohoro. – It is the hour in which dogs and bulls have tired legs.

narhū narhū, hohoro hohoro. – It is the hour in which the branched candle-sticks are spent.

narhū narhū, hohoro hohoro. – It is the hour in which the risen sun expires.

narhū narhū, hohoro hohoro. – It is the hour in which the seven stars shine.

narhū narhū, hohoro hohoro. – It is the hour in which 10,000 stars rise.

narhū narhū, hohoro hohoro. – It is the hour in which all the stars shine.

narhū narhū, hohoro hohoro. – It is the hour in which the birds sleep.

narhū narhū, hohoro hohoro. – It is the hour in which the silver rooster turns its neck.

narhū narhū, hohoro hohoro. – It is the hour in which doors and windows are closed.

narhū narhū, hohoro hohoro. – It is the hour in which the steam of the pots disperses.

We have said farewell to the old year,

we have welcomed the new year.

In the spring season,

in its truly rich splendour,

we have chosen the first day as the appropriate day,

we have prepared sacrificial food.

We have separated the grains from the bran of the corn which we sowed last year,

and we have got ready rich sacrificial food.

We have thrown away the [cooking] water and we have prepared yellow food.<sup>30</sup>

Finally it should be noted that our source also publishes the text of a prayer already analyzed by Mitamura Taisuke and contained in a manuscript which has recently been published in its entirety.<sup>31</sup>

The origin of the use of “praying in the darkness” is still to be clarified. Only the world of Manchu legends provides us with an explanation based on folklore, connected with the life of Nurhaci, forefather of the Qing dynasty.

One of these legends<sup>32</sup> tells us that Nurhaci, as a child, was kept in the house of the Chinese commander of Liaoning, Li Chengliang. The latter discovered one day that Nurhaci had seven moles on his body, a sign that had always marked the great leaders. Fearing thus for the future of the Ming dynasty, the Chinese general decided to kill the child. But the plan was revealed to him by a concubine and Nurhaci escaped with a hasty flight. The next morning, when the general found out, he accused his concubine of treachery and killed her while she was still in bed. As a result of this, Nurhaci promised that the Manchus would honour her in the future with special sacrifices—and, since the concubine was naked at the time of her death, he ordered that the sacrifices should take place in darkness.

In a variant of this tale the concubine fled with Nurhaci, but soon understood that she would only have been a hindrance during the flight. She therefore decided to commit suicide during the night, hanging herself from an old, bent pear tree, *waili* in Chinese. The following day, Nurhaci, moved by the unselfish gesture of the concubine of Li Chengliang, decided he would call her “Lady of the bent pear tree” (*Waili Mama*), and that the Manchus should offer sacrifices to her. According to folk legends, this gave rise to the cult of Fodo Mama,<sup>33</sup> this being originally the very

---

<sup>30</sup> Based on the previous description of the preparations, it can be deduced that the “yellow food” refers to cakes: see the expression *suwayan bumbi* (offer a yellow cake).

<sup>31</sup> See Pozzi 1992: 83–86.

<sup>32</sup> For these legends, see Stary 1985.

<sup>33</sup> A sacrifice to the “Fodo Mama” has been described by Körner (n.d.) and by Pozzi (1992). See also Cheng Xun (1985 and 1986).

Waili (Wali ~ Wanli) Mama,<sup>34</sup> also known to the Chinese as “Zisun niangniang,”<sup>35</sup> protector of the descendants, to whom the Manchus had “to pray in the darkness”—that is, *tuibumbi*.

## References

- Cheng Xun 1985. “Manzu suo ji nüshen – Fuotuo mama shi hexu ren.” *Minjian wenxue luntan* 3: 32–34.
- . 1986. “Manzu nüshen – Fuotuo mama kaobian.” *Shehui kexue zhanxian* 4: 327–333.
- Grube, Wilhelm 1896. *Die Sprache und Schrift der Jučen*. Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz.
- Hauer, Erich 1952–55. *Handwörterbuch der Mandschusprache*. 3 vols. Tokyo, Hamburg and Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.
- Jin Qicong 1984. *Nüzhen wen cidian*. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe.
- Körner, Brunhild. n.d. “Der Ahnenkult der Mandschu Peking.” *Baessler-Archiv. Beiträge zur Völkerkunde* N. F. 3: 175–193.
- Li Shutian, Shi Guangwei and Liu Housheng 1992. *Manzu saman tiaoshen yanjiu*. Jilin wenshi chubanshe.
- Liu Mau-tsai 1972. “Der Niang-niang Kult in der Mandschurei.” *Oriens Extremus* 19: 109–119.
- Manzu dacidian*. 1990. Shenzhang: Liaoning daxue chubanshe.
- Meyer, Iben Raphael 1989. “Zum Terminus *uyun jafambi* im manjurischen Schamanismus.” In Klaus Sagaster (ed.) *Religious and Lay Symbolism in the Altaic World and Other Papers*. Asiatische Forschungen Band 105. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz. 225–238.
- Mitamura, Taisuke 1958. “Manshū shāmanism no saijin to shukushi.” In *Ishihama Sensei koki kinen Tōyō-gaku ronsō*. Osaka. 536–550.
- Peng Po. 1985. *Manzu*. Beijing: Minzu chubanshe.
- Pozzi, Alessandra 1992. *Manchu-Shamanica Illustrata*. Shamanica Manchurica Collecta. Vol. 3. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.
- Sary, Giovanni 1983. “Due preghiere nuziali mancesi di origine sciamanica.” *Annali della Facoltà di Lingue e Letterature Straniere di Ca’ Foscari, serie orientale* 14: 119–124.
- . 1985. “Der Mandschukhan Nurhaci als Held mandschurischer Sagen und Märchen. Teil I: Orale Volksliteratur in Prosa.” In Walther Heissig (ed.) *Fragen der mongolischen Heldendichtung*. Teil III. Asiatische Forschungen Band 91. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz. 410–455.

---

<sup>34</sup> For *Waili* = *Wali* = *Wanli*, see Peng Po 1985: 129–131.

<sup>35</sup> See Liu Mau-tsai 1972.

GIOVANNI STARY Full Professor of Manchu Language and Literature at University of Venice. Ph.D. (1969) in Slavic Languages and Classical Chinese at the Oriental University, Naples, Italy. Humboldt Fellow (1978–1979) at the Zentralasiatisches Seminar, University of Bonn, specializing in Central Asian History (Prof. Walther Heissig) and Manchu (Prof. Walter Fuchs). Editor of the *Central Asiatic Journal*, *Aetas Manjurica* and *Shamanica Manchurica Collecta* (Otto Harrassowitz Verlag). Awarded the PIAC Gold Medal (University of Bloomington) in 2006.

## *Kamidari* as a Key Concept of Okinawan Shamanism

MARI YOSHINAGA and YUJI SASAKI

UNIVERSITY OF TOKYO

*Kamidari (divine retribution) occurs predominantly among the shamans of the Okinawan district during the initiation period. Kamidari includes a wide range of states: psychosis, various hallucinations, and somatic complaints, which are often the concomitants of daily difficulties such as economic hardship or conflicts among the family members. The authors found that the shaman's personality factor, unfortunate life events and the environment were all causes of the symptoms of kamidari. The practice of worship as well as the human relationships surrounding the shaman help her or him to overcome the dysphoric state of kamidari. Based on these results, the clinical and cultural aspects of kamidari are discussed from the viewpoint of social psychiatry.*

### Introduction

The psychiatric approach to shamanism presents several issues for solution. From the psychopathological and psychoanalytical viewpoint, it is not enough to examine the personality and life history of a shaman who has experienced spirit possession, a trance state or ecstasy.

In this paper, we shall be examining *kamidari* (divine retribution), a phenomenon specific to the Okinawan district of Japan. In Okinawa, the symptom of *kamidari* is generated in certain settings to signal psycho-social distress. *Kamidari* is considered to be etiologically linked to a shamanic call, and to the subsequent process of training for the office. Examination of the shaman's presentation of *kamidari* will illustrate that the symptom links an individual's personal experience and the social institutions of the community in a shamanic cosmology.

## Description of *Kamidari*

### (1) THE OKINAWAN SHAMANIC BELIEF SYSTEM SURROUNDING *KAMIDARI*

There are several names for Okinawan religious practitioners: *yuta* (who mainly takes charge in family rituals and conducts worship according to oracles), *nuru* (who formally conducts the religious rituals and ceremonies of the village), *ugansaa* (who conducts brief worship services for families and individuals), and so on. In this study, we shall treat all of them as shamans, and call them *kaminchu*, the Okinawan general term for them all. We shall assume that they all shared in the *kamidari* experience prior to becoming a religious practitioner, whatever the social function they end up fulfilling in the religious and ceremonial life of the community. In 1980, the number of shamans throughout the Okinawa prefecture was estimated to be at least two hundred (Sasaki 1986: 123).

Okinawan apprentice shamans are often unwilling candidates in the initiation period. As Lebra (1969: 220) has noted, “Most potential shamans not only do not aspire to their predestined role but also will attempt to ignore these signs, even though no escape is possible.” The “signs” suggesting her (his) destiny to be a shaman commonly commence with strange or unusual occurrences or experiences. The “signs” sometimes suggest divine retribution for the mistakes in the worship ceremonies held for the ancestors. “Signs” are recognized to be the commencement of *kamidari*. In brief, *kamidari* means both *shirashi* (supernatural notification of the potential shaman’s destiny) and *fusoku* (sins of omissions in a ritual). The former meaning is the broad sense, the latter the narrow sense of the term (Sasaki 1986: 149).

Prior to the discussion, two typical examples of *kamidari* will be given. We shall be using the shamans’ assumed names in the case descriptions.

### (2) CASE STUDIES

*Case #5: Noriko Yonaha (an assumed name).* In 1934, a daughter named Noriko was born to the family of Yonaha on Palau Island in the Pacific. She was a remarkable child. As a baby, she always had a high fever after passing through the old shrine, since she could feel



the vibrations of God in the shrine; she could see through doors and, showed an ability to predict the future; she was referred to as *saadaka unmari* (a high-born spirit) among her relatives and acquaintances.

At the age of 33, Noriko had a dream of an old man with a long white beard standing among golden flowers; she later realized the old man was her guardian spirit. It is not clear what actually occurred during this period, but she considered this visitation as the beginning of her spiritual life. Thereafter, she acquired a crick in the back, arthritis, headaches and stomachaches, and had difficulty walking. Going from hospital to hospital in search of a cure, inevitably she had to take time off from her job. She could retain only liquids, and could not sit up. She frequently lost consciousness, and had no recollection of her actions. One day, writhing in pain, she again met the old man, her guardian spirit. He asked her if she was determined to serve as a disciple of God. When she answered in the affirmative without much thinking, a big textbook and a key certifying sacrifice to God were given to her. Her conduct became strikingly mad, and she entered a state of trance and heartfelt devotion, and experienced the sweetness of transcendental bliss.

Her parents, worried about her long sickness, took her to a number of shamans, asking why she suffered her strange and severe sickness. Every shaman they took her to suggested that she was born destined to lead a spiritual life, that is to say, the life of a shaman. They claimed that her sickness would be cured after she practiced worship in the places required to find her guardian spirit, and dedicated herself to that spirit. Her brother refused to heed the oracles and took her to the psychiatric hospital. There, God took possession of her body, and she refused the doctor's examination. She could remember the happening exactly, and, speaking after the possession, asserted that she had acted as an interpreter for God. Recognizing the great power of God, she gave up resisting the shamanic call and decided to dedicate herself to the worship of God without any medication.

Confirmed by the voice of God encouraging her to establish herself as a shaman, she was able to ignore her family's opposition. She now engages in regular worship every weekend with other apprentice shamans, and herself functions as an oracle, showing the suffering the way to a cure.

*Case #9: Hisa Tamashiro (an assumed name).* In her youth, she often had supernatural experiences, like an encounter with a beautiful ship

filled with the Seven Deities of Good Fortune, or a flight to the Milky Way. She, too, was called *saadaka unmari* by the people around her.

She got married and had two sons. She was filled with despair when a doctor informed her that both of her children were so frail that they would not live very long. She prayed sincerely for help, until each of her children got over their critical phase of growth. Hardly had she tided over this first trial, when her husband got a cerebral tumor. After seven operations, he died leaving her and the two children behind. To make matters worse, her business venture failed entirely. In the depth of misfortune, she had a vision of a pile of paper money and of one of her children lying on the leaf of a Japanese banana plant before her, and heard voices asking her which one she would choose. According to her later interpretation, God was ordering her to pray for help without regard to the cost.

After that, she took the office of shaman, and has been flourishing ever since.

### (3) SYMPTOM PRESENTATION IN *KAMIDARI*

In interviews with sixteen shamans, data concerning their *kamidari* experience was collected. Table 1 shows the vital statistics of 16 shamans. From the point of view of modern psychiatry, the representative symptoms in *kamidari* can be divided into psychiatric ones and physical ones as indicated in Table 2.

(a) *Psychiatric symptoms.* Our informant shamans frequently complained that they had suffered from various voices of someone like their guardian spirit ordering them to do things or otherwise restricting their daily activities. Shamans recounted having come across unusual entities like the dead, their ancestors, and unknown figures asking them for favors. These dream-like sensations and waking visions can be classified as hallucinations. Clinically, such symptoms correspond to hallucinations and hypnagogic experience, as well as to pseudo-hallucinations.

The contents of the hallucination have fragments relating to both traditional Okinawan myths and to modern-day personal predicaments. The shaman, we noted, is convinced by the messages conveyed in these "hallucinations," and reconstructs the whole of her life in their light.

Table 1.  
Vital statistics of 16 shamans

No.	Sex	Age	Role	Residence	Birth place	Marital status	Age at taking office
1	female	65	<i>yuta</i>	Ginowan	Miyako	married	54
2	male	67	<i>yuta</i>	Itoman	Miyako	married	32
3	female	61	<i>yuta</i>	Itoman	Itoman	widowed	44
4	female	69	<i>yuta</i>	Naha	Miyako	married	50
5	female	57	<i>yuta</i>	Nishihara	Palau	divorced	36
6	female	66	<i>yuta</i>	Motobu	Motobu	married	41
7	female	65	<i>yuta</i>	Naha	Nakagusuku	married	42
8	male	67	<i>yuta</i>	Naha	Naha	unmarried	37
9	female	56	<i>yuta</i>	Naha	Naha	widowed	26
10	female	55	<i>yuta</i>	Naha	Naha	married	32
11	female	71	<i>yuta</i>	Tomigusuku	Naha	married	42
12	male	70	<i>yuta</i>	Aguni	Aguni	married	40
13	female	68	<i>nuru</i>	Aguni	Aguni	married	40
14	female	70	<i>nuru</i>	Aguni	Aguni	married	40
15	female	77	<i>ugansaa</i>	Aguni	Aguni	widowed	60
16	female	53	<i>ugansaa</i>	Aguni	Aguni	remarried	unknown

Table 2.  
Percentage of shamans presenting a particular symptom in *kamidari*

Symptoms	%
<i>psychiatric symptoms</i>	
hallucination (visual, auditory)	81
possession	44
delusion of being influenced by electric waves	38
syncope	25
<i>physical symptoms</i>	
feeling some specific pain	63
feeling badly all over	50
lack of appetite	19
dyspnea	13
insomnia	6
palpitations	6
slight fever	6
uterine bleeding	6
deafness	6
injury	6

Spontaneously, fears rooted in her unstable psychological, economic, or family situation are often reflected in these hallucinations.

Another major psychiatric symptom that appears in *kamidari* is the phenomenon of "possession." Most of them are "spontaneous dual-personality possessions, in which the subject is controlled by another personality but retains consciousness" (Nishimura 1987: 560). Possession phenomena occur at the climax of *kamidari*, when the sufferings of the shaman and the conflicts around her peak. In these extreme situations, the power of the God possessing her and depriving her of consciousness comes to be recognized as the greatest power, and she surrenders to it. Male family members, such as husbands and fathers who have opposed her establishment as a shaman, mostly change their minds after the great

power possesses her. Conflicts both internal and external are resolved through the experience of possession in many cases. Yoshino (1978: 166) has reported a case of invocation psychosis, pointing out that possession symptoms helped to solve the shaman's conflicts.

As indicated in the case studies, psychiatric symptoms which start with visual and auditory hallucinations result in the appearance of unusual bodily experiences such as possession or syncope.

(b) *Physical symptoms*. It is important to note that *kamidari* may apply to physical as well as to psychiatric symptoms. Among the physical effects associated with the condition are problems of feeling bad all over, or feeling some specific pain. Such persons always take a lot of medication and visit a number of doctors only to find their condition unchanged. Corresponding evidence indicates that the cases who emphasize physical symptoms tend subsequently to engage in public religious functions in the community rather than engage in "individual tension management" (Yuji Sasaki 1967: 444).

The term *kamidari* is utilized to encompass a wide range of troubling states or conditions, in keeping with Kiev's (1981) definition of culture-bound syndromes as a disability extending from severe functional psychosis to various symptoms of neurosis. Nosologically, it bears a similarity to *shinbyong* of the *mudang* described in Korea (Lee 1989: 40; Yuji Sasaki 1989: 26).

## The Various Causes of *Kamidari*

### (1) SYMPTOMATOLOGY AND PERSONALITY FACTOR

As previous studies have indicated (Sakurai 1988: 329; Koukan Sasaki 1984: 227) almost all of Okinawan shamans claim in their youth to have been called *saadaka unmari* (the person having a sacred disposition by nature). They had transcendental experiences which people around them had never had. As seen in cases #5 and #9, the shamans "saw" God and/or spirits, and heard their voices since their very youth. They also remembered that their parents and relatives were always worried about their being so frail.

Typically of a *saadaka unmari*, the shaman “would enter easily into trance states by minor autosuggestion” (Yuji Sasaki 1969: 237), and have considerable experience of the supernatural from childhood. Our informant shamans all experienced *kamidari*, and subsequently spontaneously acquired the ability to self-induce an alteration of their state of consciousness (spontaneous type). Yuji Sasaki (1967: 437) has already pointed out that the spontaneous type enters trance states more easily than the *shugyo* (ascetic type), who can go into trance only after conscious effort and physical and mental asceticism.

## (2) SYMPTOMATOLOGY AND LIFE EVENTS

The other factor frequently mentioned by shamans in addition to *saadaka unmari* is undergoing various sufferings which Lebra has summed up as “long records of discord in interpersonal relations,” “sexual incompatibility” in marital relations, “divorce, and bickering with spouses and in-laws” (Lebra 1969: 219). In general, such misfortune is considered as a sign of their being destined to be a shaman. They are called *shirashi* and are shown in Table 3.

From the recurrence of these factors in the shamans’ life histories, we can conclude the following: at birth, they are so vulnerable that they are strongly affected mentally; the hardships functioned as a trigger to develop their disposition to altered states of consciousness.

A shaman is a person who has difficulty adopting appropriate behavior and in adhering to cultural norms. As a result they are obliged to endure a great many personal disappointments without catharsis. It is the severity of their lives which triggers a line of personality development conducive to their falling into altered states of consciousness.

## (3) SYMPTOMATOLOGY AND COMMUNITY FACTORS

In the environment conspicuously nurturing of shamans, there seems to exist a kind of “insanity-induced communication.” This unique form of communication is based on psychotic association and mutually influential and persuasive relationships.

Sasaki and Takaishi (1979: 1047) have described the typical case of *kamidari* on an isolated island of Okinawa which the authors present as an example of “psychosis of association” (*folie à deux*). They pointed



Table 3.  
Problems predestining for shamanic activity

Problem	Number of shamans with complaint
incapable of working	6
incapable of going out	6
being treated as a madman	5
incapable of doing housework	4
family member ill	4
economic difficulties	4
family member died	3
in and out of hospitals	3
sexual rejection	2
conflicts with spouse	2
conflicts with family member	2
separation from husband (divorce)	2
(war)	1
interrupted education	1
financial laxity	1
taciturnity	1

out the nature of the mechanism from the point of view of clinical and social psychiatry: in the same way as *kamidari* as the beginning of shamanic initiation can spread to the persons around the candidate shaman, a shamanic experience of the transcendent will also be shared by the people near by.

Succeeding to the shamanic role within the family is another community factor seen in some cases. We could find at least four cases of shamans (case #1, #9, #13, and #14) where near relatives took office as a shaman. For instance, in case #1, both her grandmother and mother were *yuta*; while case #9 has two sisters who are *yuta*. It is very interesting to know that case #13 had an aunt who was a very famous and respected shaman, a *nuru*, and in the next generation, her daughter took

a prosperous office as a shaman, a *yuta* in Naha city. When she started functioning as a shaman, she learned all the necessary things from her aunt and became a helpful shaman on the island, while now she often visits her daughter to consult her about some recent misfortune in order to be able to better conduct her daily affairs.

In the light of this element of heritage in the shamanic role, the effect of imitation, which Wada (1964: 263) indicated to be a factor inducing *imu* among the Ainu, must not be ruled out in cases of *kamidari*. Another possible factor might be the inheritance of the shamanic disposition, something that is passed down from mothers to daughters. We would need to collect many more shaman family histories before committing ourselves on this score.

## Treatment of *Kamidari*

### (1) THE PRACTICES EMPLOYED IN THE PROCESS OF OVERCOMING *KAMIDARI*

(a) *Frequent visits to other established shamans.* In general, the Okinawan shaman's major religious functions are to offer *hanji* (oracles) for the benefit of the client, and to worship with clients as dictated by prior oracles. In the *kamidari* phase, a potential shaman will make repeated and frequent visits to various shamans both near and far. She seeks her guardian spirit's historical identity in order to offer appropriate worship. The successive visits are called *shijitadashi*, and continue for some time. It is important that the elder shaman's oracles fit the communications of the voices or dreams of the potential shaman's transcendent *kamidari* experiences (the process is called *chijiawase*).

(b) *Pilgrimages to sacred places for worship.* When a potential shaman has found her guardian spirit to worship in order to escape from *kamidari*, or when she is instructed of the necessity of worship by a senior shaman, she makes visits to worship at sacred places that are located all around Okinawa. The worships are called *ogami*. In *ogami*, she makes a promise to dedicate herself to her own guardian spirit. *Ogami* varies from a short and single act of worship at a nearby place to long and complicated journeys of three to seven days. Table 4 shows the

Table 4.  
Journey of worship on Aguni Island

No.	Place	Move	Prepare	Worship	Settle	Others	Total (min.)
1	home of the head of the family	15	12	16	7	15	65
2	home of a branch of the family	5	7	5	3	5	25
3	home of the parents	5	7	13	5	0	30
4	site of an old shrine	0	15	26	4	6	51
5	site of an old village	0	10	4	6	10	30
6	old village grave, named <i>uheji</i>	15	22	23	5	0	65
7	grave of ancestors	0	5	4	5	1	15
8	old grave of the head of the family	18	10	10	5	2	45
9	God's grave, named <i>yahijaa</i>	32	18	16	9	0	75
10	grave of an ancestor	10	1	31	6	7	55
11	present grave of the head the family	43	16	21	5	7	92
	total	143	123	169	60	53	548

time allocation and specifics of certain *ogami* which took place on the second day of a 3-day *ogami* held on Aguni island and was observed in its entirety by one of the authors, who accompanied a shaman and her client's family. From the data we know that *ogami* involving a few days' journey can be divided into several short *ogami*, each of which has its own script of special worship.

Another point concerning *ogami* is its dual structure: at the time of worship, there is an air of catatonia about the participants, especially the shaman conducting the worship; while at the times of movement, preparation and settling, all of them enjoy the moment of release and relaxation. It seems that the coexistence of the tonic and the atonic in a journey of *ogami* contributes to the treatment of *kamidari*.

## (2) THE SHAMAN-CLIENT RELATIONSHIP AND THE LOCAL TRADITIONAL BELIEF SYSTEM

Through *hanji* and *ogami*, an intimate relationship with the senior shamans and colleagues is established, and the process leading to the cure of *kamidari* is set in motion. A suffering potential shaman gains new ways of conceptualizing and can now convert the negative aspects of her life to positive ones. The traditional cultural belief system comes to be reevaluated. She also learns to make use of weak points like her frail physique or unfortunate family circumstances to let people believe in her notably mystic and spiritual talents, all with a view to setting up as a prosperous shaman with a lot of clients. A potential shaman can realize a rise in social status for herself and her family, with extra income from her shamanic work.

The following factors listed by Prince (1989: 13) apply as "exogenous" factors of healing in the process of overcoming *kamidari*: "the healer's culturally ascribed extraordinary powers; the healer's labeling of the illness, designation of its cause, and selection of therapeutic measures based upon these; the patients' expectancy and hope; and of course, the overriding effect of suggestion."

It must be noted that the essence of the process of overcoming *kamidari* consists of the repetition of *hanji* and *ogami*, and that the established shaman uses similar methods with her clients as was employed in her own "overcoming" process. The potential shaman visiting a senior shaman regards her as a model, a person who has already recovered from *kamidari*.

## (3) NUTRITION

*Hanji* and *ogami* are a form of ascetic training, and have been shown to involve the intensification of both physical and mental activity. To borrow Prince's (1974: 315, 1976: 115, 1989: 13) term, the "endogenous" factors clearly play apart. Our knowledge of the biological etiology of culture-bound syndromes suggests that we focus also on the physical changes that occur in the process of overcoming *kamidari*. Nutrition (Landy 1985: 173) has been shown to influence psycho-physical responses in the case of various culture-bound syndromes. Takiguchi (1986: 127) has found that most shamans have irregular eating habits during *kamidari*. Among our informant shamans, we can find three

Table 5.  
Dreams and dream-like experiences in *kamidari* of Case #3

- (1) Scene of an ancient funeral.
- (2) She was spirited into a hall in which the floor suddenly opened.
- (3) A handsome man stood at her bedside, and she watched her husband diminish to 10 cm in size.
- (4) She was about to fall into a deep gorge in a rapid river, when a man with the very dominant smell of hair oil appeared to save her.
- (5) In a dream she was dropped into strong coal tar and emerged again.
- (6) A man dressed in black *kimono* and a suit of armor gave her a pile of bills, told her to do worship with the money and shook her hand before leaving.
- (7) When she was in bed at night, a black man came to her and possessed her leg so that she could not stand up in the next morning.
- (8) An old man with a white beard dressed in white clothes tweaked her ear and spoke the name of her guardian spirit.
- (9) Somebody let her ride in a black car and brought her to the sacred place for worship.
- (10) The spirit of someone dead for a short time asked her to pray for his soul.

(19% of all) who have no appetite and probably suffer from insufficient nutrition (see Table 2). *Kamidari* might possibly have something to do with the subjects' nutritional state.

#### (4) TRANSCENDENT FUNCTION

The gradual changes in their mind and body are reflected in the contents of their transcendent experiences. In Table 5, a number of episodes of *kamidari* experiences of case #3 are shown for reference. A "man" and a "God" with a "black" shadow are the expression of her anxiety in connection with various human relationships. The "reward from God" or the "present of a pile of money" can be interpreted as the projection of economic worries, for it involves quite a vast expenditure to worship with shamans or to receive oracles from them.

Although attention has been called to its abuses (Littlewood 1989: 5), the psychoanalytical approach has proved fruitful in the research of shamanic phenomena. The shaman is manipulated by the contents of her dreams and supernatural experiences, while her anxiety and sufferings are given symbolic expression, in keeping with Jung's theory of the "transcendent function" of dreams and dream-like experiences. In the end, the shaman is confirmed in her role by God, and is told how to conduct her shamanic work by her guardian spirit in delightful dreams.

Summing up, the essence of overcoming the process of *kamidari* is repeated *hanji* and *ogami*. The tonic and an atonic contrast can be observed by turns in the course of *hanji* and *ogami*, which enables the apprentice shaman to receive effective training in their psycho-physical usefulness. The process of overcoming *kamidari* varies with each shaman, but almost all shamans share the experience of the effective rituals specific to Okinawan shamanism. The process has several factors in common with the rituals of other faith-healing systems.

## References

- Kiev, Ari 1981. *Magic, Faith and Healing*. N.Y.: The Free Press.
- Landy, David 1985. "Pibloktoq (Hysteria) and Inuit Nutrition." *Social Science and Medicine* 21(2): 173–185.
- Lebra, William 1969. "Shamanism and Client in Okinawa." In William Caudill and Tsung-yi Lin (eds.) *Mental Health Research in Asia and the Pacific*. Honolulu: East-West Center Press.

- Lee, Bou-Yong 1989. "Psychotherapeutic Aspects of Shamanism with Special Reference to Korean Mudang." *Mental Health Research* 8. Seoul: The Mental Health Institute, Hangyang University.
- Littlewood, Roland 1989. "Science, Shamanism and Hermeneutics." *Anthropology Today* 5: 5–11.
- Nishimura, Kou 1987. "Shamanism and Medical Cures." *Current Anthropology* 28(4): 59–64.
- Prince, Raymond 1974. "The Problem of Spirit Possession as a Treatment for Psychiatric Disorder." *Ethos* 2: 315–333.
- . 1976. "Psychotherapy as the Manipulation of Endogenous Healing Mechanisms." *Transcultural Psychiatry Review* 13: 115–133.
- . 1989. "Altered States of Consciousness in Religious Ritual." *Mental Health Research* 8. Seoul: The Mental Health Institute, Hangyang University.
- Sakurai, Tokutarou 1988. *Nihon shamanism no kenkyū* [The study of Japanese shamanism]. Tokyo: Yoshikawa-koubun-kan.
- Sasaki, Koukan 1984. *Shamanism no jinruigaku* [The anthropology of shamanism]. Tokyo: Kōbun-dō.
- Sasaki, Yuji 1967. "Wagakuni ni okeru miko no kenkyū." [Psychiatric study of shamanism in Japan]. *Psychiatria et Neurologia Japonica* 69: 429–474.
- . 1969. "Psychiatric Study of the Shamanism in Japan." In William Caudill and Tsung-yi Lin (eds.) *Mental Health Research in Asia and the Pacific*. Honolulu: East-West Center Press.
- . 1986. "Okinawa no yuta no genkyo [The general feature of recent Okinawan yuta]." *Shukyo kara seishin eisei he* [From religion to mental health]. Tokyo: Kongo Shuppan.
- . 1989. "Shamanism and Community Mental Health." *Mental Health Research* 8. Seoul: The Mental Health Institute, Hangyang University.
- Sasaki, Yuji and Toshihiro Takaishi 1979. "Okinawa ni okeru kamidari." [Introduction to the religious fanatics in Okinawa]. *Japanese Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 8: 1047–1052.
- Takiguchi, Naoko 1986. "Shaaman no chiyu taiken" [Therapeutic experiences of Miyako shamans]. *Kokusai kirisuto kyou daigaku shakaikagaku* 24(2): 127–153.
- Wada Kan 1964. "Imu ni kansuru jakkan no mondai" [Some problems on "imu"]. *Japanese Journal of Ethnology* 29(3): 263–271.
- Yoshino, Masahiro 1978. "Kannousei seishinbyou to kitousei seishinbyou" [*Folie à deux* and invocation psychosis]. In Katsumi Kaketa (ed.) *Gendai seishin igaku taikei* 6. Tokyo: Nakayama-shoten.



MARI YOSHINAGA took her PhD. in Health Science at University of Tokyo in 1995. She is now in the department of Architecture, in Kokushikan University, to teach and research human-environment interaction from the viewpoint of psychology and is currently specializing in the field of community planning and children's action research program. Her other main research interest is a support system for the various community members and students, and she is working on a book on pregnancy and childbearing of spinal cord injured women. She is starting her new activity at another university from this spring, Showa Pharmaceutical University, in suburbs of Tokyo, to establish a center for education and coordination for the university-community cooperation.

YUJI SASAKI is a psychiatrist. He is specializing in the field of Community Mental Health and Shamanism. He completed a M. D. degree program at University of Tokyo in 1957. He is the author of "Psychiatric study of shamanism in Japan" in *Mental Health Research in Asia and the Pacific* (eds. William Caudill and Tsung-yi Lin) by East-West Center Press, Honolulu, 1969. He was a Professor of Mental Health at Ryukyu University and University of Tokyo and is currently an honored professor of Dokkyo University, Saitama, Japan, and a doctor of health care center in Nihon Keizai Shimbun, Inc. (Nikkei).

## Shamanism and the Politics of Culture: An Anthropological View of the 1992 International Conference on Shamanism, Yakutsk, the Sakha Republic

MARJORIE MANDELSTAM BALZER      GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

In Fall, 1992, after I had returned to Washington D.C. from the dramatic, stimulating and educational conference on shamanism in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), I heard a rumor that people in Moscow were discussing the conference as “an attempt to make shamanism the state religion of Yakutia.” I reasoned they were joking, but when I heard an American colleague seriously repeat this formula at a public forum, I realized the joke had gone too far. The full title of the conference was “Shamanism as Religion: Genesis, Reconstruction, Tradition,” but this is no reason to attribute to conference organizers a desire to create a new state religion. Rather, the conference represented, in its timing, politics and symbolism, a complex effort to accord aspects of traditional Sakha culture greater credibility.

This essay is an attempt to interpret the shamanism conference in the light of a strong ethnic and spiritual revival in Yakutia. These building blocks of a growing Sakha national pride (nationalism) need not and should not be seen as stimulating national chauvinism. Before dissecting the issue of the shamanism–nationalism interrelationship, it is important to explore some of the substantive contributions of Sakha scholars to the conference, plus the creative contributions of Sakha cultural leaders to its parallel rituals, exhibits, films and concerts. Discussion concerning curers, curing, religion and the politics of culture can then continue.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> I do not pretend to review the whole range of conference scholarship here. My views are those of an interested outsider with field experience in Yakutia in 1986, 1991, 1992 and 1993, sponsored predominantly by International Research and Exchanges Board. I am grateful to my friends and colleagues in the republic, particularly the organizers of the 1992 Conference on Shamanism, Aïza P. Reshetnikova, Anatoliï I. Gogolev, Ekaterina Romanova, Platon Sleptsov; my hosts Zinaïda and Volodia Ivanov-Unarov; and Ivan E. Alekseev for help with terminology and concepts.

## Sakha Interpretations of Shamanism

Andreï S. Borisov, Minister of Culture of the Sakha Republic, welcomed the conference over-flow crowd in the Academy of Sciences auditorium with the statement that he hoped both shamanism and its study could move onto a plane of focus on “White”—pure, sacred and benevolent priestly shamanism—away from its dark and debilitating history of emphasis on Black and then Red shamanism. Both the word play and the sentiment were typical for Andreï Borisov, who has been a consistent cultural leader of the Sakha in his roles as theater director, and head of the cultural-political movement *Sakha Omuk*, the Sakha People.<sup>2</sup> He was building metaphorically on the symbolism that had led us into the academy, for the conference began outside in Friendship Square, with a series of Sakha rituals cameoing some of the rites associated with the most sacred of Sakha holidays, the *ihiakh* festival, held annually in June.<sup>3</sup>

Welcoming rituals included chanted prayers, called *algis*, sung by a deep-voiced Sakha bard (Nikolaï Petrov, linguist and popular folklore propagandist) dressed in the appliqued and fur-trimmed clothing of a traditional epic singer. His prayers were sung to the fire spirit, as he poured *kumis* (fermented mare’s milk) onto a leaping bonfire. Several others, including guests from Yamal, Buriatia, and Kirghizstan, were also asked to participate, showing Siberian and Turkic solidarity. Outsiders, guests in various degrees, then were drawn into participation with Sakha residents from all over the republic by a mass distribution of colored and patterned ribbons, representing offerings of benevolent wishes. We tied the ribbons on a long string held in arcs by traditionally dressed young dancers, who encircled the crowd and symbolically unified us. Many then joined in the stately Sakha circular line dance *ohuokhay*, during which the leader of the dance sings a line of poetry and the rest of the dancers chant it back, allowing the leader to improvise the next lines. While these dances sometimes go on for hours, indeed for days of trance-like mesmerization, ours was merely a small taste of the power and aesthetic beauty of *ohuokhay* poetry and

---

<sup>2</sup> For more on Andreï Borisov, and on the group *Sakha Omuk*, see Balzer 1993a, 1993b. His reference to Black and Red shamanism stems especially from the Sakha folklorist-revolutionary P. A. Oïunskiï, who is discussed below.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Gogolev 1992a.

rhythm. The poetry was about hopes for success of the conference, as well as the loveliness of Sakha lands and spirits. Soon we filed into the academy building, with each person, while passing under an entrance arbor, given a purification by smoking larch branch. Much of this was for show, to give visitors an almost tourist-like inkling of Sakha culture, but the mini-*ihäakh* also had a more serious purpose for some of the Sakha—those who had taken to heart warnings by folk curers that “spirits need to be appeased when this many ‘extrasenses,’ shamans, and guests come to one gathering place.”

The conference became intellectually substantive quite quickly, with a review of shamanism literature and conceptions by ethnographer Anatoliï I. Gogolev (Professor, Yakutsk University), head of the conference “scientific organizing committee.” He had revised his originally planned statements the night before, partly in response to debates begun at a “round table” (mass public forum held in the Cosmophysics Institute) the previous day. Explaining that increased interest in shamanism was related to people’s striving for both cures and self-realization, he then discussed the literary–academic heritage of Siberian shamanism, including seventeenth century writers. He gave mixed reviews to later (Russian) scholars like G. P. Snesarev, S. A. Tokarev, A. A. Vitashevskii and V. F. Troshchanskiï, noting that especially Troshchanskiï stressed shamanism as “black [read evil, anti-Christian] faith.” But now, he observed, shamanism is being tied to ideas of psychotherapy, telepathy, and understandings of “biopol,” bioenergy fields. And the figure of the shaman is being rethought, as a person, and as part of society: sensitive, unusual, but not psychotic or evil, or not necessarily evil and exploitative. “Nonetheless, the Sakha, indeed Turkic-Mongolian, shaman should be seen in historical context . . . tied to early forms of religion, or cults, but not the same as a priest (*sviashchennik*) or high priest (*zhretz*).”

Anatoliï I. Gogolev’s analysis represented a balance among various views, for example Vladimir N. Basilov’s urging that we see shamanism in highly specific cultural-historical contexts and my attempt to show commonalities in Native American and Siberian spiritual and curing cultures, when seen through the statements of curers themselves. Even more, he was implicitly reconciling the claims of his Sakha colleagues Anatoliï Novikov (cf. 1992), who sees shamanism as a “culturological”

rather than religious phenomenon; and Nikolaï Alekseev (1997), who stresses the “white,” “priestly,” roots of Turkic, Sakha shamanism.<sup>4</sup>

The split between those who study general, cross-cultural issues of shamanism and those who focus on specific aspects of shamanic personality and curing was formalized in a pragmatic division between two halls. This meant that many of the papers read by Sakha scholars were delivered in the republic library, where focus was on the “person” (*lichnost'*) of the shaman. Papers by international scholars were read in the main auditorium, with simultaneous translation facilities. It was delightfully ironic that some of the Sakha translators were former Communists, who even a few years ago righteously refused to discuss shamanism in positive terms.

Sakha academic presentations on their own culture can be roughly divided into: (a) those that shed light on historical dimensions of shamanism, including pre- and post-Russian contact history and Soviet repression; and (b) those that illustrate the richness and complexity of shamanic symbolism, ritual, thought, and cosmology. For all the Sakha presenters, an important subtext was the presence in the audience of the cultural elite of the republic—especially well known writers and scientists, many of whom were on vacation, but had come into town from their *dachas* specially for the August conference.

Some of the most controversial questions for Sakha scholars and amateur historians concern their distant past and their “ultimate” roots. The quest for this has led researchers to Turkic sources (Gogolev 1986), Siberian native sources (Nikolaev, penname Somogotto 1989), and Indo-Iranian sources (Fefelova 1990). It was not surprising, therefore, to see these debates carried on through the medium of shamanism. The cultural enthusiast K. D. Utkin, director of the *Khomus* (Jaw Harp) Music Center, choreographer of recent *ihiakh* festivals, gave a popular, prevailing over-view of “sources of Yakut shamanism” by stressing its links to “Turkic-Mongolian” steppe culture, developed in the “epic of

---

<sup>4</sup> See also Gogolev (1992a, b, c, d). In their jointly published abstract, conference organizers Anatoliï Gogolev and Aïza Reshetnikova conclude: “it is impossible to understand shamanic ideology without incorporating a whole complex of traditional beliefs, without using its mythological system. Thus shamanism, it seems, appears and grows within a religious environment, is tied to many religions, and has correlations to their pantheons and ritual forms.” Unless otherwise mentioned, quotes in this section are translated excerpts from published conference abstracts (Gogolev et al. 1992).

metal with the growth of cattle-breeding.” Its world view, speculated Utkin, was formed out of “*udagan* culture,” female shamanic predominance. More nuanced was the position on religious syncretism of F. F. Vasil'ev, who elaborated three main branches of intermingling influences, “Ugrian-Samoyed,” “Manchu-Tungus” and “Turkic-Mongolian.” Z. F. Semenova had a more concrete approach: the interpretation of cliff art from Ämigättäakh Khaya, originally found by archaeologist A. P. Okladnikov and dated to the eighteenth century. She sees a figure posed in a worshipful position with uplifted hands and head crowned by a three-pronged antler as a female deity, linking the Sakha goddess of fertility, *Ayïihit*, with the ancient Turkic goddess *Umay*.<sup>5</sup>

Several scholars approached the issue of historical roots through linguistics. V. E. Vasil'ev, for instance, logically sees the root of benevolent Sakha god-spirits called *ayïi* in Turkic words for ‘mother’ (e.g. Uzbek *aya* or *oyi*). Iu. I. Vasil'ev and G. V. Popov trace the etymology of *uot kurbastay* (fire god) to the Mongolian highest sky god *khurmast*, and link this in turn (more adventurously) to Indo-European mythology and the cult of the fire represented by Zoroastrianism. S. Gabyshev tackled the important problem of the etymology of the Sakha word for a male shaman, *oyuun*, noting that V. F. Troshchanskiï had linked it to the Turkic *oy-* ‘to jump’, or *oyna-* ‘to play’, while S. I. Nikolaev (Somogotto) ties it to “Ugrian-Samoyed” *yung* ‘devil’ or ‘crazy’. The well-respected linguist N. K. Antonov traces it to the (ancient Turkic) Chuvash *asam* ‘witchcraft, magic’ and this tempts Gabyshev, but in the end he turns to Mongolian for the word *oyuun*, which means ‘reason’, or ‘wise one’, in effect, ‘keeper of the memory and tradition of the people’. He also correlates the Sakha word for female shaman, *udagan*, with a Mongolian origin.

A few Sakha analysts are studying literary-historical images of shamans. For example, A. N. Myreeva analyzed such images in P. A. Oiunskiï’s drama “The Great Kudansa,” and his poem “The Red Shaman.” Following Oiunskiï (the folklorist-revolutionary who remains a culture hero for his potent pseudonym and life of sacrifice), she sees

---

<sup>5</sup> She notes similar poses for male shamans, explaining “there is no contradiction here, since in performance of rituals, shamans could transform into women (religious transvestism), and sometimes wore female dress.” This correlates with papers by V. N. Basilov and B. Saladin d’Anglure. See also Balzer (1996). The theme of gender flexibility, manipulation and transformation in shamanism is getting increased attention.



the shamanic world view as created in the period of “feudal-clan structure.” But she also perceives it as dealing with everyday tensions “of good and evil, freedom and constraint, fairness and unfairness . . . sky and earth, humans and fate, the present and the future.” Thus the Red Shaman becomes the ultimate humanistic transition figure, to quote Oiunskii, “a person on the crossroads of two epochs.” But this crossroads turns out to have been far longer and more crooked than Oiunskii predicted, as many speakers noted.

One of the most renowned and respected Sakha historian-ethnographers of shamanism was G. V. Ksenofontov, another key transition figure, persecuted for his studies and his politics in the 1920s. His significance was ably reviewed by A. N. D'iachkova, in her conference presentation and her introduction to the book published for it (Ksenofontov 1992). This was a great victory, since D'iachkova herself in earlier days was heavily discouraged from interest in Ksenofontov. The book contains his essays and one of the richest compendiums ever collected of shamanic legends and stories, as told to Ksenofontov by diverse Sakha in the 1920s. Ksenofontov saw the roots of shamanism in nomadic Hunnic traditions of Eurasia, and viewed Christianity as successfully displacing “white shamanism,” without fully obliterating the more underground and unofficial “black” form. He believed that, through shamanism, one could discern a dualistic philosophy and “many aspects of the internal content of Yakut belief,” some of which are still unexplored today.<sup>6</sup>

Although it is well known that both shamanism and shamanistic studies were repressed in the 1920s and '30s in Siberia, details of repression in Yakutia are less known. Its extent was described by N. D. Vasil'eva and S. N. Gorokhov, whose work mostly complements each other. Vasil'eva bluntly called the measures against shamans “harsh,” and listed various forms, “isolation, loss of citizenship rights, land requisition, public court proceedings, repression [i.e. jail].” Typically enforced by starry eyed young Komsomol (Sakha and Russian), these measures resulted in “ruining the whole religious-philosophical, moral-

---

<sup>6</sup> The issue of Christianity and the influence of Russian Orthodoxy on Sakha culture was underdeveloped in general, although one Russian Orthodox priest announced on the final day his approval of scientific shamanic studies, and it was not coincidence that an article on Orthodoxy appeared during the conference in the popular press (Okhlopko 1992).



ethical and medical knowledge system, such that the national culture was seen to be without value . . .”(Vasil'eva). Gorokhov quoted the first 1924 resolution that declared shamanism in Yakutia “a phenomenon especially destructive, blocking cultural-national development and the political growth of the peoples . . .” Mass burnings of shamanic accoutrements occurred, as “deceiving” and “exploiting” shamans were humiliated in public. The height of the campaign was during the 1928–1930 “war of atheism” and struggle for collectivization. Gorokhov noted not only Sakha but also shamans of other Siberian nationalities were targets, and he concluded with an awareness that the official repression did not prevent “the continuation of shamanism in the memory of the people.”<sup>7</sup>

One of the most creative ways of showing the effects of repression of Sakha shamanism, as well as revealing under-studied aspects of its nature, is through the study of toponyms, made famous in Yakutia by the once-jailed, meticulous scholar Bagdar'ın Sülbä (M. Ivanov), whose modest penname means ‘rushing river’. For instance, lake Oyun of the Viliuisk region was changed to lake Diring (or Deep). In the Tatta region, the Valley of the Shamans, Oyuuttar Toloottoro, was changed to Kolkhoz Valley. But some of the new names did not stick with the local populace. Thus in the Viliuisk region, people know that New Lake is really Dūngür İyaabıt (Where they hung the drum). Place names marking shamanic resting places dot the countryside and are well-known and protected today.

The elder N. L. Ignat'iev of Viliuisk, known for his cultural journalism in Sakha language newspapers and his predictions of weather through traditional Sakha techniques, described specific male and female shamans through history, as reported in early Russian sources and by later ethnographers such as the well respected part-Sakha A. Popov (1902–1960). Ignat'iev rather dramatically ended his presentation with a litany of shamans he knew personally.

Presentations that revealed the ethnographic richness of Sakha shamanic rituals, philosophy and symbolism were often more modest in their goals and less speculative than some of the historical subjects,

---

<sup>7</sup> See also Gorokhov (1992). My conference paper was on a similar, though cross-cultural theme. It is urgent that Sakha researchers collect, as modern folklore, stories of repression of shamans and their diverse, sometimes dramatic responses. See also Balzer (1993a).

although some of these too had a whiff of controversy or had broad implications.

E. N. Romanova, one of the conference organizers, an ethnographer well respected for her role in helping establish the annual June *ihiakh* festival as an official Sakha Republic holiday, gave an over-view of the “stratigraphy, cult practice, and ideology” of shamanism. She bridged the gap between history and culture area studies by discussing the division in Sakha culture between “black” and “white” shamanism as related to historical syncretism, noting this dualism also occurs among Tuvinians, Buriats, Altaians and Kirghiz. Linking white shamanism to the cult of *ayii*, in the tradition of G. Ksenofontov and N. Alekseev, she sees it as the organizing principle behind a whole “religious-ritual system . . . on which depended the fate and well-being of a whole clan (tribe).” The white, priestly, or sky-spirit-oriented shaman (*ayii oyuun*) can be traced back to the Sakha culture-hero *Älläi*, putative founder of the *ihiakh* festival, and, according to many Sakha, founding ancestor of the Sakha people.

E. Romanova is a member of the Sakha cultural revitalization group *Kut-Siir*, named for the Sakha nexus of soul and mind (cf. Afanas'ev et al. 1990). This potentially can reinforce her authority as an ethnographer searching for the reasoning behind symbols of fertility and renewal that are recreated today in the Sakha *ihiakh*. The spirit of this revitalizing *ihiakh* was partly captured in a Sakha Republic TV film, shot in 1992 at Suntaar and Nurba, for which Romanova was an adviser.

Far less accessible were the fascinating theories of V. I. Okoneshnikov (cf. 1992), a self-described “philosophical engineer,” known in the republic for his writings on Sakha cosmology, and metaphysics. Featured at the public “round-table,” he drew a schema over a huge blackboard at the Cosmophysics Institute to indicate the “semantics” of *Kut-Siir*, simplistically glossed as soul-mind, but reflecting many aspects of human potential and human-nature interaction. He discussed and diagrammed nine levels of the Upper World, and four aspects of Nature, at dizzying speed, and then drew the concepts “object,” “energy,” and “subject,” as round balls with arrows going (one way) from one to the other. The crowd was mostly lost but impressed, as he sent the message that ancient Sakha philosophy was sophisticated and complex, though he neglected to explain his methodology—how he knows precisely what ancient Sakha philosophy entailed. His *tour de force* took the research of scholars like A.

Mordinov (1982) and A. Gogolev (1983) on Sakha “folk wisdom” farther than ever before, relating it to shamanism, folk astronomy, and physics. A Russian scientist then endorsed some of his points as correlating with ideas now known in physics.<sup>8</sup>

L. L. Gabysheva focused on one of the more controversial gods of Sakha cosmology, *Uluutuyar Uluu Toyon*, associated at times with white shamanism and the benevolent *ayii*, and at times with evil spirits called *abaahi*. Some, she explained, have even called this key figure in Sakha belief “half-*ayii* and half-*abaahi*,” a remarkable merging of categories rarely joined. Several aspects make this god key to the Sakha: he gave people shamans, “mediators between people and gods, the sky and earth, life and death”; he gave people fire, “which marks the boundary between people and animals, nature and culture”; he took the form of the raven, “mediator figure in the mythology of many people”; and he is the controller of thunder and lightening, “capable of sweeping illness and impurity from earth.” In illuminating the symbolism of this god, Gabysheva easily convinces that multiple interpretations of his significance reflect multiple manifestations of his personality as a supernatural mediator.

N. V. Emelianov, senior folklorist in the tradition of the renowned G. U. Ärgis, also saw the shaman as a mediator, between the three main worlds of Sakha cosmology (Upper, Middle, Lower), during séances. He stressed the correlation of the shamanic séance with the Sakha *olonkho* (epic poetry) tradition. Loyal to epic studies, he concluded that the epic form enabled more artistic-aesthetic flexibility than the ritual restrictiveness of a shamanic séance.<sup>9</sup>

The shaman’s mediating role between the living and dead in burial rituals was the subject of Yakutsk university ethnographer R. I. Bravi-

---

<sup>8</sup> My scepticism was mitigated recently by the British cosmophysicist Alan Johnstone, who is familiar with Sakha philosophy and impressed by their elaborate “magnetosphere scheme.” A film called *Kut-Siir*, made by the Minister of Education E. Zhirkov and the artist R. Petrov for Sakha TV, also explains cosmological complexities using maps and charts.

<sup>9</sup> These conclusions are similar to those of Elena Novik (1997). Folklorist V. M. Nikiforov too built on the work of Ärgis, and reminded us of the Russian folklorist V. Ia. Propp’s admiration for Ärgis. Nikiforov’s interests are in the social dimensions of shamanism, and the often conflict-laden role of traditional (seventeenth–eighteenth century) shamans, in competition with more secular Sakha leaders (*toyon*) and outside priests.

na's presentation, which explicitly supplemented Ärgis. R. I. Bravina is known for her brave excavations of burials, often considered by locals too sacred to touch, even when they are unconnected with direct Sakha ancestry. She stressed that shamans were considered best equipped to guide the souls of deceased Sakha into after-life since shamans themselves must go through horrifying tortures of near-death and rebirth (called *ättänii* 'cutting to pieces of the body') during their "sacralization." Rituals for escorting souls were done on the night after burial, for example the ritual of *kut araariï*, or soul removal, during which a shaman urged the deceased not to carry away loved ones. Escorting to the land of the dead was a separate ritual, as was a rite to ensure that the deceased did not stay on earth to become a sickness-bearing *yuyor*. The rituals reinforced and portrayed the pivotal, integrated social and sacred function of the shaman, protecting the interests of both the living and the dead.

Respect for such mediating functions was evident, as usual, in the work of ethnographer P. A. Sleptsov, another of the talented conference organizers. Using ritual to decipher "traditional world view," he explained the importance of understanding "white," society-oriented, and "black," more individual-oriented, shamanism as both representing and stimulating development of the Sakha ethnos's religious values. He reminded us of a whole range of sacred figures in Sakha society, besides the *oyuun* and the *udagan*. These include the *khos kuolay-daakh kihi* 'bringer into life, midwife', *bäriäččittäakh kihi* 'person with visible shadow [intuition, telepathy]', *tüülläakh kihi* 'dream seer', *bilgä kihi* 'sign interpreter', *körbüöččü* 'fortune teller', *otohut* 'curer', *iičään* 'wise one', and *uus* 'blacksmith'. Harmony and balance was the philosophical and religious goal of shamanism: "the unity of nature and humans, life and death, spirit and fertility." In this, Sleptsov's analysis fits well with the research of L. I. Vinokurova and A. N. Zhirkov on Sakha rituals of human and animal fertility, and with various pleas at the conference to remember the importance of treating Nature with ecological-spiritual reverence.

The Sakha supernatural world was, and still is for many Sakha, permeated with various kinds of spirits, not only simply benevolent upper-world (*ayii*) and evil or capricious under-world (*abaahi*) ones. The ethnographer P. M. Zykov, who usually writes about Sakha material culture, delved into the distinction between *abaahi* and *aĵaray*, who, in both Buriat and Sakha folklore, are correlated with a "clan"

emanating from the source of the Lena River, and thus may have originally been actual human enemies changed into spirit ones. I. S. Portniagin focused on yet another major category, the *ičči*-spirits of the Middle World, earth. Even words have their *ičči*, and the power of human words, especially the poetic and prayerful speech of shamans, is considered compelling precisely because they are imbued with spirit that acts on human consciousness, especially that of children. Through this socialization, “terror and honor, fright and respect of shamans is maintained to this day.”

Shamanic séances were, and are, addressed to spirits of other worlds through the crucial *uot iččitä*, or fire spirit. But not only shamans give offerings to the fire, as Portniagin stressed: “At every special occurrence in life, for each creative or joyful event, it is necessary to honor *uot iččitä* with offerings: to toss into the fire the best morsel of food or to sprinkle oil. *Uot iččitä* is considered the leading and most well-wishing helper of humans.” Since 1986, my arrival in Sakha friends’ homes and their comings and goings to my home have been marked by offerings, and sometimes prayers, to the fire spirit. Fire spirits were fed (often with vodka or wine) at crucial times during the shamanism conference, especially when participants arrived by boat at the magnificent Lena Cliffs.

Given the living presence of *ičči* for many Sakha, it was especially appropriate that an exhibit honoring them was created by curator William Iakovlev at the Republic Iaroslavskiï Museum, coinciding with the shamanism conference (cf. Seregina 1992; Savvinov 1992). It depicted ritual life and various spirit images or housings (*ämägät*) that have been used by the Sakha and other peoples of Yakutia through the centuries in sacred places. Far from being a sacrilege, many Sakha took this exhibit to be a long-overdue recognition of the merged aesthetic-spiritual value of these objects. I was warned that the objects themselves still emanated power, and indeed before one carved wooden image, representing the Sakha fertility goddess *Ayihüüt*, were offerings of coins and ribbons spontaneously thrown onto her fur rug. An elderly Sakha grandmother arrived while I was there, and launched into raptures (in Sakha) over her joy at seeing so many ancient, revered and yet not long ago reviled, sacred objects. Many Sakha viewers knew that the exhibit occupied space recently devoted to Soviet-style propaganda over industrial progress in Yakutia. Only one thing marred the exhibit—the museum has yet to replace its absolutely horrifying, full-sized shaman,



whose wild dance pose and filthy cloak is punctuated by evil, bulging, animal eyes. A Russian father and son visiting the show hurried by this left-over Soviet atheist creation, with the son saying, predictably, “Daddy, get me out of here.” In contrast, the life-sized model of a shaman, recently created for Director Aĭza Reshetnikova’s Museum of Music and Folklore, which sponsored the conference, is the epitome of a kindly wise man.

Changing shamanic images were also evident in a show at the Gabyshev museum, featuring the work of several generations of Sakha artists on shamanic themes, curated by Zinaĭda Ivanova-Unarova. It began with a famous 1926 painting by the painter I. V. Popov, portraying the prototype of the scary, evil, deceiving shaman. But it quickly moved to more diverse and spiritual themes, with images by subsequent artists ranging from the haunting depiction of a spirit lake (1976, Iu. I. Votiakov) to the charmingly whimsical dancing udagan (1981) of V. Parnikov. It culminated in the complex and monumental paintings of T. A. Stepanov, from his new (1990–1991) series “Shamans,” which confronted viewers immediately with the dark lushness of multiple Sakha supernatural worlds and spirits. Depictions of an elder shaman passing power to a younger one, and of the initiatory *ättänii*, or cutting to pieces of a novice’s body, were especially clear and bold, but all of the work was imbued with Stepanov’s ethnographic symbolism merged uniquely with his own more personal shaman-like fantasies.<sup>10</sup>

At the “Images of the Shaman” opening, one of the National Theater’s star singers, Gavril Kolesov, sang an improvisational, multi-versed song in honor of the artists and the new spirit of cultural revitalization. He had been asked only days before to sing, and had been worried that the poetic spirit would not move him sufficiently to create, but he need not have been concerned. His chanted, *algis* (prayer-like) poetry was in the strong and resonant mode of an *olonkhohut* (epic singer), not surprising since he earlier recorded Melodiia’s version of Oiunskii’s text of the epic *Ńurgun Bootur*. Music of a different nature, yet also drawing on shamanic and epic roots, was displayed during an evening concert by the rock group Ay-tal, named in a salute to the benevolent *ayĭi*. Proud

---

<sup>10</sup> See Starodubskaia (1992) and the exhibit catalogue by Zinaĭda Ivanova-Unarova (2000) for fuller elaboration. Stepanov’s triumph at this show was in delightful contrast to the suspicion in which he was held when I first lived in Yakutia in 1986, and admired his work.

of the shamanic heritage of some of their members, they utilize drums, *khomus* (jaw harp), chants and electronic animal calls to create a folk rock synthesis of total immersion music.<sup>11</sup>

The Ay-tal performance, in the huge, newly named “Kulakovskiï Center of Culture and Art” (once the Palace of Technology and Culture), followed several highly theatrical depictions of shamanic séances by Sakha actors. In one, a sick, limp patient was cured by a shaman dancing around a fire beating his drum, barely looking at the patient. In another, a young boy, alternately hysterical and uncontrollably singing, was recruited by a shaman to become his apprentice. In the finale, nine shamans danced together to depict a time of community crisis (for example, an epidemic) in which the rivalries of various great shamans were suppressed for the greater good of joining to drive out evil forces. The staging of these vignettes was so artificial that by contrast, one surprise lone amateur drummer chanting *algis*, seated on a chair in the middle of the auditorium, was more “authentic” in feel, but still far from the séance that some of the Sakha and their guests were yearning for. We were asked not to applaud.<sup>12</sup>

During a conference boat trip, at dawn the morning we reached the Lena River Cliffs, another kind of ritual was enacted, one associated with “white” shamanism—the greeting of the sun. The long-grey-haired actor Afanasiï Fedorov, dressed in a floor-length, elegant fur-trimmed white robe and hat, faced East in the chill dawn, as women were herded to his left and men to his right. We waited for the ball of fire itself, not just its rays. Finally, Afanasiï began a long, low *algis* that was practically inaudible. We bowed and raised our hands at intervals, at his cues, as blankets fell off our shoulders and cameras juggled awkwardly in our hands. We were then led off the boat to a pebbly beach where a bonfire was lit, and Afanasiï stepped dangerously near

---

<sup>11</sup> On the relationship of shamanism and music, N. M. Petrov presented interesting material that linked the *khomus* with white shamanism, and correlated its etymology to the Buriat word *khobkhon* ‘magic’. Ethnomusicologist E. E. Alekseev was creative, articulate and controversial on the parallels of rock and shamanic séance. His award-winning film on shamanism, made together with E. Novik and A. Slapinch, called “Time of Dreams,” was also presented at the conference.

<sup>12</sup> A Sakha intelligentsia tradition of theatrical staging of séances itself goes back to at least the turn of the century. The drummer was a university pedagogical division teacher, who has recently begun using skills he feels are sent from spirits to cure people.



the flames to pour an offering of vodka to the fire, singing more *algis*. Suddenly one of the better known female curers, media star Zoia Duranova appeared, dramatically dressed in a long traditional applique gown, with head beads and silver breast-plate jewelry. Coming down the narrow plank off the boat, she was singing her own *algis* at the top of her considerable lungs. When she got to our circle, she started an echo pattern of repeating Afanasiï's phrases of praise for the sun, but she didn't maintain this for long. Afanasiï retreated, and soon Zoia and her husband were ordering us to encircle the fire with stones; indeed the result was a protected and somehow more tame, human-touched fire. She walked further down the beach, still singing *algis*, trailed by a string of foreign cameramen. The sun was coming up, shimmering over the huge blue-grey Lena River. Later some of us fed another fire and danced *ohuokhay* in the woods near a sacred tree where offerings had been left for local spirits.

## Of Curers, Curing, Charlatans and Shamans

An underlying tension that at once heightened the significance of the conference and left it open to criticism as non-academic was the presence of over thirty self-professed and reputed curers and "extrasenses." A wonderfully interactive exchange occurred, especially informally, as scholars studied the curers, who were studying us, and in some cases curing us (or attempting to). Some of the Sakha curers were invited participants, ones who have proven themselves as knowledgeable in many aspects of folk healing and metaphysical techniques, only partially overlapping with shamanism. Some were people who came on their own, thrilled that shamanism was being recognized as a legitimate tradition and eager to meet and trade experiences with colleagues, as at any modern convention.

Only a few people have reputations in the Sakha Republic as current full-fledged, initiated by the spirits, *oyuun*. None of the five best known of these formally participated in the conference, although one, Vladimir Kondakov, the head of the Association of Folk Medicine, was on its planning committee and agreed to speak with foreign guests in a hall nearby on its last day. When he was asked (by Professor Kim of Korea) whether he considers himself an *oyuun*, the large, bearish,

bearded, longhaired Kondakov paused and replied, “it is possible.” The reason is simple: a true shaman does not advertise him or herself, but rather allows deeds of curing, prediction and aid to the society to speak for themselves.

Kondakov’s message was dual: (1) there were many charlatans in the republic and at the conference, and he worried that their presence would harm the credibility of a fledgling respect and effectiveness his Association was fostering; (2) traditional Sakha shamanism involved secrets of curing that are well worth study and apprenticeship. As some of his apprentices sat nearby, he enumerated six main techniques that underpin Sakha curing. A few, such as *süllärdäähin*, or ‘operation without cutting’, nearly have been lost, while others, such as *bokhsuruyuu* ‘sucking out poisons of illness’, are still common. At the start of his talk, Kondakov shocked his audience by asking one Sakha woman to leave. Later he and others explained privately that she had a reputation for mistreatment of patients, and also for writing a book which outlined, as Sakha, techniques that Kondakov and others considered preposterous or harmful. A former schoolteacher and historian, Kondakov confirmed that for him, the goal of the “rich shamanic philosophical system” is to “balance forces of the three worlds and of evil and good.” But he warned: “The danger today is that the middle world is destroying itself and the balances are out of kilter.”<sup>13</sup>

The star of the conference (for me and for many of the Sakha who attended) was Aleksandra Chirkova, daughter of a well-remembered shaman, the deceased Konstantin *oyuun*, and herself a Soviet-trained surgeon from the Abyisk region. The well-tailored, poised Chirkova recalled her father’s curing practice and his repression in 1928. Though his nine children were labelled “children of a shaman-charlatan,” she remembered him as a “person of hugely kind spirit, truly a shaman, a person with gifts from nature.” With wisdom and foresight he urged her, as his child with curing potential, to be trained in modern medicine to avoid accusations of illegitimacy and potentially to merge the best of Sakha traditional medicine with European techniques. She spent years as a Komsomol activist, oblivious to spiritual power, until recently inheriting his shamanic accoutrements and a profound understanding

---

<sup>13</sup> See also his pamphlet (Kondakov 1992a), and Balzer (1993b, 1993c) for more detail on my talks with him.

of her roots. She is now considering giving up her post as director of her region's medical establishments, to found a new center of folk medicine. She introduced a film that she had made in her father's honor by saying, "After sixty years, it is time to raise the spirits of those shamans who suffered repression, to ask their forgiveness, and to honor them." Privately, she lamented that the night of the staged shamanic vignettes, an elderly man from Suntaar had not been allowed to perform, for she felt he might have been able to accomplish this, even in a large hall. She also explained: "I can feel my father's spirit, especially when I don his cloak and beat the drum. Yes, I do this now. I do it to cure myself . . . And I'm beginning to do it for others. I want to set up a clinic for folk healing. I already have a team, a group of people who work with me. And we are curing people, using the old techniques."<sup>14</sup>

One of the people working with Chirkova is Lisa Petrova, a young woman training as a nurse, with a degree in community theater cultural work. She was introduced to me as the great-granddaughter of one of the most famous female shamans (*udagan*) in Sakha history, Alikhardaakh. Although this lineage was later called into question by others, Lisa Petrova impressed me as someone who may have some of the natural curing talents that the Russians call *dar*. She may also be a *ahagas ättäakh kihi* (person with open body), or extraordinary sensitivity. She had been ill, and first gone to see one of the famed Sakha curers of the Viliuisk region, Nikon *oyuun*, in 1974, returning the next three summers both to be cured and to observe him. "I was sick for quite a while . . . especially sick in the Fall, when all of Nature is dying. And I'm ill in Winter, but when Spring comes, I again recover." This pattern was repeated for years, until she began curing others, despite the opposition of her father, a Communist Party official, and, later, of her husband. "I tried to stop the curing, but it was my calling," she lamented.

Though she does not call herself an *udagan*, Lisa Petrova has mastered at least one of the traditional Sakha curing techniques, *bokhsuruyuu* or sucking out poisons. I asked her to work with me in my cabin on the boat, and she gave me a diagnostic full-body massage. To my surprise, she saw deep inside my body a minor physical defect that my own doctor had only recently discovered, using very fancy Western

---

<sup>14</sup> Aleksandra Chirkova's conference presentation is in manuscript, entitled "Vospominanie ob otse," which is also the title of her film. See also Il'iakhov (1992) on both father and daughter.

equipment. “Could she be a human X-ray?” I asked myself and others. The answer of several of the Sakha curers, including the former Vice-President of the Association of Folk Medicine, Aleksander Iakovlev, was that this is one of the traditional curing-diagnostic techniques that could be cultivated in certain people.<sup>15</sup>

Aleksander Iakovlev is a psychologist also trained in sports medicine. For several years, especially since the relaxation of Soviet propaganda against folk medicine, he has been working with techniques of hypnosis, breathing and trance, helping people stop smoking and drinking, among other things. He, together with the actor Afanasiï Fedorov, is also interested in promoting the curative, calming use of rhythmic drumming, and of the *khomus*.<sup>16</sup> In a popular presentation as the host of an evening organized to showcase folk curers, Iakovlev explained his conception of the difference between folk healers and actual shamans, making it clear he felt there were very few true shamans. “But both utilize aspects of hypnosis. There are two main types of hypnosis: one is the ‘inductor’ type, requiring active and close contact with a patient, and the other is the ‘prescient’ type, which encompasses far-seeing abilities (predictions) and clear-seeing (diagnostics). It is rare that one person has both of these. But some shamans did and do.”

In two public discussions, Vladimir M. Matveev also reinforced the distinction between “true natural shamans,” and more common “extrasenses,” people with sensitivities to others’ suffering through use of “bioenergy.” Matveev, looking like a *bogatir* out of the epic *Ñurgun Bootur*, is an “extrasense” who heads a community self-help group *Prozrenie* “recovery of sight, insight” to cure alcoholism, drug addiction and smoking. By his own account, he was himself a rowdy alcoholic until he decided to take control of his life and help others.

---

<sup>15</sup> In another example, a friend with one of the only “spirals,” (IUDs) in the republic said that her Sakha curer had been able to see her IUD, though she was not told about it. My position on such phenomenon is similar to that of Novikov (1992): science has much to learn from traditional medicine and from events we now consider “anomalies.” In recognition of this, a new American division has been opened at the National Institutes of Health to study traditional medicine on a scientific basis.

<sup>16</sup> This is also being fostered by people at the International Khomus Music Center, for instance Director Ksenofont D. Utkin and President Ivan E. Alekseev, master *khomus* player who rescued the instrument from obscurity and made it a symbol of cultural revitalization throughout the republic.

His influences include the Western program “Alcoholics Anonymous”; Slavic curer G. A. Chichko; A. Markova, a Suntaar curer also present at the conference; and Konstantin Chirkov, whom Matveev had known in his youth. When Aleksandra Chirkova showed her film about her father, Matveev in public testified to his greatness, saying Konstantin *oyuun*, like others of the most famous Sakha shamans, could control the weather and walk across water.

Credulity-stretching tales are typical among those who tell stories about shamans, as anyone who has worked in Siberia knows. In the weeks before the conference, a competition was launched to collect such tales, with the following appeal to potential anonymous respondents: “Freed from scepticism and the fear of being considered superstitious, share with us your riches” (Okoneshnikov 1992; cf. Novikov 1992). Behind-the-scenes conference discussions were filled with stories of shamanic feats, and also with whispered fears concerning the darker side of beliefs about spirits and shamans. I was admonished not to discuss by name the long-deceased *udagan* Alikhardaakh outside after dark, and was stopped from describing the possibly telepathic powers of a young *oyuun*, who I had visited in the Viliuisk region, by someone worried I would say his name. Naming shamans is considered by many to court their awareness. More serious, some Sakha were concerned that the conference itself was not being received well by spirits. Fears for the children of people involved in the conference were expressed. Before the conference began, I heard discussions about bad “omens.”

The expressed cause for these fears was sadly concrete. A young artist associated with the Museum of Music and Folklore had been killed several weeks previously, the victim of robbers, who had apparently dragged him from his car. His family, after he had been missing several days, had hired two Sakha with reputations as seers. One had predicted the body would turn up at a nearby lake, and another, confirming this, had even pinpointed where the body could be found. While many versions of this story circulated, some of which praised the seer(s) more than others, the gist illustrates the degree to which many Sakha, including highly educated urban Sakha, may turn to seers in a crisis,

especially when police work has failed. In this case, by most accounts, the body turned up near where the second seer had said it would.<sup>17</sup>

At the opening reception of the conference, I met a family of curers who had come from one of the outlying Sakha regions, and I was pleased to find them again two days later. The son (part-Russian, part-Sakha), a curer novice, had not been well; his mother attributed it to the “intense and electrical” atmosphere generated by “so many extrasenses and shamans.” She explained, “Too many shamans and already vampirism occurs . . . I protect myself. I put up a screen with my mind. Otherwise I could not handle it . . . But we take our energy, we Yakut shamans, extrasenses, from the sun.” This family was fascinating as proponents of the syncretism of dual curing traditions, Russian and Sakha, and dual religious traditions, Russian Orthodox and shamanism. The baptized mother, who claimed that harm befell anyone who cut her hair, emphasized that shamanism needs to have more of a moral, “even Christian,” aspect today: “People say we should not cure without medical training, but if we have talent for curing, and a moral sense, why shouldn’t we cure?”

During the official show-case of curers, I decided to let the mother, with whom I had rapport, try to “cure my tiredness.” She gave me a standard “non-contact massage,” allegedly cleaning impurities and bad energy from my whole body, from which all jewelry and metal had been removed. But I failed to feel much different, and was put in the awkward position of being asked to write something in their comment book. I thanked her for her concern and warm attention, realizing that so much of the effectiveness of folk curing, particularly in today’s chaotic atmosphere, is precisely the care lavished on people who have been sadly neglected in Soviet-style clinics and hospitals.

The show-case was a chance for many curers to come out of the woodwork of Sakha society, where they had been hiding, in some cases for years. At the invitation of the prestigious Ministry of Culture, they took over an entire building, presenting first a press conference and then smaller curing workshops with volunteer patients. Representatives from all over the republic were present, and far too numerous to fully

---

<sup>17</sup> I am purposely not explicit here about the names of my consultants or of the seers, one of whom I met and with whom I had a highly unimpressive session of pseudo palm reading.



describe here.<sup>18</sup> But perhaps the most impressive, according to Sakha insiders who saw each session, was an elderly blind man from Churapchī, Iakov I. Pavlov. He cured by a laying on of hands, in the style of the revered Nikon *oyuun* of Viliuisk. In his official statement to the crowd, he said in a quavering voice: “I wasn’t allowed to heal people, so I healed animals. I’ve done this for many years, and now have begun to heal people again, openly. I am a bloodletter and a bonesetter. I also know traditional arts of how to help children be conceived and delivered . . . I’m old now and I want to help train as many people as I can in the old ways.”

## The Politics of Culture

At the end of the conference, Sakha Republic President Mikhail E. Nikolaev received a few foreign and local participants and organizers, on the same day he entertained some South Korean businessmen. With our group, he stressed the importance of not only republic material-economic development, but also spiritual and national. He had a significant dialogue with the ethnographer Taras Mikhaïlov of Buriatia. Asked directly whether the Sakha have a “national ideology,” Nikolaev, taking the question as one on ethnic consciousness rather than nationalism, replied “Of course . . . If there is such a thing as the Sakha People, then there must be a national ideology. We have our own distinct culture, history, language.” He nonetheless suggested that Buriat ideology was “more developed,” because of Buddhism, and he contrasted Sakha conversion to Russian Orthodoxy, away from shamanism.

It was clear that Nikolaev, like many Soviet-educated people of his generation, harbors a Marxist idea of Progress that places shamanism lower on some universal scale of civilization than Buddhism. But this didn’t prevent him from being interested in the roots of shamanism, which he associated, following a few of the Central Asian as well as Sakha paper givers, with Tengrism and ancient Turkic religion. In his opening statement, he also proudly referred to the ancient and lovely

---

<sup>18</sup> Those introduced at the showcase were: A. Iakovlev; A. Markova; Ia. Pavlov; Z. Duranova; E. Gerasimov; A. Grigoreva; V. Matveev; A. Chirkova; K. Naïmova; M. Matveeva; G. Permiakova (Sakhaï).



palaeolithic archaeological site we had visited on our boat trip, Der-ingüräkh (discovered by Iu. A. Mochanov). He was understandably appropriating it as part of “interest in our past,” although it is clear that if and when any early human remains are found there, they will not have direct correlations to Sakha ancestors. Nikolaev’s official focus was cautiously on the value of studying past civilization, rather than on any current revitalization of shamanism as either a belief or curing system. Undoubtedly aware of the controversy the conference had sparked in local media, he could have avoided meeting with us entirely, but instead chose compromise, as is his style.

Both Russian and Sakha newspaper coverage of the conference was mixed, and by no means consistently positive in the Sakha papers and negative in the Russian ones. Vladimir Kondakov, who felt the conference was “premature,” was interviewed in both Sakha and Russian papers (cf. Aprosimova 1992; Kim 1992); and published his own data-filled historical article (1992b) on the Verkhoiansk shaman Gavril I. Sleptsov. Some comprehensive articles, such as A. Gogolev’s (1992c, 1992d), seized the opportunity to educate the public on the multiethnic history of shamanism and to its potential selective uses in broadening understanding of religion, medicine and ecology. A few mentioned calls for the establishment of Sakha shamanic schools, and the idea of creating in Yakutsk a “house of spirits,” to bring shamanism out of the taiga and into the city. Prior to the conference, S. Nikolaev (Somogotto 1992) slammed all trends toward a “new religion” as empty and phoney, but N. Bugaev (Bugay 1992) articulately responded: “If a scientist . . . rejects the right of his people to a spiritual culture, then are we [that people] alive?”

The Sakha intelligentsia, judging from the media, conference presentations and interviews, seem to have split among those seeing shamanism as valuable for scientific study, those wanting to tap into and reinterpret its cultural dimensions, those believing in its spiritual aspects, and those who thought the hoopla was nonsense. The cynics were a clear minority; and some individuals merged scientific, cultural and spiritual interests. Throughout the republic, thirst for diverse spiritual experience is understandable after the long Soviet draught, as the researchers L. I. Vinokurova and A. N. Zhirkov observed in their abstract for the conference, and the sociologist E. E. Gerasimov found

in survey research just prior.<sup>19</sup> Even more, people hunger for adequate medical care, notwithstanding the recent opening of an Austrian-built medical center (Spiridonov 1992). When teams from the Association of Folk Medicine go to villages for 10-day stretches, patients line up to see them with enthusiasm. Enormous gratitude for past cures was evident when I witnessed the reunion of the curer Elena Kopylova with some of her patients in one Zapadno-Kangalask village (see Figs. 1 and 2).

One of the most poignant Sakha self-criticisms came from professor Anatoliĭ Novikov, who said during a public discussion: “we are still *mankurt*,” using the Kirghiz writer Chingis Aĭmatov’s powerful metaphor about the debilitating erasure of cultural memory. But by the end, the conference itself proved otherwise, for it was precisely about the recapturing of cultural memory, and adapting it for the future. This was in part the message of Aĭza Reshetnikova in her closing remarks.



Fig 1. Sakha curers Aleksandra Grigoreva and Zoia Duranova (gesturing).  
Photo: Marjorie M. Balzer, Summer 1992.

---

<sup>19</sup> While methodological considerations are always tricky regarding surveys on religious issues, Gerasimov’s reported findings are suggestive. He also found, in republic provinces, 80% of his Sakha sample believe in shamanism as effective medicine.

It was also symbolized in the closing remarks of a young neurologist, Galina Permiakova, reputed to be a potential *udagan*, who has taken the culturally significant name Sakhay. As spokesperson for the curers officially attending the conference, she said that she hoped understanding of shamanism could be put on a more scientific basis in the near future, and that scientists would support the growth of shamanism into the next century. Sakhay was trying to bridge a gap that had become apparent during the conference, as the curers themselves divided over how much of their “secrets” they should share with perceived outsiders, who were both Sakha and foreign.

Curing the body politic of a spiritually cut up and bleeding post-Soviet society is obviously a messy and painful process, metaphorically akin to the transformation of a young shaman during *ättäni*. Thus it would be remiss not to mention a xenophobic dimension to the Sakha cultural revival, especially in connection with shamanism, and its occult, secret aspects. One evening, a Sakha man I considered a friend told me somewhat drunkenly, “We will never tell you our real secrets. At least not until after seven years.” Assuring that I only wanted to know what could be shared easily was beside the point. He was creating ethnic “us/them” barriers, in the process of convincing himself that his cultural differences were important. One of the paradoxes of the conference was that its very internationalism enabled many Sakha themselves to feel their own culture and national solidarity more strongly. But this dialectic does not mean most Sakha are national chauvinists, or are using shamanism to promote national chauvinism (Hoppál 1992: 197–209).

It was no accident that when a group of foreign scholars wanted to go on a fieldtrip to visit a working “shaman,” or at least folk curer, debate arose as to whether an Evenki rather than Sakha curer should be chosen. This was partly because the Sakha themselves have long stated that shamanism was better preserved among the Evenki, as more traditional, less urban, more “close to nature” (Balzer 1993a). But it was also because conference organizers could not easily arrange a trip to one of their true working *oyuun*, who by definition try to keep outsiders away and do not perform séances for show. In the end, the elderly, revered Sakha curer Evdokiia Semenova living near Yakutsk received the visitors. She allowed some limited filming of her home-based practise, and



Fig 2. Sakha curers, including Elena Kopylova (in striped jacket), in a Lena River village reunion with patients and friends. Photo: Marjorie M. Balzer, Summer 1992.

blessed the foreigners with a sung *algis*, accompanied by hand gestures over their heads (after she had changed into her best clothes).<sup>20</sup>

The conference confirmed and reinforced a trend well-known in Native American studies, but not yet properly appreciated for Siberian studies: that native ethnographers are making stunning contributions to international understanding of spiritual culture. Various Siberian shamanic traditions, such as Yukagir, Nivkh, Nenets and Khanty, were represented in the presentations. To reach the soul of traditional beliefs, creative kinds of anthropology, including use and analysis of poetry, film and art by Siberians, are opening new paths for all of us.

---

<sup>20</sup> See the film “Fieldnotes from Siberia: On the Land of the Shamans” by Mihály Hoppál and Lajos Nádorfi. Protectiveness concerning shamans was reflected in mixed reactions to a suggestion that the International Conference on Shamanism meet in the Sakha Republic every several years. People were honored yet concerned about invasions of foreigners, studying and misinterpreting their culture. The visit of some French journalists from the conference to a Viliuisk area shaman, and the publication of his photo afterward, has aggravated these concerns.

Official support for the shamanism conference should be seen in the perspective of the difficult struggle to balance competing cultural symbols of political allegiance in a mixed ethnic republic, where the Sakha are only about 40% of the population. A local Yakutsk town council in 1992 rejected the idea that a main street of the capital be renamed for one of the major Sakha intellectuals of the twentieth century, Kulakovskii, choosing instead to keep its antiquated Soviet name, Derzhinskiĭ. The Presidential Cultural Revival Fund had recently given money to a newly emerged Cossack group. By openly embracing the study of shamanism, with its potential, not guaranteed, validity for showing people a route to their roots, to personal health, and to community solidarity, President Nikolaev and the Ministry of Culture were hardly advocating a new state religion. But they were, perhaps unconsciously, endorsing one of the most potent of the traditional and wise Sakha beliefs: the idea that words themselves have spirit, *ičči*. For this reason, it was appropriate that on the last day of the conference, two different Sakha elders felt it important to offer prayers, *algis*, in the Sakha language. The first, from the Ust-Aldan region, was spontaneous. He said that “through the Sakha language itself comes purification and healing.” The second, from Suntaar, was scheduled into a finale mini-concert. He was the elder who had wanted, cathartically, to raise the spirits of repressed shamans to ask their forgiveness.

## References

- Afanas'ev, L., A. Romanov, R. Petrov, N. Petrov and V. Illarënov. 1990. *Ayï üörähä* [Teachings of the spirit]. Yakutsk: Sakha Käskilä. Kut-Sür (in Sakha).
- Alekseev, N. A. 1997. “Shamanism Among the Turkic Peoples of Siberia.” In Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer (ed.) *Shamanic Worlds. Rituals and Lore of Siberia and Central Asia*. Armonk: New York and London. Revised and expanded edition of *Shamanism: Soviet Studies of Traditional Religion in Siberia and Central Asia* published by M. E. Sharpe in Armonk, N. Y., 1990. (Translation of *Shamanizm tiurkoiazychnykh narodov Sibiri*. Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1984.) 49–109.
- Aprosimova, Liudmilla 1992. “Ayanim ortoturgar siljabin . . . [I am in the middle of the path].” *Sakha Sirä*, August 8, p. 5. (in Sakha).
- Balzer, Marjorie Mandelstam 1993a. “Dilemmas of the Spirit: religion and atheism in the Yakut-Sakha Republic.” In Sabrina Ramet (ed.) *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 231–251.
- . 1993b. “Two Urban Shamans: Unmasking Leadership in Fin-de-Soviet Siberia.” In George E. Marcus (ed.) *Perilous States: Conversations on Culture*,

- Politics and Nation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 131–164.
- . 1993c. “The Poetry of Shamanism.” In John Leavitt (ed.) *Poetry and Prophecy. The Anthropology of Inspiration*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 93–127.
- . 1996. “Shamans, Bear Festivals and Hermaphrodites: Gender Transformation in Siberia.” In Sabrina Ramet (ed.) *Gender Reversals and Gender Cultures. Anthropological and Historical Perspectives*. Routledge: London and New York. 164–182.
- Bugay (Bugaeu, N.) 1992. “Oborvannaia tseepochka (Rezonants stat'ia Somogotto).” *Molodezh Yakutii*, August 6, p. 8.
- Fefelova, V. V. 1990. “Participation of Indo-European Tribes in Ethnogeny of the Mongoloid Populations of Siberia: Analysis of the HLA Antigen Distribution in Mongoloids of Siberia.” *American Journal of Human Genetics* 47: 294–301.
- Gogolev, A. I. 1983. *Istoricheskaia étnografiia iakutov. Narodnye znaniia i obychnoe pravo*. Yakutsk: Iakutskii gos. universitet.
- . 1986. *Istoricheskaia étnografiia iakutov. Voprosy proiskhozhdeniia iakutov*. Yakutsk: Iakutskii gos. universitet.
- . 1992a. “Bil'irgiliu tuomnaakh ihiakh sürün torumnara [Basic aspects of the ancient ritual of ihiakh].” *Sakha Särä*, June 19, p. 7. (in Sakha).
- . 1992b. “Cultural History of the Yakut (Sakha) People: The Work of A. I. Gogolev.” *Anthropology and Archeology of Eurasia* 31(2) (Fall): 4–84.
- . 1992c. “Fenomen shamanizm v istorii religii.” *Sovety Yakutii*, January 21, p. 8.
- . 1992d. “Vklad uchenykh Rossii v izuchenie Iakutskogo shamanizma.” *Sovety Yakutii*, July 21, p. 7.
- Gogolev, A. I., A. P. Reshetnikova, E. N. Romanova, P. A. Sleptsov, Z. F. Semenova (eds.) 1992. *Shamanizm kak religii: Genezis, Rekonstruktsiia, Traditsii (Tezisy dokladov mezhdunarodnoï konferentsii)*. Yakutsk: Iakutskii gos. universitet.
- Gorokhov, S. N. 1992. “Pod davleniem sily.” *Iakutiia*, August 19, p. 3.
- Hoppál, Mihály 1992. “Urban Shamans: A Cultural Revival in the Postmodern World.” In Anna-Leena Siikala and Mihály Hoppál (eds.) *Studies on Shamanism. Ethnologica Uralica* 2. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.
- Il'iakov, Petr 1992. “Uluu oyuun olohittan [The life of a great shaman].” *Kiim*, August 15, p. 6. (in Sakha).
- Ivanova-Unarova, Zinaïda Ivanovna 2000. *Liki Shamana. Images of the Shaman*. Yakutsk: Bichik.
- Kim, Natalia 1992. “Ia chustvyiu vlianie belykh sil.” *Iakutiia*, August 15, pp. 1–2.
- Kondakov, Vladimir Alekseevich 1992a. *Ämtäähin kistälängnärättän* [A few secrets of folk-curing]. Yakutsk: Association of Folk Medicine (in Sakha).
- . 1992b. “Uyruurdaan uola [Son of Uyruurdaan].” *Sakhaada*, August 5, p. 9 (in Sakha).



- Ksenofontov, G. V. 1992. *Shamanizm. Izbrannye trudy*. Compiled, with foreword, by A. N. D'iachkova. Yakutsk: "Sever-Iug" Tvorchesko-proizvodstvennaia firma.
- Mordinov, A. 1982. "Sakhalarga filosofskay sanaa üöskäähinä [The rise of philosophical ideas among the Yakut]." *Khotugu sulus*, 7, pp. 82–9; 8, pp. 89–101; 11, pp. 80–92 (in Sakha).
- Novik, E. S. 1997. "The Archaic Epic and Its Relationship to Ritual *from Ritual and Folklore in Siberian Shamanism*." In Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer (ed.) *Shamanic Worlds. Rituals and Lore of Siberia and Central Asia*. Armonk: New York and London. Revised and expanded edition of *Shamanism: Soviet Studies of Traditional Religion in Siberia and Central Asia* published by M. E. Sharpe in Armonk, N. Y., 1990. (Translation of *Obriad i folklor v sibirskom shamanizme. Opyt sopostavleniia struktur*. 1984. Moskva: Glavnaia redaktsiia Vostochnoi literatury Izdatel'stva Nauka, 1984.) 185–234.
- Novikov, A. G. 1992. "Mozhno li vozrodit'sia shamanizm? (Itogi konkursa)." *Sovety Yakutii*, August 15, p. 4.
- Okhlopko, S. 1992. "Vvedenie pravoslaviia v Yakutii." *Iakutiia*, August 15, p. 3.
- Okoneshnikov, V. I. 1992. "Zdravstvuite, ia vash dvoïnik . . ." *Iakutiia*, August 1, p. 3.
- Savvinov, Igor 1992. "Dobryï mir *ichchi*." *Sovety Yakutii*, July 21, pp. 4–5.
- Seregina, V. 1992. "Vystavka *ichchi*." *Iakutiia*, August 19, p. 3.
- Somogotto (Nikolaev, S. N.) 1989. "Neobychnyï vzgliad po obychnye veshchi." *Molodezh Yakutii*, August 28, p. 9.
- . 1992. "Novaia religiia? Novaia podelka!" *Molodezh Yakutii*, June 4, p. 8.
- Spiridonov, Georgii 1992. "Khorosho zdes' lechit'sia, no luchshe ne bolet'." *Sovety Yakutii*, July 21, p. 6.
- Starodubskaiia, Nataliia 1992. "Postizhenie suti (Put' dolgiy. Muchitel'nyi)." *Sovety Yakutii*, August 19, pp. 4–5.

MARJORIE MANDELSTAM BALZER is Research Professor at Georgetown University in the Sociology/Anthropology Department and the Center for Eurasian, Russian and East European Studies (CERES). She is editor of the journal *Anthropology and Archeology of Eurasia* and of several books, including *Shamanic Worlds: Rituals and Lore of Siberia and Central Asia* (M. E. Sharpe, 1997). Author of *The Tenacity of Ethnicity: A Siberian Saga in Global Perspective* (Princeton, 1999), she travels widely in Siberia and has helped organize exchanges of Native American and Native Siberian leaders. Early fieldwork was with the Ob-Ugrian Khanty. Fieldwork since 1986 has focused on the Turkic speaking Sakha (Yakut) of the Russian Federation.

# ACTA ORIENTALIA

ACADEMIAE SCIENTIARUM  
HUNGARICAE

Editor-in-Chief ■ ISTVÁN VÁSÁRY

Editor ■ IMRE HAMAR

## Aims and scope

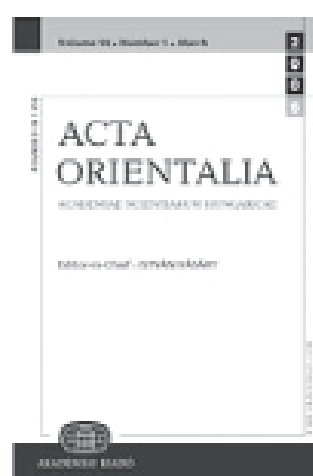
Acta Orientalia provides an international forum for original papers in the field of oriental studies, including Turkic, Mongolian, Manchu-Tungusian, Chinese, Tibetan, Indian, Iranian and Semitic philology, linguistics, literature and history.

Papers mainly in English, but also in French, German and Russian

Publishes book reviews and advertisements

## Please send your order to

AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ  
Journals Business Centre  
P.O. Box 245  
H-1519 Budapest, Hungary  
Phone: (+36 1) 464 8222  
Fax: (+36 1) 464 8221  
E-mail: journals@akkrt.hu



**FOUNDED IN 1950**

HU ISSN 0001-6446  
(print)

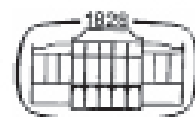
HU ISSN 1588-2667  
(online)

**Publication:**  
one volume  
of four issues annually

**2007:** Vol. 60

**Subscription price  
per volume:**  
EUR 248

incl.  
**FREE ONLINE  
access**



AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ

[www.akademiai.com](http://www.akademiai.com)  
[www.akademiaikiado.hu](http://www.akademiaikiado.hu)

## Shamanistic Studies in China: A Preliminary Survey of the Last Decade

KUN SHI

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Serious study of shamanism is a young discipline in China, but documentary evidence of it dates back probably farther than in any other place in the world. Shamanic rituals in southern and northern China alike were recorded by poets and historians well over 2,000 years ago (Fu 1988, 1990; Qiu 1985, Song 1989; Waley 1955; Wu 1989; Zhang 1990), and were inscribed on oracle bones as early as the Shang dynasty before the eleventh century B.C. (Cai 1988a; Qiu 1985). With the emergence of



Fig. 1. Yao *shigong* or shamans (Master shaman Su Yulong, left) with Kun Shi in Jinxiu, Guangxi, 1989.

Confucianism and the introduction of Buddhism, the ancient *wu* tradition (shamanism) of the Han people gradually became taboo. Despite historical assimilation and persecutions, the shamanic traditions of the minority peoples—the Daur, Ewenki, Hezhen, Jingpo, Manchu, Mongol, Oroqen, Uygur, Xibe, Yao and Yugur—have endured till today. But with a few exceptions (Ling 1934; Shirokogoroff 1935), little was published on shamanism in China before the Communists came to power (Thompson 1985). From 1949 to the late 1970s, shamanic studies were virtually prohibited, shamanism being regarded as a superstition that had to be eradicated, although some work was done within the framework of the national ethnic identification project in the 1950s. From the early 1980s, China's "open-door" policy paved the way for the study of shamanism. Since then, numerous articles, books and documentary films/videos have been produced. Some have caught the attention of such internationally known scholars as Michael Harner, Lauri Honko, Mihály Hoppál and Tae-gon Kim. But nearly all these publications are in Chinese, and are little known outside of China. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview and an assessment of the recent Chinese literature on shamanism, in the attempt to bridge the rift between the Chinese and the "others" in the field of shamanistic studies.

## Progress in Shamanistic Studies

Along with the revival of shamanic practices among ethnic minorities all across China, the last decade has witnessed a veritable revival of shamanistic studies: hundreds of publications, numerous audio-visual tapes, dozens of dedicated researchers, organizations, and ongoing programs focus on shamanism. Although many of the publications and research projects implement theories and approaches no longer current in either Russian or Western scholarship, the very volume of the publications and of the ethnographic research work of the past few years is ample demonstration of the devotion of Chinese researchers to the study of shamanism, and there have indeed been some real breakthroughs (e.g. Fu 1990; Fu and Meng 1991). This progress, made after years of academic suppression, deserves to be celebrated.

## Publications

Academic journals have carried about 200 articles on shamanism among the Altaic peoples in China. Including the shamanic traditions of some minority peoples in southern China will at least double this figure. Some of these journals, such as *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu* (Studies of World Religions), *Beifang Minzu* (Northern Nationalities), *Minjian Wenxue Luntan* (Tribune of Folklore), and *Shehui Kexue Zhanxian* (Social Science Front) are available in major university libraries outside of China. After the first book on shamanism was published (Qiu 1985), ten more books of this nature appeared within a period of four years (Cai 1988a; Fu 1988, 1990, Fu and Meng 1991; Liu and Ding 1990; Meng 1990; Song 1989; Sun 1990; Wu 1989; Zhang 1990), and several collections of shamanic scriptures, myths and ritual songs have been printed (Aisin-Gioro 1987; Jalungga 1990; Wang and Chen 1988). A promising sign is that more books are ready to go to press, including a book of photos on Tunguz shamanism, several book-length studies by Fu Yuguang and his colleagues (personal communication), and seven volumes of monographs on



Fig. 2. Oroqen shaman Meng Jinfu (Chuonnasuan) drumming and chanting with his wife as an assistant. Photo: Kun Shi, 1994.

the Daur, Ewenki, Hezhen, Manchu, Mongol, Oroqen and Xibe (Mandu 1992: 118). While some of the articles and books published offer valuable new ethnographic materials within a solid theoretical framework, most of them are written from a historical materialist perspective (which is assessed in the following section).

Worth mentioning here is the major contribution made by Fu Yuguang and his colleagues (Fu 1990; Fu and Meng 1991; Wang 1991; Xu 1987). They argue that shamanism is not the same as witchcraft and is more than just a form of religion. It was the foundation for the emergence of civilization, and traces of it can be found in our present cultural traditions. It is an important body of knowledge accumulated through history. This is the first interpretation that recognizes the shaman as the “teacher and spirit” of the people, and discovers traces of shamanic influence in philosophy, literature, art, folklore, belief systems and social laws. Shamanism, it is argued, should be preserved and cherished; shamanic knowledge should be explored and used to make our lives better. Unfortunately, this position is not yet supported by the majority of researchers, though the study of all shamanic phenomena is encouraged (Mandu 1992).

### Audio-Visual Collection

Although three ethnographic films related to shamanism were made before the mid-1960s (Du and Yang 1989), it was not until the mid-1980s that numerous video films and sound tapes focusing on shamanism began to appear. In the past few years at least a dozen documentary video films were made on the surviving shamanic traditions of the Daur, Ewenki, Manchu, Mongol, Oroqen, Uygur, and Xibe. The most notable work was done by Fu Yuguang and Wang Honggang and their colleagues at the Jilin Institute for Ethnic Studies and the Jilin Folklore Society. Their pioneering work in making a video recording of the Tunguz shamanic rituals has proved to be, in Hoppál’s words, a “classic” and “standard reference” (Siikala and Hoppál 1992: 196) for future





Fig. 3. The Manchu scholar Fu Yuguang (left) with Kun Shi in Changchun, 2005.

studies of shamanism.<sup>1</sup> Fu Yuguang and his colleagues have conducted comprehensive surveys of Manchu shamans, have made hundreds of hours of audio recordings, and have collected shamans' costumes, drums, scriptures, idols and other artifacts.

---

<sup>1</sup> The representative videos are "The Manchu Shamanic Ritual of the Guar'jia Clan," "The Wild Spirits Offering Ritual of the Manchu's Nimacha Clan," "The Shamanism of the Oroqen Wild Spirit Ritual of the Manchu Nimacha Clan," and "Idols and Genealogy." (These and other videos can be ordered from the Jilin Institute for Ethnic Studies at non-profit bargain prices.) Some of the elder master shamans who were pictured in these videos have passed away, making the record more valuable yet. For an English description of parts of the video scenes, refer to Shi (1991).

## Researchers and Organizations

Fifteen years ago and earlier, shamanism was considered a superstition in China and no one would take the risk of owning to be a researcher of shamanism. Today, shamanism has become a hot topic, and many ethnologists and folklorists (particularly those in northern China<sup>2</sup>) are proud of being part of the contingent for shamanistic studies. More and more researchers and government workers have begun to realize the cultural and social significance of shamanism. At present, there are nearly 100 researchers directly or indirectly involved in the study of shamanism. There are two centers: one at the Institute for Ethnic Studies of the Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing (headed by research fellows Qiu Pu and Mandu Ertu), and the other at the Jilin Institute for Ethnic Studies in Changchun (headed by research fellow Fu Yuguang). There is also a small group at Liaoning University in Shenyang (headed by Wu Bing-an). So far, Fu Yuguang's team has done the most solid ethnographic work, has had the most publications, and is the best known both in China and among foreign researchers. The joint effort to publish a series of ethnographic monographs on shamanism has become one of the key projects in government-funded programs of social science research. In June of 1988, the Jilin Institute for Ethnic Studies sponsored the first conference on shamanic culture ever held in China, in the course of which the China Society for Shamanic Studies was founded (with Qiu Pu as its first president). In August of 1991, the Jilin Institute organized a second conference, and plans to host an international conference on shamanism in 1994.

---

<sup>2</sup> Most Chinese researchers hold that shamanism in China exists only among the Tunguz and some Turkic peoples in northern China; phenomena of a similar or identical nature among some peoples in southern China are associated with the *wu* tradition, a so-called "primitive religion." This traditional idea is being challenged by some Chinese (Cai 1988b; Li 1976; Ling 1934; Mandu 1992; Shi 1988) and Western researchers (Atkinson 1992; Harner 1988, 1990, Hoppál in Siikala and Hoppál 1992; Waley 1955).

## Theoretical Implications and Problems

The assessment of the Chinese literature on shamanism is not meant to slight the informative ethnographic materials collected, but intends to offer Chinese researchers some thoughts on shamanistic studies that contrast with their traditional positions. I understand that some Chinese researchers (Fu 1990; Fu and Meng 1991; Mandu 1992) are aware that some of the problems I shall be pointing out deserve to be taken more seriously.

The gravest problem, to my mind, is the feverish pursuit of “theoretical arguments” within set frames of reference (Marxist or unilinear evolutionary), and their substantiation with information selected from fragmentary historical records or from incomplete field data. Past records are certainly an important source for shamanistic studies, but they should be treated cautiously, keeping in mind that they were recorded in the style of travelogues, in a society dominated by Confucianism, which despised shamanism. Except for the work of Fu Yuguang and a few others, little systematic ethnographic work on shamanism has been carried out; thus, there is a fundamental lack of reliable field data for theory building. (In the light of the forthcoming seven-volume series on shamanism, it is to be hoped that focus will shift to present ethnographic data.) As a result, there appears to be a misunderstanding of shamanic practices<sup>3</sup> (Cai 1988a; 1988b; Fu 1988; Mandu 1992; Qiu 1985; Song 1989), which has led to biased interpretations. Of course, this problem is not unique to China, being no less prominent in the former Soviet Union (Michael 1963), and a similar situation existed only a few decades ago in the West (Atkinson 1992: 307; Flaherty 1992: 208).

One of the major concerns of most Chinese researchers is to discover the origin and fall of shamanism (Cai 1988a; Fu 1988; Liu and Ding 1990; Mandu 1992; Qiu 1985; Song 1989; Wu 1989; Zhang 1990). Mainly based on textual clues and the Morganian model, they argue that shamanism emerged in the late matriarchal period, reached its prime after the shift to the patriarchal period, and began to fade during feudalism. Many of them have predicted that shamanism is bound

---

<sup>3</sup> While judging the work of Chinese researchers, we should bear in mind that China still officially advocates atheism, and the researchers are conditioned by things beyond their control. Some may have become used to prejudiced models and are reluctant to accept or initiate new ideas, even when politics is not a big problem.

to disappear in the new “socialist state” or in post-industrial societies, and are puzzled by its vitality today. The problem here is that they have generalized the diverse shamanic traditions (diverse even among the different Tunguz groups) and have lumped all of them in the same evolutionary basket. They fail to realize that shamanism, like other components of tradition, undergoes constant change and adaptation in order to survive in an ever hostile environment. The Chinese researchers have failed to answer the following questions: What facts support the assumption that shamanism emerged in matriarchal societies? When exactly was this matriarchal period and what is the supporting evidence? How much of what we know about shamanism allows us to predetermine its demise? And why is there a revival of shamanic practices and studies all over the world as modern science advances? The effort of Chinese researchers to trace the origin and decline of shamanism is highly arbitrary. It can be traced back half a million years, to *Homo sapiens*, who may have started to worship nature—a key feature of shamanism. As for the fate of shamanic traditions, they have survived not only among native “primitive” peoples, but have also developed in the most industrialized societies, such as the United States (Atkinson 1992; Harner 1990; Siikala and Hoppál 1992).

Related to the interest in the origin of shamanism is the question of the geographical distribution of shamanic practices. Except for a few people (Li 1976; Ling 1934; Shi 1988), most Chinese scholars hold the traditional view that shamanism existed only among the Tunguz and some Turkic peoples in northern China, and those spreading from Scandinavia through Siberia to Alaska. Others acknowledge the existence of similar traditions in South America and Australia (Cai 1988a, 1988b; Mandu 1992). This view is shared by many European scholars (Siikala 1978) but is challenged by others (Eliade 1964; Harner 1988, 1990, Hoppál in Siikala and Hoppál 1992; Waley 1955). While we should be careful to regard shamanic traditions as universal, we should not restrict “classical” shamanism to Central Asia, Siberia and the Arctic regions, nor regard it as unique and homogeneous. The socio-economic conditions of these peoples are drastically diverse. For example, the Manchu people are farmers and urbanites, and their social organization is highly developed (similarly to the Han Chinese); the other Tunguz peoples are largely herders and hunters, and some of them (such as the Ewenki, Hezhen and Oroqen) still enjoy a “tribal” way of life. Also, most of the Tunguz peoples in northeastern China inhabit

a cold environment with deep forests, in contrast to many peoples (including some Tunguz such as the Xibe) in Central Asia, who often occupy open grasslands or deserts. Yet, all researchers agree that all the above peoples practice shamanism. According to some scholars (Li 1976; Ling 1934; Shi 1988; Thompson 1985; Waley 1955), traditions identical to shamanism exist among some peoples in southern China. Our criteria of “shamanic” practices, thus, cannot be their occurrence in certain geographical locations, but are, rather, the “role-taking” of the shamanic figure (Siikala 1978), whether ecstasy is involved or not (Eliade 1964), and whether s/he is a “knower” (Fu 1990; Fu and Meng 1991). If we also recognize as shamanism the “neo-shamanism” or “urban shamanism” of contemporary North America and Europe (Atkinson 1992; Harner 1988, 1990; Siikala and Hoppál 1992: 179–209), we can hardly deny that shamanism also *exists* in other parts of the world and is a worldwide phenomenon. All this, however, calls for our differentiating between shamans, and mediums and sorcerers.

A major controversy of Chinese scholarship is whether shamanism is “a later form of primitive religion” and “a transitional form of religion between polytheism and monotheism” (Cai 1988a, 1988b; Liu and Ding 1990; Mandu 1992; Qiu 1985; Song 1989; Wu 1989; Zhang 1990), or a form of the Chinese belief systems and a part of its cultural heritage (Fu 1990; Fu and Meng 1991; Wang 1991; Xu 1987). Is the shaman a purely religious figure, or a figure of many functions? Ethnographic data indicate that the shaman is not only a healer and a leader of rituals, but also a transmitter of culture. This latter interpretation gives us a whole new perspective on shamanism. The shaman is no longer an “abnormal” person as most Chinese researchers suggest (although some shamans are called and initiated after serious sickness); s/he becomes a community protector and keeper of cultural traditions; s/he is believed to be able to “communicate” with nature and bring harmony to the people. Such a position is supported by Michael Harner (1990) and Mihály Hoppál (Siikala and Hoppál 1992), and is shared by Fu Yuguang (1990). This is probably why shamanism has persisted to this day, and is undergoing a renaissance.

Most Chinese researchers admit the importance of shamanism in historical terms, but are highly skeptical of it today. Some of them (Fu 1990; Fu and Meng 1991; Wang 1991; Xu 1987) have recognized shamanic traditions as a form of knowledge, and the shaman as a mediator of cultural traditions. On the other hand, even as many researchers (Qiu



Fig. 4. Mongol *bö* Serenchin (left) at his home with Kun Shi in Inner Mongolia, 2005.

1985, Song 1989; Wu 1989; Zhang 1990) are beginning to appreciate the role of shamanism in history and argue that it was not a superstition or “opium of the people,” they conclude that shamanism is no longer functional in today’s society, and is doomed to be outdated by the process of development. The former focus on the living tradition of shamanism in the context of the present, while the latter can see historical shamanism only with modern eyes.

Some of the above problems are due to a lack of information from the outside world. Before the early 1980s, almost nothing of shamanistic studies was allowed to enter China. Then came the only informative article on the study of shamanism abroad (Zheng 1983). But it was based on a limited number of sources and was restricted in its distribution, for the journal that carried the article was not for sale to the public. Recently, a 350-page collection of translated articles has been published (Sun 1990). It is a good sign for the introduction of works on shamanistic studies from outside China, but the book relies heavily on the Russian sources (eleven of the total of eighteen articles), with not enough attention given to the Western theories (there are no articles from Europe and only two from the United States by Joseph Campbell and Mircea Eliade). As a result, most book-length studies in Chinese



are handicapped when presenting “grand arguments” of the kind previously mentioned, and none has touched on the therapeutic value of shamanic healing, as practiced, for instance, in the United States today (Atkinson 1992).

## Prospects

Despite the existing problems, Chinese researchers have made tremendous strides in shamanistic studies as compared to where they stood ten years ago. Given the present revival of shamanic traditions and a fair degree of academic freedom in China, researchers there can make significant contributions to the international study of shamanism if they modify their approach enough to consider Western theories, and base their own conclusions on solid ethnographic work.

The traditional prejudice against shamanism needs to be discarded, and shamanism recognized as an inseparable component of the Chinese cultural tradition and of the corpus of human knowledge. It will then become possible to take a multidisciplinary approach to shamanistic studies, and explore the value of shamanism to the social sciences as well as to medicine. The puzzling vitality of shamanism will then become understandable. Shamanistic studies thus having proven its usefulness, more funding and support will probably be forthcoming from the authorities.

Secondly, shamanism needs to be viewed in the socio-historical context in which it grows, is assimilated, endures and revives (or, in some cases, declines). Due attention must be given to the changes and diversities of shamanism, bearing in mind that the cultural tradition of any ethnic group (unless it is completely isolated) is always changing, and is always a combination of the old and new. It is a mistake to conclude that there is no place for shamanism in urban life; examples are the neoshamans across North America and the Hmong shamans in downtown Chicago. Generalization should be avoided unless specifically supported by reliable ethnographic data.

Finally, value-free ethnographic work should be done on every aspect of the shamanic tradition, including rituals, social control, healing methods, and altered states of consciousness. Sufficient field data must be obtained before attempting theory building and comparative studies. Once the facts about shamanism have been separated from fiction, the

value of shamanism will become evident, as will the extensive influence of shamanic traditions in our lives. As Flaherty (1992: 215) has noted, it is time for researchers of shamanistic studies to recognize the discipline of shamanology.

### Update by the Author in November 2006

Since this survey article was published in 1993, tremendous changes have taken place in China in the field of shamanistic studies. Many of the problems discussed in this article have either disappeared or become less apparent. For example, greater attention is paid to fieldwork and theories based on ethnographic data, and some researchers (e.g., Fu Yuguang, Meng Huiying and Guo Shuyun) have ventured into the areas of psychoanalysis and healing practices of the shaman. At least two Ph.D. dissertations on shamanism have been published by Meng Huiying (*Zhongguo Beifang Minzu Saman Jiao* [Shamanism of the ethnic groups in Northern China], 2000) and Guo Shuyun (*Zhongguo Beifang Minzu Saman Tuohun he Futi Xianxiang Yanjiu* [A study of shamanic ecstasy and possession of ethnic groups in Northern China], 2006), and hundreds of books and documentary videos on shamanism in China have been published/produced. With continuous revival of the shamanic tradition and increasing official tolerance and support, significant achievements have been made by various organizations in China. For example, Changchun University established the first Museum of Shamanic Culture in May 2006, and Changchun Teachers College is starting an M.A. program focused on shamanic studies, another first of its kind, to enroll students in the autumn of 2007. (The present author has been associated with both institutions in Changchun, China. More details of the development on shamanistic studies in China can be found in the author's forthcoming article in the 2006 Fall/Winter issue of *Shamanism*.)

The writing of this article is financially supported by the Foundation for Shamanic Studies (FSS), P.O. Box 670, Norwalk, Connecticut 06852 (now P.O. Box 1939, Mill Valley, CA 94942). My special thanks go to Michael Harner, president of the FSS.

## References

- Aisin-Gioro Wulaxichun 1987. *Man Zu Gu Shenhua* [Ancient myths of the Manchu]. (In Manchu, with phonetic transcription and Chinese translation; the well-known “Nisan Shamaness” included). Hohhot: Mongolian People’s Press.
- Atkinson, Jane Monning 1992. “Shamanisms Today.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21: 307–30.
- Cai Jiaqi 1988a. *Lun Yuanshi Zongjiao* [On primitive religions]. Kunming: Yunnan Nationalities Press.
- . 1988b. “Shaman” and “Shamanism.” In *Zhongguo Da Baike Quanshu Zongjiao* [Encyclopedia Sinica. Religions]. Beijing: Encyclopedia Sinica Press. 325–8.
- Du Rongkun and Yang Guangkai 1989. “The Development of Video Show Ethnology in China.” *New Asia Academic Bulletin* 8: 65–73.
- Eliade, Mircea 1964. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Bollingen Series No. LXXVI. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Fu Yuguang (ed.) 1988. *Saman Jiao Wenhua Yanjiu – Di Yi Ji* [Studies on shamanic culture. Vol. 1]. Changchun: Jilin People’s Press.
- . 1990. *Saman Jiao yu Shenhua* [Shamanism and mythology]. Shenyang: Liaoning University Press.
- Fu Yuguang and Meng Huiyin 1991. *Man Zu Saman Jiao Yanjiu* [Studies on Manchu shamanism]. Beijing: Beijing University Press.
- Flaherty, Gloria 1992. *Shamanism and the Eighteenth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Harner, Michael 1988. “What Is a Shaman?” In Gary Doore (ed.) *Shaman’s Path. Healing, Personal Growth and Empowerment*. Boston and London: Shambala. 5–15.
- . 1990. *The Way of the Shaman. A Guide to Power and Healing*. San Francisco: Harper & Row. (First edition: 1980)
- Jalungga Hewenjiyun 1990. *Saman Jarin – Saman-i Bithe* [Shaman’s handbook]. (In Xibe-Manchu). Urumqi: Xinjiang People’s Press.
- Li, Yihyuan 1976. “Shamanism in Taiwan: An Anthropological Inquiry.” In W. P. Lebra (ed.) *Culture-Bound Syndromes, Ethnopsychiatry, and Alternate Therapies*. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii.
- Ling Chunsheng 1934. *Songhuaqiang Xiayou de Hezhe Zu* [The Hezhens on the lower reaches of the Songhua river]. Nanjing: Academia Sinica.
- Liu Xiaomeng and Ding Yizhuang 1990. *Saman Jiao yu Dongbei Minzu* [Shamanism and the ethnic groups in Northeastern China]. Changchun: Jilin Education Press.
- Mandu Ertu 1992. “Saman Jiao Yanjiu de Shi Nian” [A decade of studies on shamanism]. *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu* [Studies of world religions] 2: 116–25.
- Michael, Henry N. (ed.) 1963. *Studies in Siberian Shamanism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Qiu Pu (ed.) 1985. *Saman Jiao Yanjiu* [Studies on Shamanism]. Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Press.

- Shi, Kun 1988. "Shamanic Practices in Southwest China." *Temenos* 24: 121–35.
- . 1991. "Flying Drums, Dancing Shamans: Shamanic Practices among the Manchu of Northern China." *Shaman's Drum* 25: 22–29.
- Shirokogoroff, S. M. 1935. *Psychomental Complex of the Tunguz*. London: Kegan Paul.
- Siikala, Anna-Leena 1978. *The Rite Technique of the Siberian Shaman*. FF Communications 220. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
- Siikala, Anna-Leena and Mihály Hoppál 1992. *Studies on Shamanism*. Ethnologica Uralica 2. Helsinki: Finnish Anthropological Society; Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.
- Song Zhaolin 1989. *Wu yu Wushu* [Wu "shaman" and witchcraft]. Chengdu: Sichuan Nationalities Press.
- Sun Yunlai (ed.) 1990. *Saman Jiao Wenhua Yanjiu – Di Er Ji* [Studies on shamanic culture. Vol. 2]. Tianjin: Tianjin Historical Records Press.
- Thompson, Laurence G. 1985. *Chinese Religion in Western Languages: A Comprehensive and Classified Bibliography of Publications in English, French, and German through 1980*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Waley, Arthur 1955. *The Nine Songs: A Study of Shamanism in Ancient China*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.
- Wang Honggang 1991. "Guanyu Saman Jiao Wenti de Tantaoyao" [An inquiry on shamanism]. *Beifang Minzu* [Northern Nationalities] 1.
- Wang Guoxing (recorded) and Chen Junqing (chanted) 1988. *Saman Shen Ge* [Sacred songs of the shaman]. Tieling. Liaoning: Tieling Folklore Society (Circulation within China).
- Wu Bin-an 1989. *Shenmi de Saman Shijie* [The mysterious world of shamanism]. Shanghai: The Joint Press.
- Xu Changhan 1987. "Lun Saman Wenhua Xianxiang – 'Saman Jiao' Fei Jiao Chuyi." [On shamanic cultural phenomenon: 'Shamanism' is not a religion]. *Xuexi yu Tansuo* [Study and exploration] 2.
- Zhang Zichen 1990. *Zhongguo Wushu* [Witchcraft in China]. Shanghai: The Joint Press.
- Zheng Tianxing 1983. "Guo Wai Saman Jiao Yanjiu Gaikuang." [An introduction to foreign studies of shamanism]. *Shijie Zongjiao Ziliao* [References to world religions] 3.

KUN SHI has done research on shamanism since 1987. He received his M.A. in cultural anthropology from the Ohio State University in 1992 (and completed Ph.D. studies in 1995), taught at OSU and Denison University, served as program developer for social service agencies and program evaluator for Ohio's Legislative Office of Education Oversight, and currently is director of the K-12 Chinese Flagship Program at OSU.

## Book Reviews

ROY ANDREW MILLER und NELLY NAUMANN. *Altjapanisch FaFuri. Zu Priestertum und Schamanismus im vorbuddhistischen Japan*. Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens e.V. Bd. 116. ISBN 3-928463-51-9. Hamburg: OAG. 1991. 127 p.

Roy Andrew Miller, a linguist, and Nelly Neumann, an ethnologist, undertake the task of investigating the Old Japanese priestly function of *FaFuri* in all its linguistic and cultural aspects, including its relationship to shamanism.

The authors begin with cataloguing the priestly functions of *FaFuri* of yore, who served in the shrine of a certain deity in the Nara Period. As the mouthpiece of the deity, he offered animal sacrifices, played an active part in funeral ceremonies, and was entitled to reprieve those condemned to death and make them servants of the shrine. They then go on to trace the root of the word *FaFuri*, in hope that its linguistic history will reveal the original functions of this priestly office.

Nicholas N. Poppe has claimed that Altaic *\*pap* 'witchcraft, sorcery', which is attested in Turkic in the form of *ap* 'witchcraft', in Mongol in the form of *ab* 'id.', and in Tunguz in the form of *haptai* 'magician', is a borrowing of Chinese *fa* (Ancient Chinese *\*p̥iwoʔp* 'law, model, imitate'). The etymology of the word has already been discussed by such great figures of Altaistics as Martti Räsänen, John Street, È. V. Sevortian, V. I. Tsintsius and Karl Menges. Miller himself assumes repeated borrowings. A separate and substantial chapter is devoted to a detailed history of the word, to its variations and semantic connections. Based on these considerations, Miller takes it as proven that the Chinese *fa* < *\*pap* entered Proto-Altaic before the individuation of the various Altaic languages. Another chapter deals with the morphology and semantics of *FaFuri*. Here again, Miller concludes that the Japanese word is a borrowing of Chinese *fa* 'device, sorcery'.

The history of the word has Korean connections of significance for their semantic and cultural history implications. Tracing the Korean connection allows the authors to present some fascinating information on early Buddhism, and to discuss the relationship between Buddhism and shamanism.

Returning to the Old Japanese sources allows the authors to attempt a more detailed interpretation of the religious and secular powers of the *FaFuri*. They emphasize his importance in the reverence accorded to trees and parks and holy places. He was the one who purified and consecrated, for instance, the wine that was to be presented as an offering to the god, and it was through him that the god spoke to make his will known. This latter was the *FaFuri*'s most important function. His most bizarre "job" was to conduct "funeral" ceremonies in the course of which the corpse was dismembered in gardens specifically set aside for this purpose. He also offered the animal sacrifices, a relatively new practice that the Japanese had imported from China. (The authors refer at this point to Meuli (1946),<sup>1</sup> and trace the practice of animal sacrifices to the hunting customs of the Siberian peoples.) In the light of all this, they put the question of how far the *FaFuri* can be considered a shaman, if one accepts the definition of shaman given by Hultkrantz (1974), and compares the functions of the *FaFuri* with Shirokogoroff's (1935) description of the Tunguz shamans. They conclude that the *FaFuri*, too, was an "ecstatic" priestly figure, in fact, the earliest one we know of in the Altaic world.

In the parallel semantic chapter (77–78), Miller compares the meanings of Greek *νέμω* 'to distribute' of *νόμος* 'law', and of the Altaic family of words designated by *\*pap*, and offers eight methodological pointers for a semantic approach to Japanese.

Though the authors marshal an amazing wealth of linguistic and cultural evidence and point out a great many correlations, in the final analysis, their argument is not convincing.

Let us consider just their account of the word *\*pap*. Though this designation for 'sorcery, witchcraft', etc. is indeed common in the Altaic languages, it seems to me to be problematic to trace it to the Chinese *fa*, meaning 'law'. They give absolutely no indication of when and under what circumstances the assumed borrowing might have occurred, nor of at what level of cultural

---

<sup>1</sup> In my view, the authors basically misunderstand Meuli's excellent interpretation, in which he connects the Olympian (Promethian) sacrifice with the feast customarily held in honor of the slain animal among hunter peoples.



development the borrowing people must have been to adopt a word meaning 'law' to indicate 'magic'. If the borrowing is assumed to have taken place at the time of Altaic unity, what need was there to adopt a word with the meaning 'law'—a notion totally foreign to traditional shamanic activity—to describe something for which there already were plenty of verbs?

In fact, the activities and social role of the *FaFuri* differ fundamentally from those of the Siberian—in our case, Tunguz—shamans. The *FaFuri* served in the shrine of a particular god, and was that god's spokesman. The shamans are not tied to any particular spirit, and their contacts with the spirit world are on a footing of equality: they represented the interests of the community *vis-à-vis* the spirit world employing the same means as were used to get one's way with any other outsider group—force, craft, bargaining, bribes and gifts. The shaman did not offer animal sacrifice, but mediated the spiritual significance of the sacrifice: a gift offered, or a due paid. It is only their reliance on what is largely obsolete information that has allowed the authors to conclude that the shaman acts as a psychopomp only under certain restricted circumstances. In fact—as we know from research and texts that have appeared since Shirokogoroff and Harva published their findings—he is under obligation to conduct the souls of the dead in every case. Their lack of familiarity with the more recent literature stamps the authors' entire vision and interpretation of shamanism as obsolete.

For all that, the book provides some fascinating new information on early Japanese religion, and raises some very important questions. One's pleasure in reading it is compounded by the satisfaction of having a fine term, name and subject Index to refer to.

## References

- Hultkrantz, Åke 1974. "A Definition of Shamanism." *Temenos* 9: 25–37.
- Meuli, Karl 1946. "Griechische Opferbräuche." In Olof Gigon et al. (ed.) *Phyllobolia für Peter von der Mühl zum 60. Geburtstag am 1. August 1945*. Basel: B. Schwabe. 185–287.
- Shirokogoroff, S. M. 1935. "Versuch einer Erforschung der Grundlagen des Schamanentums bei den Tungusen." *Baessler-Archiv. Beiträge zur Völkerkunde* 18: 41–96.

GIOVANNI STARY (ed.) *Das "Schamanenbuch" der Sibe-Mandschuren*. Shamanica Manchurica Collecta 1. 1992. ISBN 3-447-03244-8. 180 p. TATJANA A. PANG. *Die sibemandschurische Handschrift "Der Schamanenhof."* *Die sibemandschurische Handschrift Saman kūwaran-i bithe aus der Sammlung N. Krotkov*. Shamanica Manchurica Collecta 2. 1992. ISBN 3-447-03245-6. 104 p. ALESSANDRA POZZI. *Manchu-Shamanica Illustrata. Die mandchurische Handschrift 2774 der Tōyōbunka Kenkyūsho, Tōkyō Daikaku*. Shamanica Manchurica 3. 1992. ISBN 3-447-03246-4. 208 p. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.

*Shamanica Manchurica Collecta*, a new and eminently useful series of source publications, is edited by Professor Giovanni Stary, one of the most outstanding and most prolific of contemporary Manchu scholars. The purpose of the series is to make accessible in a transcribed form all the shamanic texts extant in Manchu and Shibe, together with German translations, an index of names and terms, and where possible, facsimiles of the original texts. The volumes are likely to prove invaluable not only for the study of Manchu, but also as sources of religious history, particularly the study of shamanism. Though the roots of Manchu shamanism go back to the same beliefs and practices as the shamanism of the Siberian and Amur Valley Tunguz peoples, it acquired a special position when the Manchu tribes came to rule the Chinese Empire. Its status in the Imperial Court lent it a somewhat official hue, and it was also much influenced by Chinese popular religious practices and Buddhism.

Three volumes of the series have appeared in the very first year. Let us look at each one in turn.

Giovanni Stary himself edited the first volume, the *Schamanenbuch*. The Shibe (Xibe in Pinyin), as we know, are one of the Manchurian tribes relocated by imperial edict from their homelands in the Tsitsikar and Mergen regions to do guard duty on the Western frontier, Xinjiang, in 1763. They live there still, having retained in that foreign environment their spoken and literary languages, script and all, while in Manchuria itself, the old script is long forgotten, and the Manchu dialect is spoken only by some old timers in the villages. Along with the Old Manchu dialect and script, they have also preserved their old traditions, and the old shamanic rites and practices.

The *Shaman Book* in question was written by Shaman Elsi of the Nara clan in 1843. The first published version of the manuscript was prepared by two Shibe literary historians, Jalungga and Hewejiyun, and appeared in Urumqi in 1990 under the title *Saman jarin* (Shaman Songs). Though originally written by Shaman Eisi in literary Manchu, there are passages in the text which the editors have admitted to being unable to clarify. The manuscript is divided into two chapters. The first contains short supplications and songs for use in shaman training and initiation rites: for instance, the supplication of the candidate shaman, “the one sitting on the bench,” i.e. awaiting initiation. There are healing songs, songs inviting to the sacrificial feast, post-sacrifice songs, and a song telling of the shaman’s eighteen trials on his journey to Isanju Mama, the shamans’ principal guardian spirit. The second chapter contains a lengthy song recounting the history of the shamans of the Nara clan, the “paper fortification” rite, the shaman’s secret protective prayer, and a very long prayer for healing the sick, along with the rites that go with it.

It is very easy to distinguish the various cultural layers that have settled on top of early shamanism: for instance, in the “nine paper fortifications” rite, we find not only the various kinds of Manchu spirits, but also reference to the classical Chinese yin-yang dichotomy, to Losonhan, the emperor of water dragons, and to Buddha. We find Buddhist mantra influences in the secret protective prayer, and see the iconography of tankas reflected in the “shaman picture” depicting the shaman’s trip to the nether world, particularly if we compare it to the pictures of the related Nanais (Ivanov 1954: 275–284). There are extraordinarily interesting parallels between the guardian spirits obstructing the shaman’s progress in the nether world, and the guardian spirits depicted in the Altai Turkic *Maadaj Kara*. In both accounts, we find prairie wolves, black wild boars at the foot of black cliffs, snakes and bears (Surazakov and Pukhov 1973: 280–289). It is just these elements that are missing in the account of the guardian spirits standing in the shaman’s way given in Tatjana Pang’s *Der Schamanenhof*. Are the noted parallels a coincidence, one wonders, or are they evidence of direct influence?

The title of the original of the second volume, Tatjana Pang’s *Der Schamanenhof*, is *Saman kūwaran-i bithe* (The Book of the Shaman’s Court), one of the many manuscripts collected by the Russian diplomat and Far East scholar, N. Krotkov. The introduction gives a detailed account of the collection, kept in St. Petersburg since 1918.

The manuscript contains the songs of three shamans born in the Year of the Monkey. Written in the Shibe Manchu dialect, the songs would be difficult indeed to decipher did they not coincide, in part, with the songs noted down in the *Saman jarin* manuscript. One song starts by calling upon the gods and the spirits of the ancestors for help, continues as a plea for the shaman mirror, and then goes on to describe the spirits keeping guard over the various stages of the trip to the nether world. In this song, however, after visiting Isanju Mama, the shaman also visits Buddha, and receives a book from him. There is also a reference to the “paper fortification” rite, and to the animal spirits keeping guard over the Chinese dual hours in connection with a vague magic diagram. Most informative is the passage in which the shaman, preparing for a rite, describes one by one the pieces of magic clothing he puts on, and describes how he prepares his instruments, made of the bones of stolen animals.

The poem then goes on to describe the rites of healing, which, again, we are able to understand only with the help of the *Saman jarin*. The song is a mine of information for the names and identities of the spirits revered by the Shibe, some of which strongly suggest Buddhist influences.

The third volume of the series, that edited by Alessandra Pozzi, publishes a fascinating illustrated manuscript dating to 1771. Written by Shaman Cancing, it describes, with drawings, everything there is to know about shamanic ceremonies: the procedure, the paraphernalia, the clothing the shaman wears, and the movements he makes. The description, given in Manchu, has Chinese translations and is, as we have already noted, fully illustrated. Cancing has also recorded the songs appropriate for the various rites: the sacrifice to the sky, the night sacrifice, and the sacrifices to “the Mongolian gods.” We learn the movements of the ritual shamanic dances, and learn how to drive out evil spirits with the stuffed clothing of a deceased relative. There are pictures of the sacred willow and of the “cord of the ancestors,” the paraphernalia of the Fodo Mama rite, and of the small objects symbolizing the family members. There is no way to enumerate all the treasures this little book holds. Suffice it to note that it provides an authentic picture of late Manchu shamanism, strongly ritualized and admixed with Chinese elements though it was.

The second and third volumes contain full facsimiles of the original manuscript; the first volume gives us the sacred numbers. All the

volumes contain an Index of names. One can only look forward with eagerness to the next volume of the series.

## References

- Ivanov, S. V. 1954. *Materialy po izobrazitel'nomu isskustvu narodov Sibiri XIX – nachala XX v.* Trudy Instituta Ėtnografii im. N. N. Miklukho-Maklaia. N. S. XXII. Moskva and Leningrad.
- Surazakov, S. S. and I. V. Pukhov 1973. *Maaday-Kara. Altaiskij geroičeskij ėpos.* Ėpos narodov SSSR. Moskva: Glav. red. vostočnoj literatury.

BUDAPEST

CATHERINE URAY-KÓHALMI

## News and Notes

### REPORT ON THE FIRST CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR SHAMANISTIC RESEARCH, HELD 22–28 JULY, 1991, SEOUL, KOREA

The First Conference of the International Society for Shamanistic Research (ISSR) was held in Seoul, Korea, between 22–28 July, 1991. The conference, organized by Tae-gon Kim, president of the Eastern Office of the ISSR, had “Regional Aspects of Shamanism” as its central theme. The event was an enormous success, as more than 80 papers were presented by participants who came from more than 20 countries, and it offered an opportunity for colleagues from East and West to meet. After the opening ceremony, two papers were presented at the plenary session “Shamanism and Korean Religions” by Yee-hum Yoon and “Shamanism: Structures and Symbols” by Mihály Hoppál. The afternoon session was dedicated to the theme of shamanic performances and then there followed a traditional Korean tea ceremony. During the three working days of the conference, presentations were held in five different sections: “Shamanism and Religion,” “Shamanism and Folklore,” “Shamanism and Medicine,” “Shamanism and Art” and “Theoretical, Historical and Philosophical Issues of Shamanism.” During the last two days of the conference the participants were taken to observe some local shamanic rituals which gave a glimpse into the highly elaborate character of Korean shamanism.

Thanks are due to the sponsors of the conference, the Korean Ministry of Education, the Korean Culture and Art Foundation, the Korean Science and Engineering Foundation, the Dong-A Publishing and Printing Co. Hd., the Kyung University and the Institute for Ethnological Studies of the Han Yang University, all of which generously provided financial help to the scholars attending from ex-socialist countries. The First International Conference of the ISSR has made history, since it brought together for the first time Western and Eastern scholars in a country where shamanism is a continuous and living tradition. There





Fig. 1. A Korean shamanic ritual as performed part of the opening of the conference. Photo: Mihály Hoppál, 1991.

are plans for publishing the proceedings of the conference in Korean and Japanese. The papers given in English will be published separately, Otto von Sadvoszky having offered a generous grant for the purpose from the International Society for Trans-Oceanic Research (ISTOR). The selected papers of the Seoul conference were published in 1993 (Mihály Hoppál and Keith D. Howard, [eds.] *Shamans and Cultures*. ISTOR Books 5. Akadémiai Kiadó: Budapest; International Society for Trans-Oceanic Research: Los Angeles.)

The Scientific Committee of the ISSR (1991–1993) nominated by the General Assembly in Seoul, Korea: Vladimir N. Basilov (Russia), Rolf Gilberg (Denmark), Roberte Hamayon, Treasurer (France), Ruth-Inge Heinze (USA), Mihály Hoppál, President of the Western Office of the ISSR, acting president, 1991–1993 (Hungary), Caroline Humprey



Fig. 2. A famous Korean shamaness (*mudang*) with her helpers singing at the ceremony (*kut*) at the end of the conference. Photo: Mihály Hoppál, 1991.

(United Kingdom), Ulla Johansen (Germany), Tae-gon Kim, President of the Eastern Office of the ISSR, acting president (Korea), Juha Pentikäinen, President of the Northern Office of the ISSR, (Finland), Otto yon Sadovszky, Treasurer (USA), Bernard Saladin d'Anglure (Canada), Tokutaro Sakurai (Japan), Anna-Leena Siikala (Finland), Giovanni Sary (Italy), Fu Yuguang (P. R. China).

Founding members of the ISSR, Seoul, Korea, July 25, 1991: Eduard Alekseev (Russia), Catherine Barbier (France), Jacques Barbier (France), Marie-Lise Beffa (France), Bill B. Brunton (USA), Josiane Cauquelin (France), Ronald Chavers (Holland), Maria Silvia Codecase (Italy), John A. Dooley (United Kingdom), Dashinima Dugarov (Buriatia), Alex Guillemoz (France), Roberte Hamayon (France), Ruth-Inge Heinze (USA), Eugene Helimski (Russia), Mihály Hoppál (Hungary), Roger L. Janelli (USA), Ulla Johansen (Germany), Shin-pyo Kang (Korea), Laurel Kendall (USA), Seung-mi Kim (Korea), Tae-gon Kim (Korea), Kahili Serge King (USA),



Fig 3. A Korean shamaness in front of her “altar,” a ceremonial table with ritual offerings heaped up on it. Photo: Mihály Hoppál, 1991.

Peter Knecht (Japan), Martin Kraatz (Germany), Hyeong-gi Kwon (Korea), Heimo Lappalainen (Finland), Du-Hyun Lee (Korea), Mee-won Lee (Korea), Young-yaee Lee (Korea), Seiichi Matsumoto (Japan), Hui Qin (China), Il-young Park (Korea), Sang-kyu Park (Korea), Alessandra Pozzi (USA), Otto von Sadovszky (USA), Bernard Saladin d’Anglure (Canada), Geoffrey Samuel (Australia), Giovanni Sary (Italy), Frank M. Tedesco (Korea), Takashi Tsumura (Japan), Gábor Vargyas (Hungary), Manabu Waida (USA), Snježana Zorić (Croatia), Takako Yamada (Japan), Kinichi Yamashita (Japan), Dawn-hee Yim (Korea).

BUDAPEST

MIHÁLY HOPPÁL

REPORT ON THE "SHAMANISM AS A RELIGION: ORIGIN, RECONSTRUCTION  
AND TRADITIONS," CONFERENCE, HELD AUGUST 15–22, 1992,  
YAKUTSK, RUSSIA

A conference on "Shamanism as a Religion: Origin, Reconstruction and Traditions" was held during the week of August 15–22, 1992, in Yakutsk, the capital city of the Independent Republic of Sakha. It was the first time that a conference held in Siberia could be openly dedicated to shamanism. Over a hundred researchers, scholars and speakers from all over Russia participated, and it was a particularly welcome addition to see representatives of small nations where shamanism has endured until recent times attend in large numbers. Some forty foreign (American, Canadian, Japanese, Korean, French, Finnish and Hungarian) scholars took part as well. The conference was a great success, for most of the leading figures of present-day Siberian shamanistic research (e.g. V. P. Diakonova, V. N. Basilov, Iu. B. Simchenko, E. S. Novik, and T. M. Mikhaïlov) were present, and expressed their views at the plenary session. The published material included about 130 very interesting abstracts, some shorter and some longer, all of them containing heretofore unknown data. The wide range of topics and the wealth of new information made one realize how much research work there is still to be done. Totally new, surprising and highly valuable results were reported in a number of areas. For example, in Siberian ethnomusicology, O. Seinkin and his students are working on systematically mapping the characteristics of shamanic musical dialects, the types of drums that are used and their acoustic features.

Particularly striking were the presentations centering on Siberian and Central Asian shamanism as a historical and cultural phenomenon (T. M. Mikhaïlov), and those on ancient Turkic *Tengrism* (belief in *Tengri*, the god of the skies), given by B. Kazimov and F. S. Baritsu. Several studies were presented on Siberian pictographs depicting shamans (by D. Sarvinov, A. Martinov and V. Kubarëv), which, along with archaeological finds, can help establish the time when Siberian shamanism came into being. Based on archaeological finds, some researchers, like A. Vazenov and S. Kisteneev, have traced early shamanism back to the fourth millennium B.C. Russian researchers are ever more of the opinion that ancient Iranian culture

had a great deal of influence on the peoples of Siberia, that this influence was strongest in the area of religion, and that this explains the many similarities between ancient Iranian and Siberian shamanism (A. V. Zaporozhenka). Other scholars go even further, and attribute “white shamanism” in its entirety to Indo-European and Paleo-Siberian contacts (D. Dugarov, K. Gerasimova, E. Romanova).

A number of talks dealt with the traditional narratives performed by the shamans, i.e. with the somewhat neglected fact that in certain Central Asian, primarily Turkic societies, the shaman himself was the narrator of the epics (A. Khudiakov, H. Korogli, R. Sultangazeeva, V. Nikofova). Regrettably few presentations dealt with shamanic symbolism. All the more welcome, therefore, were exceptions such as A. Tabishalieva’s paper on the shamanic ornamental motifs used in Kirghiz folk art; the two in-depth studies on the symbolic meaning in shamanism of “sex interchange,” i.e. transvestism (V. N. Basilov, and B. Saladin d’Anglure); and the research reports on the morphology of the shaman costume (L. Pavlinskaia).

Several presentations dealt with shamanic accessories (drums and symbolic weapons); others reported on research on shamanism as it was practiced among specific peoples, for example the Evenek (P. Slepov, A. Petrov, A. Alekseev). A number of talks centered on the works of the greatest researchers of Siberian shamanism, S. D. Maĭnagashev, G. V. Ksenofontov, B. E. Petri and Maria Czaplicka.

On the third day, the conference was moved to a ship sailing on the Lena River, giving the participants a chance to admire the beautiful Siberian countryside. One day, at dawn, the participants attended the sun-greeting ceremony of a “white shaman.” It was an invigorating experience. On board, they continued to view ethnographic documentaries on video, and to engage in productive discussions.

One evening the participants saw an hour-long theatrical presentation of a shaman play in several acts. The play was a reconstruction of original folklore material. The players acted out the initiation of a new shaman, the rituals of healing, and a joint shaman festival with nine shamans beating their drums simultaneously. The costumes and the drums were authentic replicas, the drum-playing, the dances, the movements, the songs and the lyrics were all reproduced from authentic folklore, making the performance a modern rendition of the ancient traditions. This type of re-awakening (or enlivening, as the drums must be brought to life for the ceremony) helps to strengthen the feeling of

ethnic identity. All in all, the participants experienced an upsurge of Sakha consciousness, of which shamanism, the religious ideology of ancient Sakha, is an essential part.\*

BUDAPEST

MIHÁLY HOPPÁL

---

\* See also Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer's review article in the present issue of *Shaman*.



