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Tungus-Manchu Traditional Beliefs. Part 1: Fertility Cult and Images of Divine Ancestresses

This article explores the traditional beliefs of the Tungus-Manchu peoples and is based on the hermeneutic and comparative analysis of the fertility cult. Some of its aspects are related to images of divine ancestresses, the tree of life, the hearth cult, ancestral lineage, and animistic beliefs. For the first time, cults of fertility, as well as those of divine ancestresses, are regarded as an integral whole. This analysis demonstrates that images of ancestresses are preserved in mythology, rituals (specifically domestic ones), tribal culture, and cultural features related to birth, shamanism, ludic culture, and applied art. Also, they relate to the hearth cult, fire rites, the tree of souls or tree of life, creation, and shamanism as part of folk medicine and rites of passage. The conclusion is made that the Tungus-Manchu fertility cult is an inherent religious system, relevant to the mentality, archetypal cultural values, ethno-cultural specificity, and contacts with other peoples.

Keywords: *Tungus-Manchu, traditional beliefs, rituals, fertility cult, divine ancestresses, symbolism.*

Introduction

The study of ritual cult practice in traditional societies is a relevant theme in today's ethnographic science, starting with the classical works of J. Frazer, W. Turner, A. van Gennep, A.K. Bayburin. Numerous studies of academic scientists have been devoted to it (Pamyatniki kultury..., 1977). The fertility cult is considered in the literature from various angles. S.A. Tokarev wrote about it at the level of early forms of religion as a family-clan hearth cult, as well as within the agrarian cult (1964: 252–265, 378–392). B.A. Rybakov investigated the fertility cult at the level of the image of the divine ancestress among the Slavs (1981: 438–470). E.A. Torchinov considered it in primitive sacerdotal societies/tribes as the cult of the Great Mother Goddess (1998: 108–131). In each ethnic community, the cult of fertility connects to universal human ideas and values, as well as specific historical features. Ethnography as a science combines

the study of both of these components. Therefore, it is important to investigate the general and the particular in the fertility cult. This topic was researched using specific materials from various peoples of the world. The cult of fertility among the Tungus-Manchu peoples has been poorly studied; only discrete elements of it have been considered. S.M. Shirokogorov studied the Evenk system of shamanic spirit-helpers (1919: 14–19); I.A. Lopatin briefly described the cult of the tutelary spirit, Dzhulin, in the culture of the Nanai (1922: 222–223); A.F. Anisimov considered the image of the spirit of fire, Togo-mushun, among the Evenks, as a separate element of the belief system (1958: 93–97). A.V. Smolyak investigated the system of the shaman's spirit-helpers among the Nanai, having included the deity of fertility therein (1991: 13). S.V. Bereznitsky compared a broad array of materials on the peoples of the Amur region, and studied various aspects of beliefs in order to identify ethno-cultural influences (2003). I considered

the issues of the fertility cult among the Tungus-Manchu peoples from the standpoint of various characters. For the first time, a typology of fertility deities is proposed (Sem, 2013: 114–178). This study continues the analysis of these images included in the complete set of all the components of the cult, as different parts of its integral whole.

The aim of this work is to study the general features and the ethnocultural specificity of the fertility cult among different Tungus-Manchu peoples in their traditional belief system, using the semantic analysis of the images of the divine ancestresses. The connection of these images to ideas about the creation of the world, the ancestral tree of life (the tree of souls), the souls of people and the soul-embryo is considered, along with the cult of the family hearth and matrilineal succession. The complex of ideas about the cult of fertility and the divine ancestresses among the Tungus-Manchu peoples is researched for the first time as an interconnected integral whole. This research includes the analysis of folkloric data, beliefs, and rituals, shamanism, applied art, and ludic culture. This work uses comparative, comparative-historical, systemic, semantic, hermeneutic, and iconographic methods.

Research materials

The image of the divine ancestress, and the creator of the world and people. In the system of beliefs of the Tungus-Manchu peoples, the cult of fertility was associated with the images of the mythological divine ancestress, family-clan, childbirth, and shamanistic rites. Its origins are preserved in the myths about the creation of the world and human beings. For example, during large (burial) commemorations, the Nanai perform a shamanic song, in which the great goddess Mamelji creates the world, stirring the waters of the rivers flowing from the world ocean in the form of snakes, and creates the earth, the surface of which her husband, the fertility deity Guranta, helps to level (Lipskiye, 1936: Fol. 48). This goddess creates the first people from a drop of her blood (Lopatin, 1922: 237).

According to Manchu mythology, the great goddess-ancestress, mistress of the Universe, Abuga-khekhe, together with the goddess of the earth begotten by her, Manga-khekhe, creates the world with a musical instrument—a drum and a beater, which are associated with the element of water chaos of the sky (the mythological feminine principle) and with the world mountain (the mythological masculine principal). Abuga-khekhe uses the willow to stir the waters; a world mountain grows, while the sounds of a tambourine/drum are heard as a symbol of the act of creation of the world by the goddess (Wang Hong-gang, 1993: 48). In this myth, the shamanic level associated with the music of the spheres is recorded. According to M. Granet, in

ancient Chinese mythology, a musical string instrument made from the world tree Fusan is also used during the creation of the world (see (Shishlo, 1991: 200)). According to the beliefs of the Trans-Baikal Evenks of the 18th century, the supreme heavenly deity Buga had a harp/gusli for the creation of the world, which was ruined by his brother, the demon Buninka, the creator and owner of the lower world (Spassky, 1822: 44). Presumably, the image of the string musical instrument of the Evenks was associated with a female womb. Such representations were also known among the Ainu people. Among the Amur Evenks, the act of creating the world in the New Year's ritual is indicated by the cry of a loon, which, according to the cosmogonic myth, participated in the extraction of grains of sand and silt from the bottom of the world ocean (Varlamova, 2002: 29–30; Vasilevich, 1936: 29–30). In the Evenk mythology, there are also some plots where the Earth appears as the result of singing (Folklor evenov..., 2005: 206).

The image of the goddess of fire and the hearth.

According to materials of the late 19th to mid-20th centuries, there are Tungus-Manchu images of the divine ancestresses associated with the cult of fire and the ancestral tree of souls. The Nanai and Udege people carved their images from wood. The most ancient version, made of stone, was found in the garden of one of the Nanai of the Lower Amur. It is dated to the 6th–12th centuries (Okladnikov, 1981: 30). The idols were 8-shaped, without legs.

The concept of the fire goddess dates back to the Jurchen era. During the excavations of the Shaiga fortified settlement, 8-shaped metal figurines were found, open at the bottom, similar to intertwined snakes. Their placement was at the hearth of the dwelling, on the basis of which E.V. Shavkunov suggested their relationship to the cult of fire and associated them with the fire goddesses (1990: 269). The Uilta of Sakhalin, a peripheral Tungus-Manchu ethnic group, has a similar image. On the bone bow of a deer saddle, there was a carved ornament of figure eight with open ends, resembling snakes, which were interpreted by the local population as the goddesses of fire (REM, col. 8761-8017, 11452).

The 8-shaped items are most clearly associated with the image of the fire goddess among the Tungus-Manchu peoples of the Amur (Nanai, Negidals, Udege), the Uilta of Sakhalin, the Evens of the Okhotsk coast of the Far East, and the Evenks of Yakutia. The Nanai people made 8-shaped figures of Dzhuilin—the ancestor of the ancestors, the spirit-master of the hearth (Sem, 2003: 172–173). Later, they began to be made in a flattened form with legs, a square body, and a round head, but the semantics remained. The Negidals carved the image of the owner of the house, Masi, from a tree in the form of two balls and wrapped them in bear skin (REM, photocol. 4701-46). Among the shamans, he was considered patron spirit of

initiation (Na grani mirov..., 2006: 64). An 8-shaped wooden figurine of the Udege ancestress, wrapped in shavings (a symbol of fire), was kept in a bark box. It has retained its most ancient appearance. According to the collection inventory of the Primorsk Museum of Local Lore, this goddess was associated with the domestic hearth and fire (Osokina, 1977: 100, fig. 5, 4).

On the Even women's breast garments (an obligatory element of traditional clothing in combination with an open-fronted caftan), an 8-shaped ornament was embroidered with beads, which was considered a symbol of the goddess of fire, and it was combined with circles symbolizing the sun. In the worldview of the Tungus-Manchu people, these images were interconnected. Fire was considered to be a ray of the sun (Sem, 2015: 422, 426, 429). A similar ornament was on the hem of the women's caftans of the Yakut Evenks. The 8-shaped figures were at the level of the woman's reproductive organs. This position testified to their connection with the divine ancestress. The name of this ornament among the Evens signified "immortality", which, as I believe, was associated with the idea of the rebirth of souls (Ibid.: 302, 306, 440). Thus, the 8-shaped figure on the clothes of the Evens and Evenks is connected, on the one hand, with ideas about the human soul, and on the other, with the image of the divine ancestress. Among the Evens, her symbol was a spider, whose image was embroidered with beads on women's handbags. The spider was considered the grandmother-ancestress. A.A. Burykin compares these ideas with the mythology of the North American Indians, where the spider was the creator of the world, and sees an ancient substrate layer in Siberia therein (1985: 38, 41–44).

The Sakhalin Regional Museum of Local Lore contains an old bridal Uilta breast garment of the early 20th century, which has bronze pendants. Two of them are in the form of a circle with two curls and a leaf in the center—a symbol of the solar tree of life, of which the divine ancestress is considered to be a mistress; another one has circles placed in the form of a cross, symbolizing the four cardinal points and the sun. At the bottom of the breast garment, six claw pendants are sewn, which, according to local craftswomen, are symbols of the divine ancestress. In the center of the chest part, there is a 8-shaped pendant of a complicated form, with three small circles at the top, denoting the head and the female breast—also a symbol of the divine ancestress, probably associated with the hearth (SOKM, col. 2338–24) (Prokofiev, Cherpakova, 2009: 164). It is interesting to note that the 8-shaped ornament can be traced back to the Tungus population of South Sakhalin from the Jurchen era (9th–12th centuries). At the settlement of Belokamennaya-Chasi of the late period of the Okhotsk culture, minami-kaizuka-type pottery was found, which had an 8-shaped ornament combined with a zigzag and circles (Shubina, 1996: 235).

Thus, among the Tungus-Manchu peoples, the divine ancestress was identified with the goddess of fire. However, among the Yenisei Evenks, these two deities were separated. The fire goddess Togo-mushun was considered to be the helper of the goddess Bugadamenin—the mistress of the universe, ancestral mountains, and the tree of souls: the latter grew the souls of people and animals on the ancestral tree, and the fire goddess kept these souls and raised them in the ancestral hearth (Anisimov, 1958: 99–101). According to the beliefs of the Udege, the mistress of the solar tree of souls, as well as the mistress of animals and vegetation, was Tagu-mama, who lived with her husband Kanda-mafa, the master of animals and the moon tree of the weather, on a huge mountain, reaching the heavens (a symbol of the world mountain) (Folklor udegeitsev..., 1998: 33, 469).

According to the ideas of the Trans-Baikal Evenks, the soul of a shaman is born in a ritual hearth, the owner of which is the first ancestor in the form of a bear, and his guardian-helpers are four little people, the *anyakan*, the embodiment of the souls of the deceased ancestors, *khanya* (REM, col. 5093–147) (Na grani mirov..., 2006: 119). Interestingly, among the peoples of the Amur and Sakhalin (Udege, Uilta, Nanai), the bear was considered the ancestor of the clan, the husband of the divine ancestress and mistress of fertility; the bear was the master of fire, whose figurines were also made of wood (REM, col. 11429–7,8) (Sem, 2015: 285).

The shamanic medicine kit of the Ussuri Nanai included wooden figurines of the goddess of fertility Maidya-mama (who is also the divine ancestress, the mistress of the tree of life), wearing clothes made of the skin of a roe deer or a musk deer, whose form she could take; as well as her husband Ayami in the form of a bear; and a figurine of their assistant Chadilangi, made of grass, with a snake in her hand. All of them were associated with the cult of fire. Maidya-mama, Ayami, or the deity of fertility Erkhiiy-mergen were responsible for the birth of children's souls that grew up on the ancestral solar tree of life (Ibid.: 285, 296). In this regard, it is interesting to compare the previously mentioned Negidal shamanic initiation image of Masi, the master of the hearth. His wooden 8-shaped figure was wrapped in the skin of a bear. As we can see, there is a dual semantic of the connection with fire.

The image of the divine ancestress, associated among the Tungus-Manchu ethnic groups with the fire of the hearth, has analogs in the beliefs of the Turkic-speaking peoples of Southern Siberia (Umai, May-ene) (Aleksiev N.A., 1984: 162–163; Potapov, 1973: 275). Dzhuilin of the Nanai people is comparable to Dzayachi, the creator god of the Turkic-Mongolian ethnic groups (Potapov, 1991: 200; Neklyudov, 1994).

Ancestral lineage. The image of *musu*, the ancestral lineage, was preserved among the Tungus-Manchu

peoples in the ideas of the goddesses of fertility and divine ancestresses. For example, among the Manchus, the symbol of the divine ancestress (Fodo-mama) was a genealogical rope, depicting a tree of life, with pendants—tufts of hair, models of bows, pig's metatarsal bones (Guo Shuyung, Wang Hong-gang, 2001: 141–142). And in the representations of the Nanai, her image looked like a vertical line of figures of goddesses, following one after another. Such a multi-level image of the divine ancestress, represented as ancestral lineage, was found on a Nanai birch-bark vessel and on a woman's headdress (Sem, 2015: 291, 293). It is interesting that this image, in its geometric representation, is found on the petroglyphs of Mongolia and in the hieroglyphic writing of the ancient Chinese (Novgorodova, 1989: 100–101). The Sungari Nanai people set up poles with masks on the street next to the house—symbols of the ancestral lineage (Lattimore, 1933: Fig. 6). Among the Yenisei Evenks, such symbols were multi-level anthropomorphic figures of Khomokon (MAE, col. 1004-6) (Ivanov, 1970: 172).

In the shamanism of the Nanai and Evenks, *musu* is understood as the power of nature's fertility. The shamans of these peoples performed the *uundi* rite, the purpose of which was to obtain happiness for the participants from the supreme gods of the sky, to renew and strengthen shamanic power. The shaman made a procession around the village, entered the dwellings of his relatives, and circled around the fire, which was considered a place of concentration of the souls of people. The participants in the ritual held on to the shaman's belt, to which a ten-meter-long buckskin strap was attached, in the form of a snake's torso and heads, and colored scraps of fabric were suspended from it, giving it bird symbolism. Thus, the belt with an attached strap symbolized the bird-snake, the main shamanic patron-spirit. With his help, the shaman drove away evil spirits and attracted the forces of nature's fertility. Smolyak connects this rite with the ancestral lineage (1991: 173, 179). The Evenks also had ideas about *musun*—the power of movement inherent in any natural phenomenon. The spirits-masters of various natural objects, elements, ritual items possessed that power. The word *musun* is included in the names of the deities of nature, for example, Togo-mushun—the goddess of fire (Vasilevich, 1969: 227–228).

Ideas about the soul-embryo and the ancestral tree of souls. Among the Tungus-Manchu peoples, the images of the divine ancestress, the first ancestor, the deity of fertility are associated with the images of soul-embryos, which are depicted in the shape of a comma, like the East Asian magatama. Such curls are often found in the curvilinear ornament of the peoples of the Lower Amur (Nanai, Ulchi, Udege), next to images of birds, trees of souls, and their mistress—the goddess of fertility (Kraski..., 1982: 85, 94). In 1927, Kimonko, an Udege shaman, made three figures as symbols of

the development of the human soul, for the collector E.R. Schneider. The first is a C-shaped type of magatama, with a button in its center, depicting the soul-life of an *erga*; the second is in the form of a dragonfly without wings; the third is an anthropomorphic figure with wings instead of hands, as the development of the *omi* soul (birds on the trees of souls) to the soul-shadow or double, *khanya* (REM, col. 5656-180/1-3) (Na grani mirov..., 2006: 91). So, in the Amur region, the image of soul had a metaphorical development from an embryo to an insect and a bird-man.

In the traditional beliefs of the Tungus-Manchu peoples of the Amur (Nanai and Ulchi), Primorye (Udege), and Siberia (Evenk, Even, and Orochon), there were ideas about ancestral trees of souls, or trees of life (Lipskaya-Walrond, 1925: 6; Mazin, 1984: 11), whose masters were a pair of fertility gods in the hypostasis of deer. An obligatory element of the wedding gowns of the Nanai, Ulchi, Negidals, and Uilta are embroidered (with colored threads in the Nanai, and with reindeer breast hair in the others) images of ancestral trees of life with birds that personify the souls of people on the branches; gods of fertility and their zoomorphic hypostases in the form of two deer. In some cases, trees are depicted entwined with snakes—a symbol of the axis of the world (REM, col. 2566-20, 21; 7005-62). The embroideries are traditionally made in a curvilinear style. This tradition is very enduring. At present, the plot of the ancestral tree of souls is repeated on modern panel pictures (clan symbolic artifacts of the Nanai) and on the dressing gowns of children's dolls. These dolls are probably the personification of the great goddess, who sends the forces of fertility to people in the form of the embryos of souls (Chadaeva, 1986: 39), symbols of family and clan guardians (Rosugbu, 1998). In the New Year shamanic ritual of the Evenks and Evens, the shaman, on behalf of the participants, beseeches the supreme goddess for the power of nature's fertility for a whole year (Mazin, 1984: 91; Alekseev A.A., 1993: 17, 41).

It is interesting that in the medieval burial of the Jurchens, the ancestors of the Tungus-Manchu peoples, archaeologists found a metal pommel on a horse's head, in the form of an ancestral tree of souls, with birds on its branches (Shavkunov, 1990: 266). Apparently, it was put on a horse, on which the bride rode to the groom's house, where, having crossed the threshold, she stood on a horse saddle belonging to the groom, thus joining the family of her husband (Starikov, 1965: 681). The Evenks carried the bride to the groom's house on a wedding deer (Tugolukov, 1980: 56).

Another interesting analogy is the Scythian pommel from Lysaya Mountain in the form of ancestral tree of life, with birds on its branches and the figure of the ancestor-elder Targitau on the middle branch (Raevsky, 1977: 85). In Evenk folklore, the images of the ancestor-

elder, the blacksmith Torontai and the bear-ancestor Torganey, are preserved. The names of these figures are comparable to those of the Scythians (Romanova, Myreeva, 1971: 212). It is known that in ancient times the ancestors of the Tungus-Manchu peoples contacted the Altai Scythians who advanced to Manchuria. This was reflected in the formation of Siberian shamanism, which has many parallels with the religious beliefs of the Scythians (Kurochkin, 1994). On the carpet from 5th Pazyryk mound, a scene of the meeting of a goddess with a horseman is depicted, with eight repetitions. These are interpreted as images of the goddess of fire, Tabiti, and the son of the great ancestor, Kolaksai, the sun deity, who came to receive the gift. The goddess is depicted on a throne, from the leg of which a tree with flowers seems to grow. Therefore, she is interpreted as the mistress of the tree of life (Polosmak, Barkova, 2005: 146–147).

According to the Nanai shamanistic beliefs and to a drawing of the great shaman Bogdan Onenko, the shaman flew to heaven to the goddess of fertility, where a tree of souls with birds grew, for the soul of a child for her future parents. On the way, he rested on a two-color red and blue stone, a symbol of life and death, and flew further into the possession of the mistress of the solar tree (Sem, 2003: 163–164). The Evens considered her as the wife of the master of the sky, and both of them as the main supreme deities (Alekseev A.A., 1993: 17). According to the Evenk beliefs, the mistress of the solar tree of life was the goddess Bugady-enin, who was also the mistress of the ancestral mountains and forests, the souls of people and animals; and her husband was the lunar elder, the master of the weather tree. Some shamans have painted (for A.F. Anisimov) a tree and two gods under it—a solar woman and a lunar man (Anisimov, 1958: 29, fig. 2). According to Udege mythology, Tagu-mama was the mistress of the sun mountain and the tree, and her husband, the old man Kanda-mafa, was the master of the tree of frost and animals (Folklor udegeitsev..., 1998: 455). The goddess of fertility was usually depicted at the base of a tree, in the form of a lyre-like figure, schematically rendering the woman's chest, thighs, and womb. The image of the male deity of fertility was in the form of Jomon figures *dogu* and was located in the crown of the tree of souls. There is evidence that groups of the population from the mainland of East Asia, Transbaikalia, Mongolia, and the Amur migrated to Japan in the Paleolithic, Neolithic, and in the Middle Ages; also, there were later migrations in the opposite direction (Vasilyevsky, 1981: 153). Therefore, it is not surprising that a figure of the *dogu* type is found in the ornament of the Amur peoples (Nanai, Udege) as the preservation of the cultural memory of the peoples of the nearby East Asian region. In this regard, the ancient Korean material is interesting. The golden crown of the Silla kingdom, dating to the 5th century, depicts three ancestral trees

with magatamas—the soul-embryos of people (Lim Sang Jeong, 1980: Col. fig. 15). This is the earliest depiction of the ancestral tree of souls in East Asia. Later Korean materials testify to the continuation of the tradition. On pillows and shawls, Koreans embroidered trees with birds on the branches (Pojagi..., 1989: 9).

Thus, the ideas of the soul-embryos and the tree of life among the Tungus-Manchu ethnic groups have analogs in the beliefs of the peoples of Central and East Asia (Scythians, Jurchens, ancient Koreans).

Results and discussion

A systemic hermeneutic analysis of the religious and mythological beliefs of the Tungus-Manchu peoples showed that at the end of the 19th to 20th centuries they had a complex of ideas about the cult of fertility, associated with the image of the divine ancestress, characterizing the creation of the world and the first people, the mistress of the hearth and fire, trees of souls and images of soul-embryos, the ancestral lineage. In the mythology of the Manchus and Nanai, the divine ancestress was the creator of the world and the first people. According to the traditional beliefs of all the Tungus-speaking peoples of Siberia and the Amur, she was the mistress of the hearth and fire. The 8-shaped image of the deity is presented in ritual sculpture and decorative and applied art of the Nanai, Ulchi, Uilta, Negidals, Evenks, and Evens. The ancestral lineage found expression in the symbolism of the image of the divine ancestress herself. For the Manchus, this is a rope with pendants, symbolizing the ancestral tree of life; for the Amur Nanai, this is a multi-level figure, which meant numerous women in childbirth; for the Sungarian Nanai and Evenks, this is a column with masks. The Tungus-Manchu peoples of the Amur had a special attitude to the matrilineal succession of their ancestors, which was reflected in the New Year ceremonies *uundi*.

The image of the divine ancestress is associated with the ideas of the tree of life or the ancestral tree of souls and of the soul-embryos in the form of curls of the magatama type, with their further development into images of birds and men. They were widespread in the beliefs of the Evenks, Evens, Nanai, Ulchi, and Udege. The ancestral tree of souls was depicted with birds on the branches and two deer below—its symbolic masters. In the decorative and applied art of the Nanai, Ulchi, and Udege, images of soul-embryos, known to Koreans and Japanese, have been preserved. These were depicted on wedding gowns, family panels, birch-bark utensils, and dressing gowns for dolls. The image of the ancestral tree of life has analogs in the wedding rituals of the Jurchens, in the religious ideas of the Scythians.

Conclusion

As a result of the study it was established that the Tungus-Manchu peoples developed archetypal signs of the fertility cult, associated with the images of the divine ancestresses. They had their own ethnocultural specificity among different peoples. These beliefs mentally reflected the intergenerational cultural memory about the mythological creators of the world and the first people, the patrons of the house and fire, the tree of souls and the soul-embryo, and the ancestral lineage. These ideas, which make up an integral whole, have been preserved in folklore, rituals, family and clan cult practice, childbirth rituals, shamanism, ludic culture, arts and crafts. The formation of this complex was influenced by the Central Asian (Turkic-Mongolian and Scythian) and East Asian (Korean-Japanese, Jurchen) cultural traditions. In conclusion, it should be noted that the cult of fertility is a qualitative valuable unique feature of the beliefs, ritual practices, and art of the Tungus-Manchu peoples.

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