Tiger rituals and beliefs in shamanic Tungus- Manchu cultures

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tougouso-mandchoues*

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Map of the repartition of the Evenki in Russia and China

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Positions of the case studies in the present volume

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- 1 Tungus-Manchu shamanists¹ venerate tigers because of their belief in the possible possession of some tiger-individuals. Despite the fact that not all animals can become possessed, people consider it dangerous to fail to show due respect to the animal in case a powerful spirit occupies its body. The spirits are believed to be initially independent from tigers, but later, after staying awhile in tigers' bodies, they can obtain some of the animals' features. This makes them, as the shamanists consider, temporarily visible, taking the form of tigers. Assimilating the properties of dangerous predators like real tigers, the spirit-tigers help shamans to dominate other people in the community and overpower foreigners. The spirit-tigers' might and authority, along with the fact that in certain situations even their master-shamans are unable to dictate anything to them, shows their independence from the real animals whose shapes they assume. Taking into consideration Tungus-Manchu shamanistic emic knowledge, we question the popular idea that shamanic praxis is based on the adoration of nature and affirm that venerating the spirits, not nature (that is to say, not animals as such), lies at the heart of tiger worship in Tungus-Manchu shamanism.
- 2 Tungus-Manchu shamanists treat tigers² as humans and worship them as distinctive creatures with extraordinary mystical abilities. One might assume that the extreme

strength and beauty of these beasts is what inspires people to attribute to them abilities that go beyond physical laws. However, the Tungus-Manchu shamanistic people themselves explain their mysterious power as being granted by certain spirits. To understand this point, it is worth considering the extent to which spirits with a tiger shape are, from the shamanistic perspective, separate and independent from the real animals. This paper presents some examples of worshipping tigers and discusses the ideas which lie at the basis of the Tungus-Manchu shamanistic beliefs in the ability of tigers to behave like people and in their extraordinary spiritual power. First, the paper presents the shamanistic belief that some tigers can be possessed by spirits: this raises the question of why such a belief leads to the worship of all tigers, and not just the possessed ones. Second, the paper considers those cases in which spirits originally believed to exist independently of animals become temporarily visible in the form of tigers and discusses the changeability of the spirits' "material containers" in the context of shapeshifting. Finally, we turn to the Tungus-Manchu shamanistic praxis of communicating and cohabitating with spirits by interacting with possessed tigers or with spirits that take on the appearance of tigers. Remaining within the limits of anthropological research, we cannot question the very nature of the unusual abilities attributed to tigers and the spirits associated with them. We can only summarize some of the information known to us and the author's own field data³ in order to discover how Tungus-Manchu shamanists themselves comprehend and explain the exceptional properties of these beautiful and powerful animals.

Tigers as human-like creatures

- 3 Attitudes towards tigers are manifested in the following practices. Tiger hunting is strictly prohibited (Titoreva 2012, p. 17): those who maintain a shamanic worldview condemn hunters who kill tigers for money from contemporary Chinese buyers (Bereznitskii 2005, p. 353). When a hunter meets a tiger in the taiga, he usually speaks to it. "In order to make the tiger understand that the hunter does not intend to interfere with the tiger's hunting, the man must leave his rifle, putting it on the ground, and address the tiger with a speech... The tiger is not supposed to understand this word by word, because the tiger cannot speak, but by a special method of penetrating into the very sense of the speech" (Shirokogoroff 1935). Nevertheless, if someone is unlucky enough to accidentally kill a tiger (for instance, in self-defence) or find a dead tiger in the taiga, he or she has no other choice than to bury it. Dismembering a tiger's corpse (a common practice with bear carcasses) is strictly prohibited (Titoreva 2012, pp. 17-18). Instead, people hold a funeral ceremony very similar to that given to humans. The tiger's body is buried in human dress. The Oroch people put trousers and dressing gowns on the deceased creature, along with boots on its hind legs, mittens on its fore feet, and a hat on its head (Petrov 1977). Tobacco, a firesteel, and a pipe are placed near its head (Petrovich 1865). T. V. Melnikova has also reported that the "Udeghe and the Oroch bury tigers in trousers, dresses, boots, and mittens"; she adds that tigers are clothed in summer dress in winter and vice versa⁴ (Melnikova 2005, p. 184⁵). Referring to the Chinese components of the Udeghe funeral rituals for tigers killed accidentally or as a result of a vendetta⁶, S. V. Bereznitskii notes the ritual of burning red and gold papers over the corpse or saluting it with rifle volleys (Bereznitskii 2005, pp. 256-257). A. Barvinok mentions that the "Udeghe and Oroch bury tigers in special blockhouses called *saktama* (similar to a barn) on four vertical

columns. Inside these blockhouses, they spread out some soft shavings (*kuaptel'a*) to absorb the animal's blood: the tiger is placed on top of these shavings. The rooves of the blockhouses are covered with birch bark and poles. Long strips of shavings are placed in the corners, denoting that this dwelling is the resting place of a dead 'kinsman'. Special marks are made on the walls to let people know that this is a place which one is forbidden to visit" (Barvinok 2010).

- 4 One might suppose that such unusual treatment is connected to the peculiar powers and physical perfection of tigers. "It is difficult to find an animal on earth which is comparably powerful and dexterous, beautiful and fearless [...]. A tiger's influence on human physiology is tremendous and, in many respects, mysterious. Simply being aware that you can meet this striped monster in a particular place makes your heart start beating more rapidly; your senses and attention become much keener" (Kucherenko 2012, pp. 264-265). Trying to explain why people treat tigers like humans, L. I. Shrenk argued that it is exactly the fear of tigers that induces people to devote rituals to them and create images in their likeness. He also noticed that people do not like to talk about tigers and avoid uttering the very word for fear of incurring the animal's anger, which could cause trouble and disease (Shrenk [2003] 2012, p. 116). One can also find in the literature attempts to explain the tiger cult from a materialist position. Thus, S. N. Skorinov writes that worshipping tigers can be explained by trade priorities in the Lower Amur and Sakhalin regions. He argues that the emerging markets of the Lower Amur and Sakhalin, which may have arisen as early as the end of the 18th century, required the indigenous population to intensify the hunting of valuable fur-bearing animals, which contributed to the growth of unflagging indigenous interest in the taiga cult of the bear and the tiger (Skorinov 2005, pp. 123-124).
- 5 To a certain extent, all these interpretations of the special relationship with tigers are fair, but neither aesthetic attitude nor economic concern can explain the widespread belief in the ability of extraordinary tigers to behave like people. The Oroch, Udeghe, and Nanai consider tigers to be masters of the taiga with power over all other animals: they can command an animal to dress in its expensive "coat" and rush into the trap of a hunter. The Negidals, Ulchi, and Nivkh also believe that tigers, the masters of the taiga, order animals to reveal their most vulnerable spots to hunters for a well-aimed shot (Skorinov 2005, p. 97). If a hunter loses his way in the taiga, he can call upon the master of tigers, who will come to him in the form of a tiger and show him the way out (Bereznitskii 2005, p. 194). As the master of the taiga, the tiger is believed to be the highest judge: it teaches people the laws and partly instructs them about the order of the bear feast and blood sacrifice.
- 6 Explaining the unusual qualities attributed to tigers, shamanists affirm that tigers (the real animals which live in the taiga) "are not just animals; instead they represent a special species of humans⁷. This attitude is partly similar to the attitude towards bears, as bears are not considered to be animals either, but humans" (Kaplan 1949, p. 61): nevertheless, tigers are considered much mightier than bears. According to Shirokogoroff, the famous expert on Evenki shamanism, people who practise shamanism, believe that animals (like humans) can be possessed by spirits: "the Tungus do recognise that animals may become dwellings for the spirits. If so, the animal may also become 'stupid', 'unreasonable', or, if actually directed by the spirit, as clever as the spirit itself" (Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 165).

- 7 The Tungus-Manchu not only treat tigers as humans, but also call them “humans” (for example, in Nanai the word *nai* – “human” – is used). This does not mean that the Tungus-Manchu actually consider tigers to be people. When speaking about particularly dangerous spirits, the Tungus-Manchu often use euphemisms: indeed, in Nanai, the word *nai* means not only humans, but also spirits. If the Nanai want to refer especially to a tiger, they use the aforementioned euphemism *puren ambani* (“dangerous spirit of taiga”). Therefore, when calling tigers “people” (*nai*), the Nanai do not mean the animals as such, but rather the spirits that have mastered those animals. Tigers are considered living physical receptacles for disembodied spirits, and the attitude towards them is somewhat similar to that towards figures depicting spirits. People address tigers just like they address spirits, with pleas and spells: they also fear damaging either of them (for instance, one should neither kill a tiger nor break a spirit figurine, since both actions may deprive a dangerous spirit of its home).
- 8 Tungus-Manchu shamanists do not make exceptions for different individuals and treat each particular tiger like a human. Based on this fact, one might think that all the tigers are inhabited by spirits, but those who practise shamanism themselves are convinced that very far from all the tigers they meet in the taiga are possessed. Moreover, from the shamanistic point of view, a spirit is never constantly present in the animal chosen as its physical vessel: from time to time, it leaves the body of the animal, so the possessed tiger temporarily becomes an ordinary animal again. However, it is extremely hazardous for a hunter if they do not treat a tiger in the proper way during the special moment when the powerful spirit is still present in its body. Therefore, the fear of making a mistake by failing to show respect for the animal when it is possessed by a powerful and dangerous spirit makes people venerate all encountered tigers.

Spirits which become temporarily visible in the shape of tigers

- 9 In addition to tigers as possessed real animals, Tungus-Manchu shamanists also know of initially incorporeal invisible spirits which sometimes can become visible and appear in front of people in the shape of a tiger. It is they that communicate with people in the human rituals called shamanic “games⁸”. A. Lavrillier interprets these games with spirit-tigers as an “entity conceptualizing the natural environment” (Lavrillier 2012, p. 115). By invoking spirit-animals, shamans actually appeal not to the real animals and nature, but to the intangible spirits that have only taken guise as animals. The spirit-tigers to whom the Nanai shaman appeals in the following fragment of a Nanai shamanic ritual are not real, physical animals:

My children tigers come, come!

From the foot of my sacral tree come to my body, come to my body!

Tigers! Appear by the foot of my sacral tree!

Shake yourselves off and stretch yourselves! (L. I. Beldy)

- 10 A. V. Smoliak wrote that Nanai *tudin*⁹ apparently return from the world beyond mounted on the backs of tigers (Smoliak 1991, p. 49); equally, during shamanic battles, shamans fight each other whilst flying on tigers (*ibid.*, p. 61). However, in all these cases the tigers become visible only for a few moments, which proves their spiritual nature. Some spirits that cause sickness manifest themselves in the shape of a tiger; in order to

free the patients from these spirits, shamans transport them from sick patients into figurines or drawings of tigers. In 1981, in the Nanai village of Daerga (Khabarovsk region), I had the opportunity to observe how a Nanai shaman carried “a tiger” from a patient’s chest into a drawing of tiger on a *moigan* (a breast collar made of fabric). During the ritual, she sang the following verses appealing to “the tiger:”

In order to wake up this *moigan*, to make it alive,
Stick to the *moigan*, revive it!
We have made your image as a body for you.
The tiger Kutu amban¹⁰, which has marked her [the patient]
and which has got stuck in her chest, biting her as if with iron!
Become satisfied with my rite-request!
Be incarnated into this *moigan*!
Be incarnated in this pictured tiger, in its eyes! (G. K. Geiker)

- 11 One might suggest that the images of tigers on the famous Sikachi-Alian petroglyphs¹¹ were probably used for similar purposes and that such rituals took place at the rock art site, although there are no data remaining to prove this. The images of tigers on shamans’ dresses are also used in the same manner. In all these cases, it is a question not of the animal’s physical dimensions but of the spirits within: the only query is why spirits so often take tiger shape.

Figure 1. Zinaida Beldy in the wedding dress made by herself

The skirts of the robe depict tigers as “ancestors” of her husband Beldy’s clan.

© T. Bulgakova, Village Troitskoe, Khabarovsk region, August 2007

Figure 2. A fragment of the same wedding dress

© T. Bulgakova, Village Troitskoe, Khabarovsk region, August 2007

Love affairs with tigers

- 12 The answer to this question partly lies in the widespread Tungus-Manchu idea that marriage is possible between a girl and a real physical tiger, which connects real tigers with the spirits and raises their status to human. The Nanai clans of the Aktanka, Beldy, and Samar, the Oroch clan of the Èminka, the Udeghe clan of the Kamandiga, and the Ulch clans of the Dumsal and Udy believe that they are relatives of tigers due to the fact that their girls have had or are having sex with tigers (Titoreva 2012, p. 19). Scholars write about human-spirit cohabitation as one of the most noticeable characteristic of Tungus-Manchu shamanism. Thus, the Russian ethnologist Lev Shternberg was the first to elaborate the theory of sexual electiveness in shamanism, which he based on information collected from a Nanai shaman. Referring to a shaman's revelations, Shternberg affirmed that a "spirit's sexual preference for its chosen human" is the main motif of the shamanic call and the fundamental basis of shamanism (Shternberg 1927, p. 12¹²). His informant confided that he "slept with one of his spirits as if with his own wife" (Shternberg 1927, pp. 8-9). Furthermore, it is not only shamans who have such experiences, but also many ordinary people. According to Smoliak's data, every Nanai woman has a spirit "husband", known as a *horaliko* (Smoliak 1991, p. 74), who takes the form of a tiger in dreams. In all matrimonial contacts, the tiger is obviously not treated as an animal that is only visible from time to time, but as a spirit which can take on different physical forms such as a tiger or sometimes even a human.
- 13 It should be noted that Tungus-Manchu shamanists are sincerely convinced that their familial relation to tigers is not a fabrication, but a result of sexual intercourse either

with real tigers or with spirits in the shape of tigers. Kira van Deusen, who recorded traditional stories in the 1990s from the people of the taiga forest in the Russian Far East, has stated that “marriage with tigers was being entertained as a real possibility, not a vision” (Deusen 2001, p. 175). In her book *Flying Tigers*, she wrote that, upon first hearing that the Ulch shaman-woman Anga was married to a tiger, she interpreted the story “as happening in another reality – as a vision”. However, after talking to Anga herself, it was clear that she perceived her marriage as real. Van Deusen writes: “It seems possible from the following story that Anga had gotten pregnant from being scratched by the tiger” (Deusen 2001, p. 171). Furthermore, she notes: “This is a difficult problem for folklorists and ethnographers who enter a culture different from their own – how to relate to things that seems impossible and yet are accepted as literal truth” (*ibid.*, p. 175). In comparison, we could also mention A. A. Popov’s similar revelation about the Dolgan’s conviction in the veracity of their stories about marriages with spirit-animals. He wrote that someone had once discussed with him the possibility of human-bear cohabitation. In the presence of many other people, this person asked Popov:

“Tell me, please, is it not true? You are Russian and probably do not believe in it?”
Being experienced through adversity about how useless it is to convince in such cases, I answered: “Would you yourself try to go and live with a bear?” All of the people present, who did not expect such an answer, confusedly fell silent. Looking at their faces, I saw their internal strife; there was no laughing or any jokes. (Popov 1937, p. 14)

- 14 Again, it is not for us to reveal whether extraordinary tiger/human relations are reality or fabrications. The only important thing for us is the natives’ full conviction in the reality of these relations. The Nanai believe that if a tiger has kept an eye on a girl in order to make love to her (as can be judged from her dreams), it is impossible to marry her to a human. Thus, when T. K. Hodger was 12 years old (as she herself stated), she was brought to an uninhabited island on the Amur River and left there for a night because she “was intended to marry to a tiger. That night she met the formidable beast. The tiger walked over to her, sniffed her and walked away, refusing to take a girl as a wife” (not killing her). From this moment, it was possible to marry T. K. Hodger to a common man (Maltseva 2007, p. 109). In the Nanai village Lidoga (Khabarovsk region), people remember a girl who hung herself because her parents decided to marry her off to a human without permission from a “tiger”. According to my informant E. Ch. Beldy, the girl, upon learning of their decision, began to cry, “I am already married to a tiger!”. She then said: “Why are you going to give me to a strange human?” She hung herself outside, and a huge tiger came to her body. It sat near her for three days as if guarding her corpse, and would not let it be taken away. People thought it was her tiger-lover. Only after the tiger left could the corpse be removed. Later, the same tiger was seen lying on the girl’s grave. V. Ch. Geiker, another informant, had a sister who died young and was also “married to a tiger”. On the eve of the sister’s marriage to a human, she suddenly died as they were sewing her dress and providing a dowry. V. Ch. Geiker recollected:

What beautiful hair she had! Every morning I plaited her hair. That morning [when she died], I woke up and saw that they had already put her body on the table. She was lying there, and her hair was hanging down. My mother approached me and said, “Daughter Verochka, your sister died. Go and plait her hair”. I was scared and cried. She said, “Daughter, do not be afraid. Never be scared of the departed ones, they will not harm you [...]”. I dried my tears and plaited her hair. (V. Ch. Geiker)

- 15 However, the death did not bring an end to the family's encounter with the tiger. As one of their female relations was a tiger's wife, the animal was their brother-in-law. All the family continued dreaming of the tiger and the cubs which were supposedly born from the marriage¹³. Geiker was certain that "the tigers [the relatives of her brother-in-law] sometimes visit", "trying to do the rounds"; "they are probably interested in how their human family lives, whether they are sick or not". Geiker's family noticed that if, in their dreams, the tiger's attention in one of their relatives increased, that person soon died. The tiger-relative's influence on the family also manifested itself (or so they believed) in similar dreams and illnesses: it was as if the family was subject to the same spiritual ailment. I define this phenomenon as a collective clan disease (Bulgakova 2013, pp. 35-58).
- 16 In Geiker's case, the tiger was perceived as an invisible spirit that only became observable as a physical animal in certain circumstances. The ability of an invisible tiger to become visible in reality is one of the most striking features of these cases. The tiger-spirit either becomes temporarily visible or can only be seen by one person: others cannot see it. Thus, Geiker emphasised that the tiger (her sister's groom) was visible only to her sister: "It was only her who could feel how this tiger entered the house, how it lay under the table and slept there. We (the rest of the family) could not see its body". At the same time, however, the other members of the family dreamt of that tiger. "All of us", she said, "dreamt the same thing: the tiger was lying on the *zavalinka*¹⁴ of our house". K. van Deusen had a conversation with an Ulch shaman woman who had had two tiger babies by a tiger: "Where did the tiger babies go?", "They are alive, they help me". "Are they in the taiga?", "They are here with me. You don't see them?", "No". "I see them" (Deusen 2001, p. 171). In other words, this Ulch woman-shaman saw her children-tigers in reality, even though they remained invisible to others.
- 17 This information about tiger/human marriage can help us discuss the important question of indigenous ideas concerning how incorporeal invisible spirits become visible. According to the shamanistic point of view, after residence in a particular physical body, the intangible spirit obtains some of the features of that corporal creature. In some exceptional cases, these material features can be perceived and seen not only by shamans, but also by ordinary people. Generalizing the data on different shamanic cultures, V.I. Haritonova terms such a phenomenon as the "temporary exchange of worlds" (i.e. of the material and spiritual worlds). She writes that "a spirit is not able to carry out its activities outside of someone's body"; thus, it needs a person or a shaman for this purpose. In other words, it is the shaman who is significant. He or she is required as a particular form, a container for keeping a spirit in the world of the living (Haritonova 2005, p. 34). Such containers can also be ritual sculptures, figurines, drawings, etc. made with the special purpose of embodying spirits. Regarding real tigers (as well as bears and some other animals), their bodies (and also human bodies) can fulfil the same function for spirits, serving as their temporary dwellings.

Shamans who shapeshift into tigers

- 18 Tungus-Manchu shamanists hold that one spirit can simultaneously dwell in two or more objects (for example, an animal and a figurine which depicts the animal), not just one. This idea lies at the basis of the belief in shamans' ability to shapeshift into tigers

and other animals. People who practise shamanism affirm that the changeability of shamans' physical bodies and their temporal shapeshifting into animals can sometimes be noticed even by ordinary people. Ornamenting a shaman's costume in such a way that it makes them look like an animal also relates to the shaman's ability to join with another being by means of a spirit, which can dwell in both of them. T. Iu. Sem indicates that among the Amur Evenki, Daur, and Nanai, there was a special category of shamans who were held to be tigers: either their clothing imitated tiger skin or they had pictures of tigers on their chests (Sem [2015] 2017, p. 39). The connection of these shamans with tigers was also emphasised in the method of their burials. Referring to the archival materials of V. K. Arsen'ev, recorded at the beginning of the 20th century, S. V. Bereznitskii reports that one Udeghe shaman's grave was covered with a shed of boards: "the coffin was placed on a special stand, painted with black and red transverse stripes": "these stripes on the coffin carried great meaning, for they imitated tiger fur" (Bereznitskii 2005, pp. 101-102). Despite the fact that the shaman and his or her spirits exist independently to a certain extent, an observer might come to believe that "in the Tungus mind both the shaman and the spirit are the same. This ought to be understood in the following sense: there is no question as to the personal ability of the shaman, the question is about the spirits which have been mastered by him; thus, the spirits are nothing other than an alter ego of the shaman himself" (Shirokogoroff 1935 p. 373).

- 19 The widespread belief of Tungus-Manchu shamanists in the reality of shapeshifting is connected to the idea of a close unity between shaman and spirit (or between animal and spirit). Thus, the Udeghe who live near the confluence of the tributary Vahumbe and the River Iman (the Amur basin district) try not to approach a certain rock with a cave out of fear for the shamanic spirits which still occupy a place where, as they believe, powerful Udeghe shamans with spirit-tigers physically turned into tigers in the past (Bereznitskii 2005, p. 351). In order to comprehend how the Tungus-Manchu themselves perceive shamans turning into tigers and other animals, it is useful to listen to those shamans who affirm that they have had experiences of such transformations. The Nanai shaman N. P. Beldy was once walking in the forest together with his mother, father-in-law, and elder brother and ran a few steps ahead of his family. Then he stopped and looked back at his family approaching through the heavy foliage. However, when his relatives spotted him, they took fright and started running back. Later, his mother explained to him: "It was not your face, not a human face, but a tiger's muzzle that was looking at us from the bushes, that is why we were so frightened". N. P. Beldy was convinced that this had occurred because he had a shamanic spirit-helper tiger that he had inherited from his great-grandfather, a great shaman¹⁵. Shamans can also take on different hypostases while sleeping. The neo-shaman¹⁶ I. Kile¹⁷ assured me that people who stayed overnight at her place often saw her either as a dog which jumped right from where she was sleeping and attacked them or herself in an unusual dress approaching them: throughout these incidents, Kile remained in bed. One of my Nanai shaman informants explained the changeability of the shapes of a possessed person by the fact that, as he expressed it, the "human body can become a container for spirits". To illustrate this statement, he told me about one of his patients, a young man who "unexpectedly started putting on lipstick" and "running away from home": his "eyes from time to time became really terrifying". Sometimes this patient even became unrecognisable: "at night his eyes became different, but in the morning he became himself again, and he could hardly remember what was happening to him at night". According to the shaman's diagnosis, these occurrences were caused by an alien

shaman who had settled a female spirit into the patient's body. The shaman affirmed that the possessed person had two distinct faces because the spirit which had possessed him occasionally started manifesting itself, thereby pushing the host's own personality out of his body. There is nothing new in the idea of the changeability of a shaman or a person possessed by a spirit. As long ago as 1927, L. Ia. Shternberg noticed that, in the presence of "the creature" that had moved into a shaman, the shamans' own personalities completely vanished; they became, for a brief period, the supernatural creature that had chosen them as a container. According to Shternberg, everything a shaman says or does during this time is in fact an action of the spirit inside; the shaman's own personality has disappeared (Shternberg 1927, p. 28). Through the same mechanism, this scholar also explained phenomena like a change in sex: the "shaman's personality is abolished upon being transformed into his or her spirit-spouse. Thus, a shaman-man, at least for the time of the ritual, becomes a woman, and a shaman-woman becomes a man. If a spirit chooses a shaman's body as its permanent dwelling, as happens among the Chukchi, it is no wonder that [...] such a spirit, if it is of the same sex as the shaman, openly demands from its 'chosen one' that they change their sex" (Shternberg 1927, p. 30). When a spirit gets into a shaman, the latter obtains some of the characteristics of that spirit. Thus, as Shirokogoroff explains, if a spirit takes a bird-shape, the shaman can act like a bird; if the same spirit turns into a tiger, the shaman can obtain the appearance of a tiger; and so on. In order to move around, hide from enemies, etc., a shaman places a spirit which is able to turn into different animals into himself: he therefore also obtains the ability to change and insert himself into different objects, humans, and animals (Shirokogoroff [1919] 2005). Hence not only tigers but also shamans can be vehicles for spirits.

- 20 It is not only the face of a possessed person that changes; as the shamans assure us, even the appearance the spirit takes when it approaches the shaman can alter. In other words, the same spirit can present itself in different forms in the face of a shaman. My informant shaman L. I. Beldy told me about her own experiences of this phenomenon:

At night, they [the spirits] walk in the forest: I also "walk" there [while sitting at home and beating the drum]. I walk around and watch [these spirits]. Nobody sees them, only me. They are such creatures that you can see them [spirits] as animals on four legs, but, after stepping a pace, they turn into humans. Nobody believes me. How can I say that an animal turns into a human? How can humans get into the forest at such a late hour? It is night! (L. I. Beldy)

- 21 According to the shaman who acted as Shternberg's informant, his spirit-wife first appeared to him as a beautiful woman half an *arshin* (0.355 m) in height. Later, however, she came to him "in the likeness of an old woman, sometimes like a wolf – it is scary to look at her – and sometimes 'she' comes as a winged tiger" (Shternberg 1927, pp. 8-9).
- 22 The changeability of spirit-tigers and other shamanic spirits is usually expressed in ritual figurines by combining the features of different creatures on one image. At the basis of the changeability of the spirit's image lies the mortality of those creatures in which the immortal spirit dwells. When a spirit sequentially possesses several creatures, it collects all their features. If the same spirit first possessed a tiger, then a bird, and then a human, it would have the ability to appear in all these forms or as a rider on a winged tiger (or a winged rider on a tiger). Thus, a shaman, upon making a receptacle for his or her spirit, depicts it as a tiger with wings and a human on its back (see Fig. 3). Moreover, non-ritual art works also combine the features of different

creatures (see Figs 4 and 5). This is why a shaman combines the features of different animals in his or her spirit receptacle. In turn, the praxis of combining these features is additional proof that indicates the spirits' relative independence from these physical bodies, which they can temporarily leave and exchange.

Figure 3. An image of a spirit *seven* used in traditional Nanai shamanic practice

The image combines the features of a tiger, a human, and a bird.

© R. Beldy, village Naihin, Khabarovsk region, October 2015

Figure 4. A fragment of carpet depicting a tiger, including elements of images of snakes

Made by the shaman O. E. Kile.

© T. Bulgakova, village Verhni Nergen, Khabarovsk region, August 2007

Figure 5. The work of the contemporary Nanai artist N. M. Digor

It connects the features of a tiger and a human. Such images produce the same impression on the contemporary descendants of shamans as traditional images of spirits.

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Games of unequal partners

- 23 In shamanic praxis, a human and “a tiger” (that is to say, a spirit in the shape of a tiger), despite their close interconnection, are certainly independent of each other; furthermore, their interrelations are determined and, to some extent, predictable. In the initial stage, such intercommunication is usually called “a game” (Na. *hupiuri*), wherein a spirit-tiger involves a human in ever closer terms of intimacy. Thus, the Nanai shaman M. P. Beldy informed me that when she was forced to perform a shamanic ritual, it was as if someone was whispering into her ears: “Let’s go playing [shamanising]!” During the process of becoming a shaman, a person can dream of spirits which call out: “We played with your father, let us now play with you” (Shternberg 1933, p. 77). Furthermore, it is not only the initial stage of shamanic praxis and the performing of shamanic rituals that are called “playing”: this also applies to cohabitation with a spirit¹⁸. “Playing” is also used to describe ordinary women’s experiences of having “spirit-tigers” as “lovers” (*horaliko*). However, playing occurs only in the initial stage; after a human has already been involved in particular relationships to a certain degree, the spirit begins to dominate him or her. Thus, if the person refuses to play with “a tiger”, or if a “tiger” unexpectedly becomes bored with its human partner, the “tiger” can be really dangerous. Shternberg’s informant, a Nanai shaman, stated that upon imposing cohabitation, his spirit-wife said: “If you do not obey, you will be bad; I will kill you” (Shternberg 1927, p. 9). Smoliak wrote that if a

Nanai woman gets “a husband” in the spiritual world, she could become sick to such extent that no shaman will be able to heal her: such women often commit suicide. “A *pasiku* spirit [a gallows spirit] flies around with a rope and throws it about their [the women’s] necks. The woman permanently feels it [the rope] on her neck, and she will certainly hang herself” (Smoliak 1991, p. 77). The Nanai V. Ch. Geiker and her relatives believe that her elder sister died on the eve of her wedding because she was killed by her “tiger” spirit-lover, which became jealous and did not want the wedding to go ahead. My informant, the Nanai shaman N., had had six husbands; all of them died, one after the other. O. E. Kile, another Nanai shaman, explained that it was N.’s jealous shamanic “spirit-lovers” who killed her human husbands: “Now she complains: Who else will love me? I do not even have anyone to carry some firewood for me!” It is *amban*¹⁹ (her spirit-lover) which kills her husbands”. Those who practise shamanism also believe that spirit-lovers can make attempts on the lives of the other relatives of their human partners. I had the chance to be present at a shamanic ritual ordered by a non-shaman woman. She complained to the Nanai shaman L. I. Beldy about her “tiger” spirit-lover: “It torments me! My *horaliko* (spirit-lover) is very powerful; it was exactly it that killed my husband!” L. I. Beldy answered her: “Such a creature really does kill the husbands and children [of its women-lovers]”. The patient continued: “Now it is going to kill my children. I have learned about it and came to you [to shamanise]. I am here for that very reason. My kids can’t stand it anymore. Therefore, [my son] bought a bottle of vodka [for the shamanic ritual]; he gave me some money and said: ‘Mother, go to the granny [to the shaman L. I. Beldy]!’ It, the creature [the spirit-tiger], wants to bury my children and therefore I came here crying”.

- 24 From the perspective of the shamans, the spirits can issue threats and dangers without any perspicuous reasons. However, the most interesting cases are when shamans track the causes of the troubles and indicate precautions. One of the forbidden deeds which unavoidably leads to a “tiger’s” punishment is killing a real tiger²⁰. As was already said, Tungus-Manchu tradition forbids slaughtering tigers²¹; however, if a tiger accidentally falls into a trap set for a large animal or is killed because of a hunter’s error, appropriate measures can be taken. Thus, it is forbidden to visit those places where tigers have been killed or where tiger bodies have been found. People put special markers around the area and never again hunt or pick berries there. The person guilty of the tiger’s death is considered indebted to “the tiger’s clan” and is supposed to compensate the damage via ransom (sacrifice). My Nanai informant Ch. D. Passar had trouble with tigers, which was incomprehensible to her for long time. She said that she often met tigers when gathering berries in the taiga.

“If you had a problem with a tiger, tigers will always follow you!” We went for berries and a tiger began to follow us. How we ran away from it! My mouth became dry, we breathed in such a way [...]. We did not have time to tie our bags; we just grabbed them and ran. My daughter Lilka suddenly stepped on the rope dragging from Zhenka’s bag; Zhenka fell on her back and spilled her berries [...]. Koshkina, the Russian woman [...], said: “Look, it [the tiger] is pursuing us!” She began crying [...]. Lilka said: “Let us shout! Animals are afraid of shouting!” [...]. We started shouting, but the tiger became even angrier. It began growling in different voices. How could we not be frightened! [...] I said to Koshkina: “Run behind me!” I was the last one. Okay, I thought, let the tiger eat her. I was saving myself. She stood behind me. I was saving myself: “Let it eat her!” [...]. Before we met the tiger, Lilka took off her dress and hung it on a stick: “When we go back”, she said, “we will take it away”. Nothing of the kind! We did not remember about the dress when we were running [from the tiger]. We left the dress and got into our boat. (Ch. D. Passar)

- 25 Passar did not see any reason why tigers should pursue her family. However, she later noticed that people met tigers only when her daughter Lilka accompanied them. There were also some other details which suggested that Lilka was the person somehow connected to tigers. For example, the day after they left Lilka's dress while they were running away from the tiger, Passar went to the forest to get it back, but it was badly torn. As she explained: "The tiger found [the dress]; it spread it out right on the road, unfolded it, and tore it up. It tore from the dress two strips, each approximately half a metre long [...] and then carried those strips away somewhere". The elders said that Lilka must have owed something to the tigers: it was then that Passar remembered that, several years ago, the hunter V. Geiker killed a tiger and gave her some money from the payment he received upon selling its skin. With this money, Passar bought some cloth and sewed a dress for Lilka²². After she remembered all this, she began to understand the tiger's persecution as revenge for a killed "tiger-kinsman".
- 26 Blood revenge is when a person is forced to act against his or her desires and submit to the inevitable necessity of killing a tiger. If humans delay in committing blood revenge for a relative killed by a tiger, tigers supposedly continue to kill people. Barvinok mentions (unfortunately without clarifying the details) the existence of a long-lasting vendetta between people and tigers which lasted into the 1930s (Barvinok 2010). Blood revenge on tigers, which is initiated after a tiger murders a hunter, starts with a relative of the murdered person making a speech to the tiger containing complaints, requests, and threats. Then a special shamanic ritual is performed: only after all these "peaceful" activities do people kill the tiger (Arsen'ev 1949, pp. 188-189, 196, 203-204). To restore peace with the tigers, the Udeghe once invited an experienced shaman (Bereznitskii 2005, p. 123). At the same time, any person who has been wounded by a tiger, along with his or her entire clan, is considered a "wrong" person by others²³. They are not supposed to borrow any hunting and fishing equipment from people "marked by the spirits". To borrow something from such individuals means to receive their curse along with the item. Nevertheless, if someone really needs an object which is available only from "marked people", he or she may borrow it only after performing a special ritual to defend themselves against the evil fate of the "prohibited people"²⁴. Tigers are also supposed to take revenge if they feel they have been insulted. Bereznitskii writes about an Udeghe who, against all the rules, wanted to kill a tiger but actually only managed to wound it. The tiger then sought revenge, eating eight of his dogs and breaking his boat and his net: nothing of this kind happened to the other hunters in the village (Bereznitskii 2005, p. 520).
- 27 If we compare the two situations (a human killing a tiger and a tiger killing a human), we notice their asymmetry. Power and domination are always on the tiger's side. If a human has killed a tiger, he and his clan become indebted to the tigers; if, on the contrary, a tiger has killed or injured a human, all the victim's relatives become the debtors of tigers. If these unequal relationships with tigers can be considered a game, it is a game of unequal partners. Tigers (or, to put it more precisely, spirit-tigers) dominate humans in both cases.
- 28 At the same time, the spirit-tigers, having obtained some qualities of dangerous predators, nevertheless pass their power to shamans and thus allow them to dominate other people in the community²⁵. As E. V. Shan'shina points out, according to the Nanai worldview the spirit-tiger does not persecute its human "relatives"; on the contrary, "it helps them in their struggles for territory against their neighbours" (Shan'shina 2003,

p. 157). Such spirits are used in attacks; as Shirokogoroff noted, “for killing their enemies, shamans sent their spirits in the forms of bears, tigers, and other dangerous animals” (Shirokogoroff [1919] 2005). These spirits help them to overpower those who are not “relatives” of the tiger. The power and authority of spirit-tigers and the fact that humans are unable to dictate anything to them also shows that they are independent of the real animals whose shapes they assume.

Conclusion

- 29 The Tungus-Manchu belief in the spirits’ ability to exchange physical bodies (animals and humans) points to the relative independence of the spirits from the possessed bodies. So, the unusual intelligence and mysterious abilities attributed to tigers in the Tungus-Manchu world do not just derive from the admiration of real animals in the context of general nature worship: they also derive from the veneration of the spirits which can possess these animals and other natural objects.
- 30 This allows us to question a popular idea that makes shamanism look so attractive in our time, that about the essence of shamanic praxis consisting of the harmonisation of the relationship between humans and nature. If a scholar comes to the supposition that the “shaman teaches how to interact with natural forces, to shift from consciousness towards unconsciousness” (Sem 2011, p. 447), he or she would logically conclude that the beast-like dress represents the shaman’s “zoomorphic double of the powers of nature” (*ibid.*, p. 442). Close to this is the concept of the alleged “archaic mentality” of those who practise shamanism (e.g. Tarvid 2004, p. 101): according to this, a scholar does not have to make any effort to perceive phenomena like transformations into different creatures and the “absence of an insuperable wall which separates humans from nature” (Kryzhanovskaia 2009, p. 201). None of these opinions take into consideration that shamanistic rituals devoted to animals actually venerate the spirits which have possessed these animals and acquired their shapes: equally, they underestimate shamans’ conviction in the existence of spirits independent of any material receptacle²⁶. As we have already shown, from the emic perspective not all animals are possessed and the tiger’s body is not a constant dwelling for a spirit, only a temporary one. Thus, it is not nature as such that is “a partner for shamanic games” (Lavrillier 2012, p. 115), but rather the spirits which dwell within it. The reason why nature seems to be significant in traditional Tungus-Manchu shamanism is that, until recently, shamans lived almost exclusively in nomadic camps and settlements, places close to the natural environment. However, contemporary neo-shamans in cities have started to complain that computers, mobile phones, and cars occasionally begin to “behave” as if they are also possessed and unmanageable. According to their experience, some items of technology have begun to act like contemporary dwellings for spirits. “If a spirit settles in a car, that car can go crazy, refuse to work, or run on its own. The technological devices can gain their own will and go not where a human sends them but where they themselves want” (I. Kile). Neo-shamanism is a relatively recent phenomenon, and not enough material has been collected about it: thus we cannot yet talk about shamans worshipping complex technical devices. However, if we consider the faith of shamans in the possibility of such devices being possessed by spirits²⁷, the development of such worship in the future cannot be excluded. This is similar to how real tigers living in the taiga can become receptacles for disembodied

spirits in certain circumstances. Thus, when people worship a tiger, they are not expressing their awe at the beauty of the mighty beast. Nor do they think it is actually a human; rather, they are addressing the spirit inhabiting the animal because that spirit is able to influence people's circumstances via their mastery of the objectively manifested world.

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E. Ch. Geiker = Evdokia Chubovna Geiker (1931-2010), Lidoga village, Nanai district, Khabarovsk region. Work with the informant, 2000-2010.

G. K. Geiker = Gara Kisovna Geiker (1914-1985), Daerga village, Nanai district, Khabarovsk region. Work with the informant, 1981-1984.

L. I. Beldy = Lingdze Iltungaevna Beldy (1912-1994), Dada, Daerga villages, Nanai district, Khabarovsk region. Work with the informant, 1991-1993.

M. P. Beldy = Maria Petrovna Beldy (1924-1993), Daerga village, Nanai district, Khabarovsk region. Work with the informant, 1981-1992.

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NOTES

1. It should be emphasised that the term “shamanist” does not imply the existence of an organised religious system called: “shamanism”; the term is rather used here as a matter of convenience to signify a member of a society in which shamans are the principal providers of ritual and therapeutic services.
2. By 2016 in the territory of the Russian Federation, the number of tigers increased by 10-15% when compared to 2005: this amounts to 523-540 animals, including 98-100 cubs (Barinova 2016).
3. The author uses materials on the shamanic culture of the Tungus-Manchu peoples, especially those living in a tiger habitat (the Oroch, Nanai, Neghidal, and Ulch), and the author's field material collected among the Nanai between 1980 and 2017 in the Nanai district of Khabarovsk region. Trying to understand the bearers of the shamanic tradition, who are fully convinced of the trustworthiness of even the most unbelievable tales about the behaviour of tigers, we do not take into account here folklore texts about tigers. Instead, we only consider informants' discussions where they note either their own experience with tigers or the experiences of people whom they know well.
4. In human funerals, they also clothe the departed in summer dress during the winter and winter dress during the summer. Tungus-Manchu shamanistic people believe that it is summer in the land of death when it is winter in the land of the living and vice versa.
5. I heard from my Nanai informants that an animal is dressed as a human at a funeral only if sexual intercourse with a human has taken place while the animal was alive. I was told about a hunter who caught a live musk-deer in the taiga and started “living with her as with a wife. For a long time, he lived with her that way; when it died, for its funeral he put a female dress on it and earrings in its ears and nose”.
6. A vendetta against a tiger (that is to say, the intention to kill one animal) is announced if a tiger has killed a human.
7. M. A. Kaplan literally duplicates the Nanai word *nai* (“human”), which is a common euphemism that often replaces the words for spirits or animals possessed by spirits.
8. One of the synonyms of “shamanising” in Tungus-Manchu languages is “playing”, and tigers can be partners in such shamanic “games”.
9. A Nanai religious specialist (Na. *tudin*) who operates like a shaman but does not use a drum.
10. Kutu is a spirit's nickname; *amban* in Nanai is a generic name for a group of dangerous spirits.
11. The Sikachi-Alian petroglyphs are rock carvings on the surface of massive basalt boulders situated near the villages of Sikachi-Alian and Malyshevo in Khabarovsk region (Okladnikov 1971). The petroglyphs depict animals, human figures, and hunting scenes. The oldest of the Sikachi-Alian petroglyphs is dated to 12,000-9,000 BC.
12. At the same time, as Anna V. Smoliak has shown, not all shamanic spirits are sexual partners with the shaman (Smoliak 1974, p. 113).
13. My informants confirmed that, through spiritual “marriage” to a tiger, the woman Zaksor gave birth to a baby tiger with a human face: many people saw the strange baby before it died.
14. *Zavalinka* is a Russian word used by my Nanai informants: it means an embankment along the base of the exterior walls around the perimeter of wooden houses.
15. This great-grandfather, I was assured, had supposedly been able to ride a tiger.

16. The term “neo-shaman” refers to those contemporary shamans (among the Nanai, such shamans started practising from the early 2000s) who widely use eclectic occult techniques learned from the mass media. Unlike my other informants mentioned in this article, I. Kile did not consider herself to be a traditional shaman but a neo-shaman, because, in contrast to the former, she belonged to the younger generation and used eclectic occult techniques freed from their traditional cultural context.
 17. Unlike other informants, I. Kile asked me not to mention her personal data, so the name used here is actually her pseudonym.
 18. For comparison with the Evenki, see Lavrillier 2012, 2013 and the introduction to this volume.
 19. A tiger is usually called a *puren ambani* (“a dangerous spirit of a taiga”) or, in abbreviated form, *amban* (“a dangerous spirit”).
 20. In Tungus-Manchu folklore, there are famous stories about a bear or a tiger persecuting a human who said something disrespectful about them. Usually, these stories name the exact person who suffered this fate (Fetisova & Kile 2003, p. 265).
 21. During the years of atheistic propaganda, the prohibition on killing tigers became less strict and some tigers were killed for their skins.
 22. This dress was not the one that was later left in the forest.
 23. The same happens if someone is murdered by a bear or drowns in a river.
 24. This ritual consists of the following. They make a small bow and arrow, break or cut off a very small piece from the borrowed item, and tie it to the arrow. They then shoot the arrow in the direction of the item owner’s domicile (Gaer 1984, p. 182).
 25. Nanai shamans told me that their spirit-helpers are the most powerful and dangerous predators (tigers, bears, wolves, serpents, and killer whales): “I would not take a deer as a defender; it is not able to defend itself”, N. P. Beldy said.
 26. As the Nanai shaman G. K. Geiker said, if she worried about making vessels for all her spirits, she would fill her entire house, leaving no space for her family.
 27. Compare this phenomenon with the possession of airplanes by spirits, as described by E. Colson (Colson 1969, pp. 79-80).
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ABSTRACTS

This paper proposes a comparative analysis across space and time of tiger rituals and beliefs among the Amur Tungus-Manchu peoples. These shamanistic peoples treat tigers like humans and believe that some extraordinary tigers have the ability to behave in similar ways to people. According to these shamanic ideas, the behaviour of such tigers can be explained by the fact that, as dangerous predators, they can easily become spiritually charged; thus, the bodies of some tigers can serve as temporary dwellings for spirits. The spirits which possess tigers are believed to obtain some of the animal’s external features. Given contemporary migration to cities, urban Tungus-Manchu shamans have started believing that some items from urban culture may also be possessed by spirits. It seems that it is not the external shape of the spiritually charged items that is of interest to urban shamans, but the spirits they can contain.

Cet article propose une analyse comparative synchronique et diachronique des rituels et des croyances liés au tigre chez les peuples toungouso-mandchous. Ces peuples chamanistes traitent les tigres comme des humains et croient en leur extraordinaire capacité à agir comme tel. Selon

les conceptions chamaniques, de tels comportements chez les tigres peuvent s'expliquer par le fait que, en tant que dangereux prédateurs, les tigres peuvent aisément devenir « spirituellement chargés ». Les esprits possédant les tigres sont censés obtenir certaines caractéristiques de leur apparence. Longtemps après avoir quitté le corps des animaux, ces esprits ont la capacité de se rendre visibles sous l'apparence de tigres. Avec la migration contemporaine vers les villes, les nouveaux chamanes urbains toungouso-mandchous commencent à considérer qu'en plus des éléments naturels, certaines composantes de la « culture urbaine » sont aussi possédées par des esprits. Il semble que ce ne soit pas tant la forme extérieure des éléments spirituellement chargés qui soit importante pour les néo-chamanes, mais plutôt les esprits eux-mêmes.

INDEX

Mots-clés: Russie, Toungouse, Mandchou, chamanisme, néo-chamanisme, possession, animaux, esprits, mythologie

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