études mongoles & sibériennes centrasiatiques & tibétaines

Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines

46 | 2015
Études bouriates, suivi de Tibetica miscellanea

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OpenEdition Journals

Electronic version
URL: https://journals.openedition.org/emscat/2510
DOI: 10.4000/emscat.2510
ISSN: 2101-0013

Publisher
Société des études mongoles et sibériennes

Electronic reference
Marina Sodnompilova and Vsevolod Bashkuev, "Diseases and their origins in the traditional worldview of Buryats : folk medicine methods", *Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines* [Online], 46 | 2015, Online since 10 September 2015, connection on 10 March 2026. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/emscat/2510 ; DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/emscat.2510

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Diseases and their origins in the traditional worldview of Buryats : folk medicine methods[1]

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Introduction

1 The nature of diseases in the traditional beliefs of the Mongolian peoples is a complex, ambiguous and generally understudied phenomenon. This paper seeks to answer the following questions :
-What is “disease” as realized by a man of traditional culture ?
-What state of human organism the Buryats considered as unhealthy ?
A search for answers to these questions determines the necessity to study the traditional Buryat perceptions of the origins of some widespread illnesses. Another interesting issue is Buryat understanding of the ways by which infectious diseases spread. All this data help better grasp the logic of magical methods, rituals and rational practices of Buryat folk medicine. For the first time this paper presents a number of folk healing methods recorded by the authors during field research in one of the Buryat ethno-territorial groups, the Zakamna Buryats living in the mountainous area in the southwest of the Republic of Buryatia.

2 A number of ethnographic, historical and sociological works considered health problems of the Mongolian peoples, particularly Buryats. However, in all these studies the problem of diseases was viewed in the context of Tibetan medicine. Tibetan medicine is traditionally considered the folk medicine of not just Buryats, but peoples of Mongolia too. In reality, however, it differs from the folk medicine of the Mongolian peoples since it is based on a scientific foundation of the Buddhist tradition. In this

connection we specifically accentuate that the goal of this paper is to study folk and everyday medicine of the Mongolian peoples. Mongolian folk medicine practices represent a heritage of the centuries-old culture of nomadic cattle herders and hunters, whose knowledge of healing and bone-setting were accumulated in observations of animals and assistance to them. Since the ideological foundation of folk medicine was mainly formed according to Shamanist ideas and practices, most of the existing historiography concentrated around activities of Shamans, healers, bone-setters and conjurers.

3 The problem of diseases was analyzed in the context of some relevant research problems. For instance, attention was paid to diseases and their causes in the course of analysis of the Shamanist pantheon. Information about the diseases appeared as part of historical and ethnographic descriptions of certain ethnic groups and nationalities of the Mongolian world. Describing Western Buryat Shamanist pantheon M. N. Khangalov pointed out a whole group of deities, characterized in the traditional worldview as malicious spirits and gods, whose function is to send diseases to the people. He also described Buryat folk treatment methods and magical skills mostly characteristic of Shamanist practices.

4 G. N. Potanin and Ts. Zhamtsarano also left many descriptions of diseases spread among the Mongolian peoples in the late 19th-early 20th centuries and methods of their treatment. The everyday folk medicine of the Buryats with both its rational and irrational treatment methods was studied in the works of G.-D. Natsov, L. Linkhovoin, N. L. Zhukovskaya, G. R. Galdanova, S. G. Zhambalova, T. T. Badashkeeva and other researchers. For example, studying the traditional nutritional system of the Zakamna Buryats G. R. Galdanova comes to the conclusion that it was the healthy and nutritious food of the taiga and highland zones of southwest Buryatia that contributed to good health of the local population. T. T. Badashkeeva paid much attention to the activities of a specific group of healers — the *bariachi* bonesetters. Studying Buryat hunting S. G. Zhambalova turns to medicinal properties and the use of elements of spoils of the chase (bear fat, velvet antlers, fresh water seal's fat) for treatment of various diseases. It should be noted, however, that the aforementioned studies are related to data collection period in the study of Buryat traditional culture. As such, they mostly contain field materials gathered by their authors, awaiting specific scientific scrutiny. From this viewpoint, in the context of this paper these publications can be treated as primary sources.

5 The study by K. M. Gerasimova analyzes life protection rituals in the Buddhist tradition. Studying Buddhist cultic texts, K. M. Gerasimova traced the way in which Buddhists enhanced ancient traditions of magical protection of humans within the context of Buddhism's primary objective that was to establish the authority of the "Yellow Faith" among Central Asian peoples.

6 Since the Buryats perceived diseases as malignant activity of other world's creatures or people practicing magic, special attention in the traditional culture was paid to preventive measures. These included rites, ritual activities, making of protective charms and jewelry, and decoration of clothes or their parts with ornaments depicting protective symbols. In this connection we also included studies on Buryat decorative art, musical and dancing culture[2] into the framework of this paper.

7 However, despite the existence of scientific works on Buryat folk medicine, the nature of the diseases as reflected in the traditional Buryat worldview, causes of diseases, their

typology and traditional methods of their treatment still represent an insufficiently studied field and, therefore, require closer scientific attention.

Denotation of diseases in the language

8 In the Mongolian languages the denotation spectrum of sickness or ailment is rather broad. *Übshen* (Bur.), *gem*[3] (Bur.), *övchin* (Mong.) denote "sickness, illness, ailment" (Butanaev 1996, p. 6).

9 A group of other meanings associated with the above mentioned terms attracts attention. They are "vice", "deficiency", "taint", "harm" and "hoodoo," which points at the principal attribute of diseased human condition in the worldview of the Mongols, that is, a violation of integrity of the human body, organism as a whole, and a deviation from the norm. Interesting information about early beliefs reflecting the condition of a sick man is provided by the contemporary analysis of terms' semantics. In particular, the semantic analysis of the root *ot* and its variants *ut/üt/Et/it* carried out by E. V. Sundueva led us to the following conclusions. The archaic figurative root *ot* with the meaning of "something gnarled/bent" is associated with an entire group of terms, among which we are particularly interested in [Bur.] *übde* / [Mong.] *övd / övde* in the already known meaning "to be sick, to ail," but originally denoting "to be bent with pain."[4] The Mongol word *övdög* "knee" belongs to the same group of terms with the common meaning "something bent." Interesting in this connection is one of the treatment methods used by Kalmyks in order to cure hordeolum externum (stye). It could be treated by putting a sore eye to a knee three times followed by a mandatory spell *övdg övdgen av,* which literally means "a knee, take away the illness" (Sharaeva 2011, p. 70). Obviously, the terms denoting illness ascend to depictive roots.

Symptoms of a disease. Disease typology

10 The traditional worldview of the Mongolian peoples, particularly Buryats, defines that any disease is a negative consequence of a human contact with the other world ; a result of human violation of taboos that determine the interactions of the world of men with that of deities and spirits. In this connection it is necessary to divide diseases into two types :

11 1. Mild illnesses, the causes of which people could understand. For their treatment age-old methods and medicines were used. In particular, such illnesses included various traumas (wounds, bone fractures, cold) ;

12 2. Serious and epidemic diseases, the nature of which was unknown to people (fever, smallpox, anthrax, plague, rabies, venereal diseases, paralysis). Their treatment, as a rule, required magical means and methods, such as various rituals and conjurations.

13 It is important to know what state of a human organism was considered by the Buryats as diseased. Besides visible causes of a disease, such as injuries, traumas, fractures, and cold, the main features of the diseased state of the organism were torpidity, drowsiness, apathy to the things around and, contrastingly, excessive agitation and anxiety. Evidently, Buryats considered sick any unusual state of organism. For example, rapid heartbeat was considered illness and even on such an insignificant occasion Western Buryats deemed it necessary to stick a sheep as a sacrifice to gods

(Zhamtsarano 2001, p. 44). Breathlessness and nausea, usual symptoms during pregnancy, also were considered sickness and required treatment by offering numerous sacrifices to gods (*ibid*., p. 340). This high susceptibility to anything unusual, including the state of organism, was a consequence of huge influence of Shamanism on people's lives. As T. M. Mikhailov rightly stated, "Shamans took great pains to make believers assess as many real things, phenomena and events as possible from the standpoint of their beliefs and directly through the prism of their religious feeling" (Mikhailov 1987, p. 58).

14 The above mentioned symptoms of the sick state — drowsiness and apathy — caused specific concern of the people around since they pointed at the absence of soul in a person.[5] As is known, in the prism of traditional worldview a disease is a temporary separation of soul from body. The soul accidentally leaves the body as a result of scare or is forcefully extracted by the will of some deity. The longer the soul is outside the body, the more dangerous the situation gets for the sick man. Finally, the absence of soul would result in death of a person. Return of the soul was the purpose of special rituals performed by both shamans and lamas. According to Shamanistic beliefs, it was not always possible to return the soul because not every shaman possessed necessary qualities using which he could reach an agreement with deities or, as a variant, deceive them and return the soul back to a sick person. Death occurred when the stolen soul was imprisoned in Erlen-khan's dungeon from where there was no return.

Causes of diseases

15 The traditional worldview explains origins of serious and infectious diseases by the maleficent activity of supernatural creatures among which the man dwells. "Spirits of diseases had different ranks and titles, such as *tengri, noion, burkhan, khatan* and so on" (Mikhailov 1987, p. 20). According to the beliefs of western Buryat shamanists diseases were mostly spread among people by a group of "evil eastern *tengri~tengeri* [celestials]" or "eastern *khad*" led by Erlen-khan, the lord of the underworld. In the human world diseases spread with fogs, which the traditional Buryat worldview considered negative natural phenomena.[6]

16 Among the eastern *tengri~tengeri* there are deities whose function is to spread various diseases. In particular, there are Hozhiringi-dolon-tengeri, or seven deities of Hozhiringi, sending various contagious and non-contagious diseases on people and cattle. Each of them has its own name and is a master of a certain disease.

17 For example, Khamshi-Khara-tengeri sends the diseases known to Buryats as *khamšig* (tuberculosis) and *khimshin* (a variety of scurvy), causing coughing. Bomon-Khara-tengeri sends the disease called *bomo* (anthrax). Okhin-Khara-tengeri does harm to people and domestic cattle. She strikes men and women with infertility and sends genital diseases, especially female. Her wrath kills women in labor and pregnant women. An awful deity was Ganzu-tengri, the master of rabies. M. N. Khangalov recorded various names of this disease : *shüder[shödör]-ganzu* (derived from the term *shüder*, which means tether), when a sick animal turns around as if tethered, and *nokhoi-ganzu*, or "dog rabies." A shaman called Alia khatun, Gemi-ezhin, Gegui-noion and Gagui-khatun is believed to be the deity of sexual diseases (Zhamtsarano 2001, pp. 81-82).

18 A disease may be caused by deities and spirits, whose nature is generally benevolent. This happens in a case of breaking the rules set for contact or communication between men and supernatural creatures. For instance, guardian spirits of water bodies send diseases upon people if they come for water at night disturbing peace. The same happens if people contaminate waters by using dirty vessels or washing clothes there. The guardian of the hearth punishes human disrespect by sending various skin diseases. Probably that is why in the names of some skin diseases there is a component *gal* meaning "fire". For instance, it appears in the name of shingles *gal namarkhan*. K. V. Vyatkina provides an example when a curse Ündür-Gegen addressed to the Uryankha (one of the Mongolian tribes) was spread to people via their hearth's fire. Ündür-Gegen wished the Uryankha, his *shabinar*s, who butchered his old blue cow the following, "Let you be struck by severe ulcers." "First, a family in the yurt, where the meat of the butchered cow was offered to the fire was afflicted. Others got infected because they took fire from this yurt" (Galdanova 1992, p. 247). As we see, the disease known as *tav* or "scabs" was spread via fire.

19 Local guardian spirits dwelling on sacral mountain tops can punish with disease a woman or an outsider violating this spirit's territorial boundaries. Disease as punishment may be sent by various family guardian spirits, the *ongon*, if they are treated the wrong way. A woman is most often a subject of punishment of supernatural forces, since her position in society was most limited by the traditional normative system and various taboos. For instance, if a woman accidentally violates the borders of the sacral space of the yurt where the *ongon* of the householder are placed, she may feel headache, get sore eyes and throat (the authors' archive).

20 Befouling *buzartakha, khülhekhe* is among the widespread causes of diseases.[7] A person could get befouled as a result of contacts with unclean people, objects and animals, by eating foul food and visiting foul places.[8] Women were considered unclean during menstruation and after delivery, especially in the first three days. Food cooked by a woman in these days was also considered foul. A house where a man died was also believed to be foul for a certain period. Anything or anybody inside such house was unclean too. Men, especially, remarkable individuals, associated with the outer world in this or that way, such as shamans, lamas, blacksmiths, tale-tellers, elders and those who passed a Buddhist purification ritual, were especially prone to befouling. Rich and powerful people, such as *noion*s, also tended to avoid foul places (Natsov 1995, p. 37). That is why everywhere in the Mongolian world it was strictly forbidden for women to touch belongings of shamans and blacksmiths or enter their dwellings and blacksmith's shops. There were many examples, when after getting befouled, a shaman lost his magic powers and could even die.

21 Evil spell and hoodoo were essentially the same as befouling. The Mongol society was afraid of black shamans, people capable of sending curses upon their neighbors and marginal persons, such as single women and men and cripples, whose malice or envy could lead to illness. Such people were not invited to children's holidays and weddings.

22 At the same time people capable of extolling the good and by doing this invite disaster were also feared. The Mongols called such people *tsagaan khel am* "white tongue" or "white mouth" and *tsagaan chötgör* "white filth." They were feared even more than detractors called *khar khel am* or "black tongue" (Zhukovskaya 1988, p. 89).

23 One of the frequent causes of disease was “disrespect” or “disregard” of humans to deities and spirits. As M. N. Khangalov puts it, the cause of soul loss by a person often was failure to offer sacrifice (Khangalov 1959, p. 214).

24 The Mongols believe that some diseases can be caused by a disturbance in the established order of interaction between members of the traditional society. For instance, mastitis in a breastfeeding woman could be related to such “socially” caused diseases. All Mongolian peoples share the same view on the cause and culprit : it is a woman’s elder brother who did not make her a present on occasion of childbirth. The Mongols believed that as soon as the man corrected his mistake, the woman would recover.[9]

Methods of treatment

25 The essence of treatment almost always involved remedying the situation — *zahakha* and removing obstacles *zai gargakha.* The situation was remedied in various directions. First of all, shamanists would turn to a shaman for advice, while Buddhists would go to a lama. Then a sick person was cleansed of abomination and treated using rational and magic methods : performing necessary rituals, donating to a temple.

26 One of the most important and necessary stages of treatment used for curing various diseases was *sagaalkha*, *aryuulkha* ritual, which meant “cleansing” using sacred plants and water of healing springs. The significance and power of this ritual can be inferred from the consistent plot of Buryat heroic epics where the magical cleansing of dead protagonist’s bones brought him back to life.

27 The Mongolian peoples respected coniferous trees, especially juniper *arts,* silver fir *zhodoo / yodoo*, and *aya-ganga* grass (wild thyme). These plants were traditionally used as a cleansing remedy. Juniper fir needles were procured by men, who performed cleansing rituals similar to hunter’s ones before going cropping. Juniper was procured in remote places far from settlements. They were called *aryuun gazar* or “clean place” where people do not enter. Such localities, unspoiled by humans, give special sacral power to plants. The cleansing power of the plant gathered in a sacred place outperformed capacities of an ordinary shaman. The Khakass people would say on this occasion, “Wild thyme is better than a bad shaman” (Vyatkina 1960, p. 35).

28 If juniper could be gathered by commoners, it was strictly forbidden to touch silver fir trees without a special right to do so. Shamanism allowed gathering silver fir bark only to those men, whose ancestors were involved in this trade. As M. N. Khangalov wrote, “One has to have a hereditary right even to flay a silver fir. A man without such ancestry has no right to take silver fir bark used for religious services. It is a sin and he should not touch a silver fir tree” (Khangalov 1959, p. 159).

29 In curative magic cleansing with the smoke of sacred trees usually was not enough. It was also necessary to use water from sacred springs and stones from various mountains. The number of springs from where water could be taken and the number of stones could vary from 3 to 5 to 9. There were several cleansing rituals using water and stones : *uhan tarim, shuluun tarim, gal tarim, yehon tarim*.[10] The ritual was performed by *tarimchin* shamans (conjurers). Spring water was boiled in a caldron. Special herbs, silver fir and birch bark were brewed in this water. Stones were warmed up. A twig made from herbs, birch, willow, pine, and silver fir branches was soaked in boiling

water. A patient was beaten with this twig until sweat appeared. This was a sign that disease started to leave the body. This method of treatment has a rational basis as it is akin to a sweat bath.

30 Performing an *üliger* epic or fairy tale to a sick person was a unique treatment method (Galdanova 1992, p. 246). There was one peculiarity : not just any good tale-teller could help the patient. It required a kin tale-teller. Whether an *üliger* or song rhymed speech was related to the sacral language form in contrast to the profane speech. Performance of *üliger* or songs (especially at wedding parties) had a purpose to endow the listeners with the power of life, remedy problems, for example, summon rain amidst drought. It could also endow a person with children. This is proved by a wishful words recorded from the Urats (Urad) of Inner Mongolia. The best singer at a wedding was told, "Always perform songs having seventy beginnings and sing so that the number of your relatives will become abundant" (Naranbat 1992, p. 67). When songs are performed, spirits of lands and water are happy. In this connection women attend the Mongolian Oirat annual mass veneration ritual *ova* (*oboo*) at a sacred mountain wearing nice clothes and sing songs to awaken the nature from winter sleep.

31 Resort to magical methods of treatment took place during epidemics. Buryat understanding of the nature of these diseases is of particular interest. Some diseases had "divine/heavenly origin. In other words, such diseases were sent upon people by Heaven and supreme deities. Zakamna Buryats considered the infectious disease called *khorkhiroo* spreading from wild animals to domestic cattle rabies to be sent by Heaven (Van Gennep 1999, p. 49). Western Buryats believed that rabies had a heavenly origin. A number of diseases causing paralysis *halkhi / halshi / halti daarikha* apparently had divine origins. Origins of this disease can be traced in its very name, which literally means "hit by the wind." In contemporary ethnographic material such diseases as poliomyelitis and blood stroke are related to this group.

32 Smallpox that followed the Russian settlers and claimed many lives was included into the number of heavenly diseases. Zakamna Buryats called smallpox "The White Deity" (*sagaan burkhan*). Western Buryats called smallpox *hahai*. In the beliefs of Western Buryats this epidemic disease was sent down to earth by the eastern *tengri* to collect a tax in human souls. Each settlement or family had to pay the eastern celestials "tribute" or *alban* in lives of their family members or neighbors. If a person sick with smallpox was in the house, he or she was referred to as *albanda khebte* or "lying down as tax" and *ulaan khubi aba* "this one got a red share" (Khangalov 1958, p. 457).

33 The Buryats believed that these diseases could be defeated by befouling. The "master" of the disease was the object of befouling. Personification of the disease facilitated perception of the phenomenon a man could not understand. Having determined his adversary a traditional society man turned to methods, the efficiency of which was already known. In order to befoul the disease various "unclean" objects were utilized. For instance, these could be feces of wild animals, such as wolf, a fox's snout, cemetery soil, human bones to be burnt to fume patients. A rare disease called *khulgana übšen*[11]or tuberculosis of submandibular gland could allegedly be treated by touching the sore place with an unclean object, such as afterbirth stolen from a new mother.[12] Being befouled by the "unclean" person, the disease was expected to loosen its grip.

34 Apparently some magical methods of treatment had certain rational elements. Some of them are still in use nowadays. For instance, there is a peculiar method of treating a sick person by covering with warm internal organs of a specially butchered animal

(sheep or horse) and wrapping in its hide. It was widespread among the nomadic cattle breeders. The method was considered efficient for the treatment of certain diseases, such as cold-related diseases and bites of poisonous snakes. Nowadays this treatment is used to remedy cancer patients whom the contemporary medicine is unable to help.

35 As scholars and travelers of the past noted, Buryats in general suffered from very few diseases. Diseases that Buryats suffered from in the past were largely related to their specific economic activity, everyday life and nutritional peculiarities. In addition to epidemic diseases, there were such widespread illnesses as fever, local fever (*haluun übšen*) and scald head. Many diseases were brought in the Buryat environment from other regions in the course of colonization.

36 Climate and physiographic conditions of the region contributed to good health. The traditional Buryat nutritional complex undoubtedly supplemented benevolent health forming factors. It is characteristic that plants and products of animal origin used as medicinal ingredients were present in everyday Buryat ration.

37 The most widespread health problems were cold-related diseases. For their treatment various remedies and methods were used. Various dairy products were widely used as medicine. In the case of uncomplicated disease progression a popular remedy was *aarsa*, a nutritious and tasty milk beverage, a product of milk vodka distilling. A sick person drank large amounts of hot *aarsa* and then, naked, went out of the house to do some physical labor until wet with sweat. Coming back to a warm house the patient had to lie down in the bed under a thick blanket. Afterwards, the illness usually was cured. *Aarsa* was considered a very good remedy for gastric distresses restoring gastrointestinal microflora. Like hard pressed cheese *khuruud*, this beverage helped enhancement of teeth (the authors' archive).

38 Winter periods witnessed frequent cases of frostbite. To treat frostbites the blistered parts of skin were punctured by a red-hot needle to let the liquid out. Then the affected area was covered with *bozo* — a by-product of milk vodka distilling used for making *aarsa*.

39 Properties of mare's milk had special significance in the Buryat traditional medicine. It was used as a general tonic in the treatment of various diseases and as an eliminant. For these purposes a cloth folded 2-3 times was saturated with heated mare's milk. A sick person was wrapped in it and stayed like this until the cloth got absolutely dry. This treatment had to be repeated several times (the authors' archive).

40 Among meat products preference was given to horse meat and mutton. Horse meat had a warming effect and its consumption was extremely necessary during cold winters. Mutton was very highly valued by the Buryats. Mutton broth was usually prescribed as a recuperative remedy for sick people or new mothers. There was also a very special attitude to game. Meat of wild animals feeding on many good plants in the taiga was highly valued in Buryat diet as a source of vitamins. As is known, the Buryats usually ate slightly undercooked meat because only in this case all its health properties were retained. Squirrel meat was used as a general tonic. Buryats believed that squirrel meat was rich in vitamins because a squirrel feeds on various foods. Zakamna Buryats called squirrel meat *khangai khesheg* or "taiga wealth, happiness" and never neglected this product. The elderly specifically liked squirrel meat. Wild boar and bear meat were highly valued. Bear meat and fat were very good for the treatment of various lung diseases. Hard wild boar's bacon was considered a delicacy very good for strengthening

teeth. According to Buryat beliefs, the curative properties of the game were explained by the peculiarities of their diet. Unlike domestic cattle, wild ungulate animals "feed on the best grass" *nogooni deezhe idene* (the authors' archive).

41 Buryats drank fresh "live" blood of animals for the treatment of a number of diseases. Wolf's blood was considered to be especially curative. It was recommended to drink blood for the treatment of anemia and tuberculosis (the authors' archive).

Rituals

42 Protective magic used for the benefit of man and protection of his life and health from the influence of maleficent supernatural beings occupied key positions in the religious practices of shamans.

43 1. Propitiating and blessing rituals

44 The main activities that could prevent or cure diseases were propitiating and blessing rituals performed in honor of various deities. Rituals were used to directly appease the masters of the diseases or to seek protection of higher ranked deities from their malignant actions.

45 Western Buryat shamanists treated "secret" (genital and venereal) diseases only with rituals directly addressing the master deities of these diseases. They were offered milk vodka, white stud-ram or stallion. Ts. Zhamtsarano wrote, "They do not know other cures."

46 2. Life ransom rituals

47 In the religious practices of Buryat shamanism a soul ransom ritual *dolio* was widespread. T. M. Mikhailov relates it to psychotherapeutic methods of treatment. Usually an animal, a goat, sheep, cattle or horse was offered to the deity sending the disease in exchange for the patient's soul. However, sometimes the "addressee" was not satisfied with such an exchange. Then a soul of another man, a relative or neighbor was offered in exchange for the soul of the patient. It happened so that the closest relatives of the sick person voluntarily agreed to die instead. Yet, in most cases a man who the shaman selected as a sacrifice did not know about it. "A shaman secretly agreed with the sick person or his family members about ransom of his or her soul by some relative or neighbor, who, obviously, did not know about it" (Mikhailov p. 168). In the past, as M. N. Khangalov and T. M. Mikhailov assumed, a man destined for *dolio* was literally sacrificed and, possibly, such rituals were still performed in the late 19th-early 20th centuries.

48 The *dolio* ritual was performed only by a black shaman. That is why black shamans were feared and disliked by the Mongols. The practice of "soul ransom" was usual for shamanist Buryats and for such malicious sorcery, "catching" and "devouring" human souls shamans often were put on trial by the community. Sometimes the community trial sentenced black shamans to death.

49 Another typologically similar ritual was called *töön tabikha.* This ritual was performed when a small child was sick. During this ritual some components of the ritual kit (pieces of tinder) were given names of the elderly women in the settlement, passing the disease to them in the process. Then the tinder was burned. The one that burned faster than

others meant that the woman whose name was given to that piece of tinder would die earlier than others. The sick child was expected to recover after the ritual.

50 With the spread of Buddhism among the Mongolian peoples life protection rituals, a prerogative of shamans before, were gradually transformed and got adapted to the "Yellow Faith." The Buddhist religion strove to push the shamans out of the individual everyday ritual sphere. Not touching upon the considerable changes in the sphere of everyday ritualism that the Buddhist church achieved[13], we will note that the Buddhist variants of life protection rituals display the same idea of giving the maleficent deities, demons and spirits substitutes of a real person. The evil spirits were offered an image of a patient made of dough in which five *müse* (water in which a sick person washed body, arms and legs) of a person were added.[14] This figurine was dressed in clothes and decorated with jewelry. This "analogue" of a man was offered instead of the sick person's soul.

51 The main objective of the Buddhist ritual *amin zolig, luud gargakhu* was to appease and deceive evil powers and offer them a substitute sacrifice instead of a live person, being supported by the supremacy of Buddhist gods and magical power of truth of the Buddhist teaching and demonstrating magical powers of Tantric mysticism.

Conclusion

52 Thus, in the perception of Buryats any disease is a deviation from the norm. This is reflected in the language. It is a consequence of a human violation of the order of interaction between the world of men and the world of deities and spirits. In this case, various rituals aimed at expulsion or destruction of the cause of the disease (evil spirit) or propitiating rituals addressed to the deities and spirits, which caused the disease act as methods of treatment. In addition to magic methods and rituals rational ways of treatment were used too. They require a more detailed study.

53 Nowadays when the quality of state medical services decreases and commercial services are unaffordable for many people the traditional explanation of diseases and their causes becomes increasingly popular. In their turn, such perceptions lead to reproduction of special ritual practices. As a result, the interest of population to folk medicine steadily grows.

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NOTES

1. Research for this article was supported by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research grant # 14-06-00312.
2. The Buryat female costume as an object, manifesting Buryat perceptions of health and female fertility became a subject of research for D.A. Nikolaeva (2007) and O.V. Shaglanova (2005).
3. The word *gem* in Buryat denoted genital diseases otherwise known as "secret diseases" (Zhamtsarano, p. 81). According to other sources, sexually transmitted diseases were referred to as *hüiten übshen* (Van Gennep, p. 98), literally "cold disease." Besides "cold" the term *hüiten* also denoted "alien" and, in the case of venereal diseases, it apparently reflected the fact that they were brought to Buryats from the outside.
4. For more detail, see Sundueva 2010, pp. 71-76.
5. In the beliefs of Western Buryats a soul is manifested as a bee. Therefore, the Buryats avoid killing bees accidentally getting in a yurt, apparently out of fear to kill a soul (Khangalov 1958, p. 395).
6. For more detail see Sodnompilova 2007, p. 185.
7. For more detail, see Zhamtsarano 2001, p. 123.
8. In the contemporary interpretation of traditional notions a hospital may be regarded as a foul place, i.e. a place accumulating human misery and illnesses.
9. See Zhukovskaya 1988, p. 91.
10. For more detail see Khangalov 1958, pp. 507-510 ; Badashkeeva 2000, issue 3, pp. 125-145.
11. G. R. Galdanova points out that this disease mostly afflicted Western Buryats (Van Gennep p. 99). This fact was also confirmed by Ts. Zhamtsarano, who wrote in his travel diaries that the Buryats in the Ol'khon district of the Irkutsk governorate "...suffered from cervical illnesses, the so-called *qulgana* (mouse)" (Zhamtsarano, p. 82).
12. See Galdanova 1992.
13. Gerasimova 1999, p. 138.
14. Natsov 1995, pp. 59-62.

ABSTRACTS

The nature of diseases in the traditional perceptions of the Mongolian peoples is an understudied phenomenon that requires an in-depth study. In the beliefs of the people of traditional culture any illness is seen as a divergence from a norm. It is a bad consequence of a human disturbance of the order of interaction between the world of men and the world of deities and spirits, and, as such, it is fixated in the language. Curing of a disease consisted in magical "correction" or elimination of the disturbance followed by magical practices and rites coupled with practical therapeutic methods.

La nature des maladies dans les perceptions traditionnelles des peuples mongols est un phénomène peu étudié qui nécessite une étude approfondie. Dans les croyances des gens de

culture traditionnelle toute maladie est considérée comme un écart par rapport à une norme. C'est une mauvaise conséquence d'une perturbation humaine de l'ordre des interactions entre le monde des hommes et le monde des divinités et des esprits, et, comme tel, il est inscrit dans la langue. Traiter une maladie consistait en une « correction» ou élimination magique de la perturbation, suivie par des pratiques et des rites associés à des méthodes thérapeutiques pratiques de type magique elles aussi.

INDEX

Keywords: tradition, diseases, life, protection, ritual, semantics
Mots-clés: tradition, maladies, vie, protection, rituel, sémantique

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