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Tungus-Manchu Traditional Beliefs. Part 2: Zoomorphic Complex

This article describes the zoomorphic complex of Tungus-Manchu beliefs reflected in mythology, ritual practices, shamanism, and decorative and applied arts. Those beliefs are regarded as a coherent whole within the cultural system. The typology of the zoomorphic complex shows that the key figures were the serpent-dragon, the deer, the bear, and the tiger. In traditional worldviews and rituals, they were related to cosmogony, ancestor cult, hunting and fishing rituals, healing, and initiation shamanic complexes. The semantics of animal images depended on their place in the cultural system, religious ritual, and artistic communication. Comparative analysis demonstrates both ethno-cultural specificity and universal archetypal characteristics, as well as connection with ancient regional beliefs. The Tungus-Manchu zoomorphic complex originated within the East Asian traditions, having been influenced by cultures such as the Old Chinese, Korean, and Jurchen.

Keywords: Zoomorphic complex, beliefs, rituals, folklore, shamanism, Tungus-Manchu peoples, symbolism, semantics of images.

Introduction

The study of zoomorphic images in cultural systems is of constant interest to contemporary authors. Many books and articles have been written on this topic (Yurchenko, 2002; Bestiariy..., 2019; Ermolova, 1993; Davydov, 2014). This interest is due to the special status that humans attribute to certain animals. Starting from the Paleolithic period, archaic totemic beliefs about the relationship between man and animal have been observed, as well as the role of animals in shamanism, the development of the animal cult, associated cults of ancestors and trade, and zoomorphic images of the gods (Tokarev, 1964: 236–251; Sokolova, 1972: 43–120). In recent decades, an “ontological turn” has taken place in sociology and ethnography, as a result of which it has been proposed to view all objects in the world as having equal value (humans, animals, mythological creatures,

spirits, objects, sacred places, etc.) (Sokolovsky, 2016: 105). In this regard, it seems important and relevant to study the semantics of zoomorphic images in different peoples in order to identify their typology and global values.

The aim of this work is to study the typology of the zoomorphic complex of beliefs of the Tungus-Manchu ethnic groups in folklore, rituals, shamanism, and art, in order to identify the symbolism and semantics of zoomorphic images in that cultural system, as well as ethnocultural influences in this complex. The following conceptual approaches have been taken: the systemic approach (analysis of the material, considering the phenomenon of culture in the integrity of interrelated elements); the complex approach (analysis of folklore, beliefs, ritual practice, shamanism, art); the hermeneutic approach (the study of images as cultural texts), and the semantic approach (identification of the symbolism

and meaning of the images). Comparative historical, systemic, typological, semantic, and iconographic methods were used.

Materials

In the culture of the Tungus-Manchu peoples, the most important of all the zoomorphic images were the serpent-dragon, deer, tiger, and bear. They are found both in beliefs and rituals, as well as in arts and crafts. In literature, images of a tiger and a bear were seen as sacred images among the peoples of the Amur, mainly among the Udege (Startsev, 2017: 84–120), Evenks, and Evens (Vasilevich, 1971; Popova, 1967). The rest of the aspects of their analysis (in art and shamanism) were not considered, or were only briefly touched upon. The image of a deer was examined in the culture of the Evenks, but it has not been studied in a comparative sense, in the folklore and shamanism of all Tungus-Manchu peoples (Ermolova, 1993; Davydov, 2014). In this work, zoomorphic images are studied as a single worldview of these peoples on the basis of folklore, mythology, as well as beliefs, rituals, shamanism, and art.

The image of the serpent-dragon and its symbolism.

According to the ancient tradition of the Tungus-Manchu peoples, the serpent-dragon was associated with the cosmos or outer space, and was seen as the embodiment of the master of the universe, the creator of the world: the solar serpent. These ideas were preserved in Evenk, Nanai, Nivkh cultures, as well as in the mythology of the Ainu people. Images of a snake coiled into a spiral, or in the form of an S-shaped sign, were widespread on birch-bark products of the Nanai, Udege, and Nivkh (Shrenk, 1899: Ill. 26).

The Evenks of Transbaikalia and the Upper Amur region have preserved the cosmogonic myth of a frog getting mud from the bottom of the world ocean at the request of a snake. Both of these creatures lived in the water at the beginning of the creation of the world (Mazin, 1984: 19–20). The Manchu Evenks have a myth about two snakes supporting the earth (Shirokogoroff, 1935: 125). In the mythology of the Ainu, two ancestors—the supreme deities of the sky, sun, or thunder (masculine principle), and fire and the family tree (feminine principle)—descended from heaven to earth in the form of snakes and created the terrain (Munro, 1963: 17).

In Nanai mythology, the goddess-progenitor Mameldi created the earth from nine snake-rivers, twisting them, as if knocking down the water (Sem T.Y., 2015: 321). Interestingly, images of nine snakes are present on one of the sacred stones in Sakachi-Alyan. A.P. Okladnikov suggested that these ancient monuments served the Nanai as a model for their myths and beliefs (1971: 150). The Nanai considered the real Mount Devyatka to

be the embodiment of the image of the cosmic serpent-dragon. According to the mythology of the Nanai clan of the Samars, who live in the lower reaches of the Amur, on its tributary river, the Kondon, the cosmic serpent-dragon Mudur was the master of the world and the sky; together with the mistress of the earth and the mountain, the turtle Kailasu, he owned the ancestral mountains and was considered their embodiment (Kubanova, 1992: 3; Pereverzeva, 2005). Notably, the East Asian images (from ancient Chinese and Koreans) of the heavenly serpent and the turtle (the embodiment of the earth-mountain) featured similar symbolism (Dzharylgasina, 1972: 141, 147; Yuan Ke, 1965: 110–111).

The Udege have preserved a folk tale with an initiation theme about the passage of a hero through the body of a snake in order to be reborn with a new quality, or a new birth after an imaginary death (Folklor..., 1998: 325). Apparently, this was a shamanic ritual in order for the hero to acquire new qualities and the ability to communicate with the spirit world.

In the shamanism of the Trans-Baikal Evenks-Orochons, the image of a cosmic snake in the form of a cord of blue fabric stuffed with deer hair, with three heads at one end, was used during healing rituals (REM, col. 8761-19327). The shaman drum of the Orochons of Manchuria depicts three snakes of yellow, red, and black—symbols of the three worlds (Zhongguo shasha..., 2016: 6). Among the Udege, as well as among the Evenks, the image of the serpent-dragon was associated with ideas about the earth. Among the shamanic attributes, they had a belt with pendants in the form of double snakes (REM, col. 1995-2) (Na grani mirov..., 2006: 237; Folklor..., 1998: 295). On the back of the shaman's robe of the great Nanai shaman woman Nene Onenko of the 19th century, a red circle with the rays and scales of a serpent-dragon (a symbol of a cosmic solar serpent) was depicted; inside the circle were two ducks, personifying the myth of the creation of the world, and a tiger, the main patron spirit of shamans, the owner of the souls of animals and people (REM, col. 11406-1) (Na grani mirov..., 2006: 46–47).

In the visual arts of the Tungus-Manchu peoples (Nanai, Negidal, and Ulchi), the concept of a dragon has been preserved, which was necessarily depicted on *sike* wedding gowns. It was believed that this would serve as a talisman against evil spirits, as well as provide a woman with well-being and the bearing of children (Sem Y.A., 1973: 221; Titoreva, 2016: 217). Among the Udege and Nanai, this image was repeated on birch-bark boxes. The utensils often depicted a pair of dragons, probably the first ancestors, which was associated with the ancient Chinese images of anthropomorphic demigods with snake-like bodies and limbs (REM, col. 1870-66, 1995-14) (Sem T.Y., 2020: 60–63, 67).

The image of a dragon-serpent in the perception of the Tungus-Manchu peoples is associated with figures from

the taiga: a bear and a tiger. The children of the supreme deity in the form of the serpent-dragon Mudur Kailasu were the Ado-seveni twins—the taiga and water bears Na Duenteni and Mue Duenteni (Kubanova, 1992: 3; Pereverzeva, 2005). In the shamanic medical system of the Nanai-Samagirs, there was a figure of an arched-shaped snake with the heads of bears or tigers (REM, col. 4795–363). These representations reflect the ancient layer of East Asian belief. Notably, the image of a heavenly rainbow-serpent was known to the ancient Chinese (Vasiliev et al., 2015: 459).

Interestingly, Oroch and Udege shamans made ritual masks decorated with patterns in the form of spirals—symbols of snakes. The great shaman of the Udege put on such a mask during the ritual of a large commemoration or the *uundi* rite (renewal of shamanic power and attracting the forces of the fertility of nature). It was called *hambaba* or “master of the universe” (Sem Y.A., 1993) and was dedicated to the shamanic ancestor of Teunki, who also had the appearance of a tiger (REM, col. 1870–38) (Na grani mirov..., 2006: 181–182). This name goes back to the common Tungus shamanic concept of *tai/teu/tui*. The Evenks call it a shamanic gift or a beginner shaman who has acquired the ability to see spirits (Rychkov, 1923: 115).

The image of a deer with branching antlers. This animal was widely known in the beliefs of the Tungus-Manchu peoples. Among the Evenks, a deer with branching antlers was associated with space and the mythic narrative of hunting in the celestial domain. This image had solar symbolism (Anisimov, 1958: 69–71; Mazin, 1984: 9; Sem L.I., Sem Y.A., 2020: 203–207). The hero of the Evenk myth, shooting at the solar deer, which carries away the sun on its antlers (Mazin, 1984: 9), fits into the image of the great shooter of Mongol-Turkic mythology. The myth of the pursuit of the sun, according to some researchers, goes back to the East Asian tradition and is associated with the idea of a dying and resurrecting deity (Yanshina, 1984: 96). In the mythology of the peoples of East Asia, the theme of the great shooter is also widespread, only it is in the story about the plurality of suns (Shanshina, 2000: 43, 47).

This narrative has been preserved in the ornament of the peripheral Tungus-Manchu ethnic group of the Uilta of Sakhalin. On the bone pommel of a saddle, worn on a sacred deer to transport sacred items, from the photo collection of Y.A. Sem and L.I. Sem, there is an image of a deer with branching antlers next to a goatling, made in a curvilinear Scythian animal style (Sem T.Y., 2015: 202). The animals symbolized the course of the sun and the renewal of nature, the replacement of the old sun (deer) with a new one (goatling). This plot is consistent with the Evens' ideas about the winged deer as the old sun and the Siberian crane as the new sun, on which the shaman flies to the sky to the goddess of the sun tree and back, during the New Year's ritual (Alekseev, 1993: 25–34).

Among the peoples of the Amur, the image of a deer with branching antlers has been preserved in folklore with elements of a heroic epic. A Nanai legend tells of how *mergen* (a sharpshooter and a sage-shaman) travels to heaven for his wife, the daughter of the sun. On the way, he meets in a pristine swamp a deer with antlers reaching up to heaven, a wild boar that has grown with tusks into the ground, and a fish; he frees them from bondage with the elements of heaven and earth, which diverge; and thus, the act of the creation of the world is performed (Sem L.I., Sem Y.A., 2020: 148–152, 203–208). A similar plot was also known to the Udege (Folklor..., 1998: 466–469).

In the shamanic legend of the Manchus, there is a tale about an ancestor named Bukuri Yongson, which means “hero mountain-deer” (Gimm, 1992: 107). In the legend about the Nishan shamaness, the ancestor marries a goddess named Byam Buke—a female moon deer (Kniga..., 1992: 126). That is, both human ancestors are associated with the images of deer. Interestingly, the Nanai depict two deer, the owners of the tree, under the family tree of souls. In the folklore of the Trans-Baikal Evenks, the image of a mountain-deer is associated with the first ancestor Kuladai (Sadko, 1971: 9–13). Among the Yenisei Evenks, the ancestor, the first shaman Gurivul, has his counterpart in a helper spirit in the form of a deer (Vasilevich, 1936: 136–138).

In Evenk shamanism, images of an elk and a deer are widespread. The shaman's outfit symbolized outer space and a bird-deer. Among the amulets of the shamans of the Trans-Baikal Evenks, there are images of winged deer and birds, along with a figure of a double, the ancestor of the shaman (REM, col. 8761–8707/1–3, 8608/1–5) (Sem T.Y., 2017: 191).

The image of a deer is captured on items from the medieval Jurchen monuments of Primorye. The images of a deer with its head turned back are found on bronze and iron belt buckles from the Lazo fortified settlement, as well as on a stone crucible from the Ananievka fortified settlement. This image is associated with shamanism as a symbol of the passage to another world. The image of a deer with branched antlers and its head stretched forward can be found on an oval metal plaque from the Shayga fortified settlement (Shavkunov, 1990: 259, 262, 264). The images of a deer with branched antlers and a solar deer with the sun on its antlers, depicted on ceramics and petroglyphs, date back to the Neolithic era of Manchuria (Alkin, 2007: 102, 107).

Images of a bear and a tiger. These images played an important role in the mythology and cult practices of the Nanai and Ulchi. In Nanai and Ulchi folklore, the bear has the status of a clan totemic ancestor. There were widespread myths about the marriage of a she-bear and a hunter, or a girl and a bear (Burykin, 1996: 66–67). The bear cult among the Tungus-Manchu

peoples dates back to the Neolithic era. Even then, probably, there was a myth about the cohabitation of a woman and an ancestral bear that had totemic sources. This is evidenced by the figurines of women and bears found by archaeologists in places of worship on the lower Amur (Medvedev, 2005).

In the beliefs of the Tungus-Manchu peoples, the bear was a cosmic character of the three worlds of the universe. In Nanai mythology, his image was associated with one of the three suns that simultaneously appeared in the sky (Trusov, 1884: 448–449). Also, the bear was considered the master of the middle world, as well as of the taiga and animals. During the commemoration, the Nanai clan, Kile, set off on a mythical journey into *buli*, the world of the dead, riding a bear (Zolotarev, 1939: 161). In the shamanic medical system of the Ussuri Nanai, the bear Ayami was associated with the element of fire. He was considered the husband of the fertility goddess—the female elk Maidya-mama (REM, col. 11429-7, 8). According to the mythology of the Nanai, Ulchi, and Amur Evenks, the she-bear was the mistress of the land and the underworld; she was a shamanic deity (Kubanov, 1992: 3–19; Varlamova, 1994). Most often, in the Nanai and Ulchi beliefs, the image of a bear personified the owner of the taiga and of the tree of life (Lipskaya, 1932; Sem T.Y., 2003: 163).

In the healing magic of the Ulchi and Nanai, two bears are represented: the taiga bear Na Duenteni and the river bear Mue Duenteni. The first was depicted horizontally, in the usual position of a taiga animal, and the second vertically, sitting on its hind legs (Kubanov, 1992: 4, 13). In the Ulchi complex associated with the bear holiday, the mistress of the taiga is the she-bear *duente*, and the water is marked by two bear cubs, *mue duenteni*. In shamanic medical practice, the images of the *yarga* leopard, the *amba* tiger, and the *duente* bear were considered the most powerful, healing all diseases (Shimkevich, 1896: 40–46; Kubanov, 1992: 13). In the shamanism of the Nanai, Ulchi, and Oroch, an important role was played by two of the shaman's helper spirits that had a zoomorphic appearance—Mangi in the form of a bear, and Buchu in the form of a bird-snake or musk deer (Sem T.Y., 2015: 357).

The concept of a tiger in the Upper and Lower Amur regions also has Neolithic origins. A stylized drawing of a tiger's face is engraved on a sacred stone that depicts a mask with a vegetative-anthropomorphic model of the world (Okladnikov, 1971: 170; Sem T.Y., 2003: 163). In the folklore of the Nanai, there is an understanding of this narrative. N.A. Lipskaya wrote down the Nanai myth about the forefathers Julie and Masi, who, fleeing from the flood-rain, pass into another world through the body of a stone-tiger, entering the mouth of an animal and exiting through its body (Lipsky A.N. and N.A., 1936–1937: Fol. 23–24).

The tiger, like the bear, is associated in the views of the Nanai with the three worlds of the universe. In the myth of the three suns, the luminaries had the appearance of animals: a tiger, a bear, and a snake. The first ancestor Guranta shoots at the extra stars, leaving one in the guise of a tiger (Trusov, 1884: 448–449). In Ulchi mythology, the ancestor Kondoliku, in the form of an elk, becomes the master of the forest *derki dusa* in the guise of a tiger, and the younger sister turns into a solar tiger *dusa siula* and leaves for the sky (Zolotarev, 1939: 170).

Among the Nanai and the Ulchi, the Duse tiger was considered the master of mountains and forest (Kubanov, 1992: 23–30). On the shaman's robe of Nene Onenko, inside a circle symbolizing the solar serpent, the master of the universe, there is an image of a tiger connected with the mountains (Sem T.Y., 2003: 164–165). The tiger depicted on the magic ring of a hunter, with a body sprouting tree leaves, was associated with the owner of the taiga (Sem Y.A., 1992). In addition, in Nanai folklore, the tiger acts as the ancestor of the clan, the assistant to the master of the underworld, Ezhdén-Khan. It has the anthro-po-zoomorphic appearance of a tiger with the face of an old man with a beard (Sem T.Y., 2015: 532).

Among the Amur Evenks, the tiger was considered the protector of shaman, and the image of the animal's skin was placed on the back of the shaman's outfit (Mazin, 1984: 174). Manchu shamans traced their origin from the ancestors in the form of a tiger, and performed special rituals associated with it (Bulgakova, 2018).

There are different opinions concerning the origin of the cult of the tiger among the peoples of the Amur. A.F. Startsev believes that it was formed under the influence of East Asian traditions (2017: 102). According to S.V. Bereznitsky, the cult is of local origin, since the tiger lived in these places (2003: 215). It is known that members of the Jurchen imperial dynasty had seals with a golden image of a tiger, giving them the right to hereditary ownership of land and property (Sem T.Y., 2013: 141).

Results and discussion

The main zoomorphic characters of the beliefs of the Tungus-Manchu peoples (snake-dragon, deer, bear, and tiger) are reflected in mythology and folklore, ritual practice, shamanism, and art (ritual portable art, embroidery, and ornamental appliqué on clothes and birch bark). Ideas about them occupy a certain, unique place in the system of the sacred culture of these peoples.

The image of the serpent-dragon was widespread in the shamanism of the Evenks, Nanai, Udege, and Manchu. In the Evenk and Nanai traditions, it was

associated with the cosmos, solar symbolism, and the creator of the earth. The image of the serpent-dragon is presented in arts and crafts. The Nanai and Ulchi people embroidered its image on the back of their wedding gowns. It was perceived as a talisman, a benevolent sign. It was also believed that this would ensure the birth of children. On the birch-bark vessels of the Udege, Nanai, and Uilta, the serpent-dragon was often depicted in the form of a spiral or an S-shaped sign. The image of the serpent-dragon in the beliefs of the Tungus-Manchu peoples of the Amur was associated with the images of a bear and a tiger. This was reflected in the shamanic masks of the Udege, the healing sculptures of the Nanai and Negidal, and the idea of the sacred landscape of the Nanai of the Samar clan. The image of the serpent-dragon is widespread in East Asian tradition. This creature is depicted in sculpture, as well as in small portable art of the Jurchens. In the mythology of the ancient Chinese and Koreans, the serpent-dragon is associated with the cult of the ancestors. It was associated with the sky and water, and it was a benevolent symbol.

The image of a deer with branching antlers among the Evenks and Uilta was associated with space, solar symbolism, and the earth and underworld; its antlers were seen as a stairway to heaven. In the mythology and folklore of the Manchu, the first ancestors had the appearance of a man and a deer. The same ideas were preserved among the Nanai and Ulchi in the visual arts (deer under the family tree). In the Evenk myth about space hunting, the deer is associated with the change of day and night, and the arrival of the New Year. In the folklore of the Nanai and Udege people, the mythical image of a cosmic deer with branching antlers reaching up to heaven was introduced into epic legend and fairy tales. Amulets in the shape of a deer/elk are widespread among the Evenks. On the saddle pommel of the sacred deer of the Uilta, there is an image of a cosmic deer in the Scythian animal style next to a goatling, which symbolized the old and young sun. These images are comparable to the characters of the shamanic flight to heaven during the New Year's ritual of the Evend. Notably, the similar images of a deer were found in the Jurchen metal artworks.

The images of a bear and a tiger occupy an important place in the system of beliefs and cults of the Tungus-Manchu peoples, often intertwining. These animals mark the three worlds of the universe: bear (sun, taiga and water, fire and the underworld) and tiger (sun and sky, taiga-mountain, fire and the underworld). The bear was the totemic ancestor of the clan or tribe. There are myths about his marriage to a virgin. There were similar ideas about the tiger as an ancestor. The image of a bear occupied a special place in the healing magic and ritual sculpture. The bear and the tiger were considered strong shamanic patron-spirits among all Tungus-Manchu peoples.

The zoomorphic presented here are images that have been known in the lower Amur region (bear, tiger, deer, serpent-dragon) and in Manchuria (serpent-dragon, deer, tiger) since antiquity. They were partly formed within the East Asian area, as evidenced by the materials of the Jurchen (image of a deer, tiger, serpent-dragon), the ancient Chinese, and ancient Koreans (image of a serpent-dragon, tiger).

Conclusions

The results of the study of the main characters of the zoomorphic complex of beliefs in the culture system of the Tungus-Manchu peoples characterize them as cosmogonic images with a high semiotic status. The perception of each of these characters as universal symbols of culture reflects their characteristics in mythology, shamanism, art, beliefs, and rituals. The images of the serpent-dragon and the deer are more cosmogonic, while the images of the bear and tiger retained a connection with the hunting cult and the cult of ancestors, the middle world; although they were also associated with the three worlds of the universe, especially in shamanism. The formation of these zoomorphic images in the culture system of the Tungus-Manchu peoples was influenced by the traditions of the ancient Chinese and Koreans, as well as the Jurchen.

This studied zoomorphic complex reveals the specifics of religious ideas about the world. Despite the common beliefs of the Tungus-Manchu peoples, each of them developed ethnocultural peculiarities. For example, among the Manchu, the cults of tiger and serpent-dragon prevailed; the image of deer in folklore was associated with the cult of ancestors. Among the peoples of the Amur (Nanai, Ulchi, Udege, Negidal, Uilta, Oroch), the most revered were the bear and the tiger. The image of the deer is presented in the folklore of the Nanai and Ulchi, the art of the Uilta, and the image of the serpent-dragon was preserved among the Nanai and Nivkhs. Among the Evenks and Evens, the cults of the deer and the bear were of the greatest importance. The images of the tiger and the serpent were reflected in folklore, shamanism, and art. Along with this, in the beliefs associated with the zoomorphic complex, universal archetypal symbols are noted (a cosmic deer with branching antlers, a solar serpent, a bear, and a tiger) dating back to the Neolithic period, found on petroglyphs and in ritual sculpture on the Lower Amur and in Manchuria.

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