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The Tree-Clan-Individual Concept in Traditional Khakas Culture (Late 19th to Mid-20th Century)

On the basis of ethnographic, folk, and linguistic materials, most of them newly-introduced, the “tree-clan-individual” concept in the Khakas culture is reconstructed and analyzed. The status and image of the tree in their traditional mythological and ritualistic system is assessed. Notions of man and his environment were related to anthropomorphic reasoning, by which natural objects, such as trees, were endowed with human attributes. In their religious-mythological views the tree was identified with a person, with the crown of the tree being the head, the trunk being the body, branches as being arms, sap as being blood, etc. Trees were believed to be either male or female. In the traditional consciousness, human life scenarios were closely paralleled to those of trees. The vegetative code was used to refer to various psychophysical, mental, and other human phenomena. Social norms included special rules in dealing with trees, used in logging. In essence, a tree had to be dealt with like a humanlike being. In mythological thinking, felling a tree was to some degree tantamount to murder. Souls of specific individuals or groups were likewise associated with trees, so each Khakas seok (clan) had a sacred tree. It was an integral part of the burial rite. The tree, then, was a key element in the ideological structure, having a broad semiotic field.

Keywords: *Khakas, traditional worldview, tree cult, seok-clan, man, ancestor cult.*

Introduction

Structuring is a way to comprehend and appropriate the surrounding space. In the traditional consciousness, this process ultimately leads to the worldview where each object is endowed with individual characteristics. Moreover, the perception of each natural element and identification of the corresponding features in it is determined by its practical significance and benefit for the people. The nature of Khakassia is rich in forests, which have not only utilitarian, but also great spiritual and symbolic value for the local people. Therefore, it is not accidental that the tree and its image play an important role in the Khakas traditional culture.

In the worldview and ritual practices of the Khakas people, trees organize space thereby performing a structuring function. Moreover, serving as the axis of the universe, the tree both connects different worlds and personifies the model of the universe and acts as a sacral center, which is the focal point of life. Most of the traditional rituals that “ensure” interaction with the upper and lower worlds were and are still performed at a tree or at its symbols—a hitching post, pole, etc. Among the common people, veneration of the tree has reached its highest level, i.e. deification. Therefore, many popular predictions and beliefs are associated with the tree.

This topic has attracted many scholars, who have used field ethnographic and literary evidence to

analyze various aspects of the tree cult among the Khakas people (Borgoyakov, 1969; Usmanova, 1980; Traditsionnoye mirovozzreniye..., 1988; Butanaev, 2003: 40–41; Burnakov, 2006: 18–19; and others). However, less than all aspects of this topic have been adequately studied. For example, the concept of “tree-clan-individual” (*agas-söök-kizi*) in the worldview of the Khakas people has not yet been the topic of a special study. Note that the term “concept” is understood as a mental unit enrooted in the language of the people, which reflects a set of traditional beliefs about nature, society, and man. In this article, we will specifically discuss the views linked to the associative series of “tree-clan-individual” and the related social normative and ritual practices in the Khakas culture.

Anthropomorphization of the tree and mythical “dendronization” of man

Traditional worldviews typically reveal the phenomenon of revitalization and spiritualization of nature, in particular of the tree (Khakas *azac*). The Khakas people perceive trees as living beings, and transfer human characteristics to them. In Khakas popular mythology, this is reflected in one of their old riddles: *Chirimde chirilig, churttiyg polgabyn, peer kilip, moinyrna pag sugylkykh (taigadan' agylgan agas)* ‘In my homeland, I had land and a place to make camp. When I came here, I found myself with a rope around my neck (a tree brought from the taiga)’ (Domozhakov, 1951: 65). The similarity noted between the tree and man is not at all accidental. In the religious and mythological consciousness, the process of comprehension of the surrounding world is often accompanied by drawing certain parallels and often endowing some of its objects with human features. For example, humanization of the tree is expressed in its external anthropomorphization—discerning the outline of the human body and some elements of human anatomy in it. For instance, the crown of a tree is called *agas pazy* ‘the head of a tree’ among the Khakas people. A tree branch is designated by the word *salaa*, one of the meanings of which is ‘human finger’. The hollow of a tree and the female genital organ have identical names—*kýñýr/kýñýre*. The word *tamyr* has the meaning of ‘blood vessel’ in human and animal bodies, and ‘tree root’ (Khakassko-russkiy slovar, 2006: 216, 348, 434, 587). For a person in a traditional society, it seems natural to think that blood flows in the “veins” of trees, which is similar to human blood. According to a Khakas myth, when people tried to cut down a birch tree, blood flowed from it, and the tree spoke in human language; therefore, the

tree became a revered object for the Khakas people (Butanaev, 2014: 113).

The anthropomorphized image of the tree is common for Khakas popular riddles, for example: *Agas arazynda akh plattyg khys odyrcha (pazyna khar chaap pargan tökpes)* ‘a girl wearing a white scarf is sitting in the forest (a tree stump in the winter)’; *chazyda chalaas ool turcha (hastyrygy chokh agas)* ‘a naked man is standing on the steppe (a tree with its bark removed)’; *khalbakh-khulbakh khulakhtyg, khara ninqi chachakhtyg (nymyrt)* ‘it has drooping ears and hands made of black beads (a bird cherry tree)’ (Domozhakov, 1951: 68, 69, 71). In the mythological consciousness, a single tree corresponds to an individual, while the forest is associated with a group of individuals. A similar link appears in the following riddles: *Khan kharlap tur—khalykh chon pazyryn tur (childe agastarnyn' chaikhalgany)* ‘the khan is angry, and all the people bow down (trees swaying in the wind)’; *kham khamnapcha, khamykh khorai pazyrynya (chil, agastar)* ‘the shaman performs his ritual, and all the Khongor people pray (the wind and trees)’ (Ibid.: 68; Butanaev, Butanaeva, 2008: 302).

In their cultural worldview, external seasonal changes in a tree’s appearance determine its human likeness. Plant defoliation is identified with a regular change of clothing and dramatic change in a person’s social status. This association is reflected in the following riddles: *Chaigyda khatanqylyg, khyskhyda sabyrlyg (pýrlig agas)* ‘it wears a sheepskin coat in the summer and a *shabur* (a cloak made of coarse cloth) in the winter (a deciduous tree)’; *khyskhyda chokh, chaigyda pai (agas)* ‘a poor man in the winter; a rich man in the summer (a tree)’ (Butanaev, Butanaeva, 2008: 303, 321; Mudroye slovo..., 1976: 124). Another manifestation of tree anthropomorphization in Khakas folklore is the image of the autumn falling of the leaves as a dialogue between two people who personify the tree and the leaves which fall from it: “Where are you going, my little Khalba? Don’t murmur, I’ll come again in a year, my little Sirbetey” (Butanaev, Butanaeva, 2008: 321).

These ideas apply to both the external features of a tree and to internal qualities inherent in a person. People believe that trees have a soul and mind, the ability to communicate with each other, and even to move. Like people, they can experience deep feelings and emotions, for example, cordiality and hostility, joy and pain, shed tears and even curse a person (Burnakov, 2006: 184). Trees are often credited with the best human qualities, such as compassion, responsibility, hospitality, etc. Such ideas are reflected in the following folklore text: “A man went hunting. He decided to spend the night

near a tree. At night, he heard a bird settle on the tree and say: ‘My chick is sick. Please heal it!’ And the tree replied: ‘How can I go to you? Can’t you see, I have a guest spending the night? If I leave, there will be only bare steppe. So I cannot help you now’. It turns out that this tree was a *kham-agas* ‘a shaman tree’” (Ibid.: 141).

The religious and mythological consciousness of the Khakas people reveals a reverse process of symbolic “dendronization”, i.e. transferring the image of the tree to traditional everyday habits and lifestyle of people, social relationships, and directly to an individual person. For example, the word *agas-tas* is often used in the Khakas language to designate a courtyard and buildings (Khakassko-russkiy slovar, 2006: 27). It literally is translated as ‘wood-stone’ and unambiguously indicates the respective natural materials used for building the household structure. However, this word has a wider meaning. In the beliefs of the people, the human dwelling, such as the yurt (Khakas *ib*) is the embodiment of the image of a tree. It is known that until the late 19th century, both permanent polygonal and mobile rounded frame-type yurts were widespread among the Khakas people (Pallas, 1788: 566; Karatanov, 1884: 619). Both types of buildings were based on timber. The roofs of permanent buildings were usually covered with larch bark or birch bark. In the summer, mobile dwellings were almost completely wrapped in birch bark on the outside. In the traditional consciousness of the Khakas people, both types of buildings were associated with the tree. The idea of the “tree-house” was also embodied in the epic poems of the people:

*Akh chazynyn’ istinde chörip,
Altyn pýrlig pai tirekti
Körip tapkhan ançada alyp.
Pai tirekser pastyr-paryp,
Pidi chookhtapcha alyp-chakhsy:
“Izin’-paiyn’ par polza – azyl-khal!!
Izin’-paiyn’ chokh polza – chabyl-khal!”
Ýr dee, as taa polbanda –
Altyn tirek azyl-pargan.
Alyp töreen Saiyn-Mirgen
Andar kipe-salgan ançada.
Saiyn-Mirgen körip-turza –
Alton sýrmezi argazyna chaiylgan,
Ilig sýrmezi in’nine chaiylgan,
Aidan’ aryg abakhai chakhsy
Anda churtapchatkhan poltyr*

‘Walking along the white steppe,
[On] the sacred poplar with golden leaves,
The mighty warrior fixed [his] gaze.
[Coming to] the sacred poplar,
Thus spoke the best of the mighty warriors:
“[If you] have riches, be opened!
[If you] do not have riches, be closed!”

After some time,
The golden poplar opened up.
Saiyn-Mirgen, born of a mighty warrior,
[Immediately] went inside.
Looking around, Saiyn-Mirgen sees
[With] sixty braids spread across her back,
With fifty braids spread over her shoulders,
Purer than the moon, the greatest of beauties,
It turns out that she lives there’

(Kilchichakov, 1946: 96)*

The “tree-house” association appears in the following popular riddles: *Chil tibiretpes sal tirek (ib/tura)* ‘a sawn poplar tree which the wind will not move (a yurt/house)’; *tigeei tizik, isti khurtyg (ib)* ‘the crown has a hole in it; the inside has worms (a yurt)’ (Butanaev, Butanaeva, 2008: 309, 310, 327, 328).

Transferring the image of the tree and some of its features to a social organization and directly to an individual is the most distinctive and widespread phenomenon in the Khakas culture.

Tree – *seok* (clan)

In ethnography, sacralization of the tree in some cases has been viewed as phytolatry, which is a manifestation of totemism. In the traditional culture of the Khakas people, like many other peoples, the image of the tree is firmly associated with the genealogy and origin of the clan/person. The clan tree is associated with the person’s ancestor. These views go back to an archaic myth of the Khakas people about the emergence of the world and man, where the tree appears as the progenitor of mankind. The myth speaks of the initial appearance of two birches on earth: one of them was a man (*Adam*—the father); the other was a woman (*Ymai*). People originated from their union (Katanov, 1907: 552). According to the authors of the well-known work *Traditional Worldview of the Turkic Peoples from Southern Siberia* (Traditsionnoye mirovozzreniye..., 1988: 20), behind this imagery, one can discern the supreme deities of the ancient Turkic pantheon—Tengri and Umai. The relationship between the tree and person is also expressed in Khakas folklore by the frequent use of words indicating the relationship between people, such as mother, father, brothers, etc., when the protagonists address plants (Takhpakhtar, 1970: 25; Butanaev, Butanaeva, 2008: 303, 321; Sugul Mirgen, 2018: 216, 226).

*Here and throughout this article the author’s translation from the Khakas into Russian was translated into English by V.A. Baranov.

In the Khakas culture, family and clan interconnections and interrelationships are often described with plant metaphors. The Khakas language contains some vestiges of archaic ideas about the arboreal nature of man: the verb *tamyrlanarga* meaning ‘to give a shoot, to branch’ is used when speaking not only about trees and other plants, but also about a person and his clan (Khakassko-russkiy slovar, 2006: 587). This identification can be seen in one of the traditional good wishes (*algys*), where family and clan structures are directly likened to roots: “Let the moon shine before you (O people), and let the sun shine all around! Let not the vile devil turn out the sixty branches of your roots [that is, clan]!” (Katanov, 1907: 564–565). People thus say about a lonely person who does not know his ancestors and relatives: *Chilegezi chokh kizi* ‘a person without roots’ (Khakassko-russkiy slovar, 2006: 967). In addition, it is not by accident that the protagonist of an epic tale asks a rhetorical question that is a hint at his natural origin, lamenting his parentless childhood with the following words:

Alyp kizi chookhtapcha:
– *Ya, azyraan ada pilbedim,*
Abydyp, öskirgen iye pilbedim.
Khatyg agastyn khoolyndan tjškem me

‘The mighty warrior says:
I did not know the father who raised [me],
I did not know the mother who nurtured me.
Have [I] come down
From the hollow of a solid tree’

(Khan Kiriġei, 1958: 132).

For the Khakas people, the clan tree and clan-*seok* (Khakas *söök* ‘bone’) are not only interconnected, but act as key dual concepts. Identification of the Khakas people is based on *seok* affiliation and principle of commonality with the clan tree—*sööktin’ agazy* or *chula/shula*. For example, the *seok tag khargazy* ‘the Mountain Kargins’ honors the larch as a clan tree. The names of the Khakas *seoks* contain designations of various natural objects, such as mountains, rocks, animals, birds, etc., many of which are endowed with totemic features. Yet, not a single Khakas *seok* has a name of a tree, which may indicate a clear separation of the concepts of *seok* and clan tree in the Khakas culture. However, the close and deep relationship between the *seok* and clan tree contributed to the fact that in the ordinary consciousness they were equally used for clan-based self-identification, sometimes even replacing each other. Half a century ago, in the everyday speech of the Khakas people, one could often hear expressions

such as *pistin’ söögibys tyt/khazyn’/kharagai...* ‘[the tree] of our *seok* is the larch/birch/pine...’, *pistin’ sööktin agazi ös* ‘our clan tree is the aspen’, *pistin’ agazi tal* ‘our [clan] tree is the purple willow’, *pistin’ chula/shula tyt* ‘our clan tree is the larch’; *Alakhtay chony – tirek* ‘the clan of the Alakhtaevs is the poplar’ (Usmanova, 1980: 101–102).

The Khakas people explained the interdependence of these concepts by the simultaneity of their emergence. In the traditional consciousness of the people, the origin of the tree and clan goes back to the mythical era of the first creation. Old timers would say: *Agas pýtkenen’ söök pastaltyr* ‘when trees appeared on the earth, then *seoks* (the Khakas clans) arose’ (Butanaev, 1999: 17). It is clearly not by chance that images of the tree and bones (*söök*), a real anatomical element, are also the same in the Khakas popular riddles (Katanov, 1907: 242). The community of people associated with a particular tree was much larger, more global and, perhaps, more archaic than the *seok* (Usmanova, 1980: 103). Under the umbrella of a single “clan tree”, such a community could include from one or two to several dozen *seoks*. According to V.Y. Butanaev, the following trees are most often considered sacred among the Khakas people: the birch is the ancestral tree of 25 *seoks* (*khaskha*, *akh pýrýt*, *khyrgys*, *akh sokkhky*, *akh piltir*, *saiyn*, *akh chystar*, *khalar*, *ulug ygy*, *shush*, *ulug azhyg*, *ulug khamnar*, etc.), the larch is of 22 *seoks* (*saiyn*, *puga*, *tom*, *khara piltir*, *khyzyl*, *khara tayas*, *chilei*, etc.), the pine of 14 *seoks*, the poplar of 4 *seoks* (*turan*, *khobyi*, *chonmai*, *pögeyi*), and the fir tree (*syby*, *puigan*) is of 4 *seoks* (*aba*, *khara sor*, *khamnar*, *khyrgys*). The purple willow was the clan tree of two *seoks* (*argyn*, *ygy*), the bay willow of three *seoks* (*kharga*, *taban*, *sug khakhpyyny*), the yellow willow was of *seok saryglar*, the spruce of *seok khyzyl khaya*, the bird cherry tree of *seok tom*, the Siberian pine of *seoks khobyi* and *turan*, and the rowan tree was of *seok kiyin’* (Butanaev, 2014: 112).

In the past, the system of societal organization by the principle of a clan tree played an important role in regulating the social life of the Khakas people. This was expressed mainly in the marriage regulations of exogamy. For example, marriage unions between the representatives of different *seok* trees were considered the most preferable. “When [a young couple] met, they asked each other: ‘What kind of tree does your *seok* have?’ People of the same tree could not marry, because they were relatives (Chuchunova (Chebodaeva) Daria Pavlovna, village of Ust-Kindirla)” (Archive of the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography of Siberia, Tomsk State University (hereafter, AMAES TSU), No. 818-2, fol. 4); “A youth could not marry a girl if

she was of the same tree as he (Samrina (Tutatchikova) Olga Alekseevna, born in 1888, aal of Artanov)” (AMAES TSU, No. 682, fol. 4).

Among the people, each “tree” clan had its own specific features, which may be illustrated by the reasoning of an elderly Khakas woman: “Each clan took a tree for itself. Our clan took the *tyt* (larch), ...because the tribe considered itself to be stronger and more resilient than others. This tree does not rot as quickly as the rest of the trees (Sazanakova Vera Nikolaevna, born in 1908, village of Bolshaya Seya)” (AMAES TSU, No. 681-3, fol. 22). An ironic assessment of qualities of another clan is manifested by popular jokes where the image of their clan tree often appears: “The worst of the trees is the bay willow; the worst water is plain water; the worst of birds is the shrike; the worst of people is the seek *khakhpyrna*”; “the smoke of the yellow willow is acrid; the tongue of saryglars (that is, the “yellow” clan) is acrid” (Butanaev, Butanaeva, 2008: 208; 2010: 152).

Children “inherited” their tree, as with their seek, exclusively through the male line (Usmanova, 1980: 103). This traditional regulation remained unchanged even in cases of interethnic marriages, which can be illustrated by the categorical statement of an elderly Khakas man: “The Khakas people belonged to the *tyt* (larch). If the father was a Khakas and mother was Russian, the *shula* (clan tree) would still be the *tyt*. The children would also be *tyt* (Karazhakov Andrey Mikhailovich, age 90, village of Ust-Parnaya)” (AMAES TSU, No. 678-1, fol. 18).

According to tradition, the daughter-in-law was expected to treat her husband’s clan tree with the same reverence as her in-laws. Vestiges of such social and normative attitudes have survived in folklore evidence. For example, in one folklore account, an elderly woman explained to her daughter-in-law the rules of behavior in relation to objects revered by the family and clan, which were perceived as older relatives of the young woman’s husband. Trees were also mentioned in this list (Katanov, 1907: 303). Notably, a strict verbal rule of *chaiyt*—circumlocution (‘do not call them by name’)—was strictly applied to all of these objects, and substitute names were used to denote them. Moreover, in the traditional Khakas society, the daughter-in-law strictly adhered to the custom of *khazynalas*—avoiding the older, paternal relatives of her spouse. This practice is reflected in an old riddle where a plate of wood, obviously not by chance, acted as the symbol of a daughter-in-law: “A chip thrown from the door does not reach the front corner (a daughter-in-law hiding from her father-in-law)” (Ibid.: 239).

Sacralization of the tree by the Khakas people was based on its perception as the first ancestor and

guardian of soul of the clan. This is why the Khakas people called their clan trees *söök chulazy/shulazy* ‘clan soul/soul of the clan’ (Usmanova, 1980: 100). In the views of this people, as well as other Turkic peoples of Southern Siberia, the word *chula/shula* denotes one category of the human soul, which life, health, well-being, and longevity depend on. According to the traditional beliefs, the lifespan of a person and his tree are interconnected. It is believed that while the clan tree is alive, death does not threaten a person, and vice versa. This idea reappears in the myth “Puga Möke” where the protagonist of the same name bequeathed, after his death, to bury the thumb of his right hand separately from his body. He also warned his children that if birch trees grew at the burial place of his thumb, his descendants would live long and happily. As long as the birches grew, everything would be fine with their relatives. In the end, everything was exactly as he predicted (Katanov, 1907: 498–499).

The subject of trees growing from the bodies of buried people—the embodiments of their souls or vital forces—frequently appears in Khakas folklore. It indicates that in the traditional worldview of the people, posthumous reincarnation of a person was a continuous circle of life and death. A tree or mountain was in the center of this cycle. A combination of these images often occurs. The practice of planting trees on the graves of deceased relatives, most often infants, was probably associated with these ideas. Its original semantics have been lost over time and have become subject to reinterpretation. This, for example, can be evidenced by the information given by an elderly Khakas: “A birch tree was placed (planted) for unbaptized children instead of a cross. If a birch or larch grew from seeds (brought by the wind) on a person’s grave, it was believed that this person was happy (Amzarakov Nikolay Vasilyevich, born in 1912, village of Kyzlas)” (AMAES TSU, No. 680-3, fol. 18).

According to the religious and mythological beliefs of the Khakas people, the death of a clan tree is directly correlated with that of one of their relatives. People believe that having a dream about an old tree falling foreshadows the death of an elderly person, while a young tree falling indicates the death of someone of the same age. Elderly Khakas people supported their beliefs with the following examples: “If someone from the Khobyi clan sees in a dream that a larch is falling, someone from that clan definitely will die (Borgoyakova Liza Pavlovna, born in 1915, village of Chakhsy Khonykh)” (AMAES TSU, No. 680-8 a, fol. 30); “We have a belief that if a *khazyn*’ (birch tree) falls, someone from the Shor clan will die. The Shor clan is the Kolchikovs; they have the *khazyn*’ (as their clan tree)

(Burnakov Nikolay Gavrilovich, born in 1897, village of Otty, Askizsky District of Khakassia” (Ibid.: fol. 37); “The Balykovs have the *akh khazyn* tree (white birch). If you see in a dream that the birch forest is being felled, someone from the Byuryut seok will die (Tarakanova Yekaterina Nikolaevna, born in 1908, village of Kapchaly)” (AMAES TSU, No. 681-5, fol. 25); “Once in a dream I saw how a large, leafy birch tree fell across the door of my neighbor Alexey Chptykov. The next day, Alexey indeed died (Samrina (Tutatchikova) Olga Alekseevna, born in 1888)” (AMAES TSU, No. 682, fol. 4); “If you have a dream that a birch tree falls down, someone from the Kapsargin clan will die. If you have a dream that a poplar tree falls down, someone from the Alakhtaev clan will die (Alakhtaeva Taisya Viktorovna, born in 1930, village of Chptykov)” (Ibid.: fol. 5–6); “I once saw a young thin forest in a dream. A larch tree fell. I thought that one of our own clan would die. This, indeed, happened. If an old rotten tree falls down, an old person will die (Kokov Semyon Konstantinovich, age 90, aal of Malyi Kobezhikov)” (AMAES TSU, No. 818-2, fol. 25).

According to the traditional Khakas rules, a person should not cut down his clan tree for domestic needs. Otherwise, it was believed that the perpetrator and those close to him would face inevitable negative consequences fraught with illness and death. In case of urgent need, people asked representatives of other seoks to cut down such a tree. Further, cutting down any tree (and not just the clan tree) among the Khakas people was done by strictly adhering to rules. For example, it was forbidden to cut down after sunset, since it was believed that the plants slept at that time. Before felling it, one had to warn the tree “to not catch it off guard”. To do this, people lightly tapped it with the butt of the axe, explained their intention, and gave an apologetic speech (Patachakov, 2006: 23–24; Burnakov, 2006: 18, 179, 181, 182, 184). Woodchips had to be placed on the stump for further symbolical “revival” of the tree and as a way of removing the blame from the hewer for what he did. The tree was allowed to be felled strictly towards the sun. The compliance with this rule was believed to ensure that the tree that was being cut down had the opportunity to say goodbye to the sun. In this harvesting practice, signs of the human likeness of the tree appear again in the form of a natural analogy with the traditional funerary rite of the Khakas people. Its integral element is the act of “farewell” of the deceased with the heavenly body. Before lowering the deceased into the grave, the coffin lid has to be removed, so that the person could “say goodbye” to the sun.

In the Khakas worldview, the tree as the source and focus of life and strength of the clan was also the

last refuge of man. According to archaic religious and mythological logic, the tree gave life to man. At the end of life, man returns to his original state. Therefore, it is not at all accidental that in folk songs, the process of a person’s death is identified with his return to his ancestral abode, i.e. to the trees:

Azar-parar k̄ynimde
Adam pol khaldyn’ kharagai.
Alton azyr sinin’ salaan’
Aiga sustalzyn, kharagai.
Irtar-parar k̄ynimde
Iyem pol khaldyn, kharagai.
Ilig sinin’ chilegen’
Chilge pik turzyn, kharagai

[On] the day of [my] transition [to the other world]
 [You] will become father [to me], [my] pine tree.
 Sixty of your forked branches,
 My pine tree, [let] the rays of the moon illuminate.
 [On] the day of [my] exodus [to the other world]
 [You] will become mother [to me], [my] pine tree.
 Let fifty of your roots
 Stand strong against the wind, [my] pine tree’

(Takhpakhtar, 1970: 25).

This worldview was embodied in the Khakas funerary tradition, which steadily survived until the mid-20th century. The deceased was buried in a dugout coffin (Butanaev, 1996: 156; Burnakov, 2009: 527), made from a solid tree trunk, which was split in half with the middle part removed. In the traditional consciousness, placing the deceased into a block of wood symbolized complete merging of his body with the tree. Therefore, people used to say about a deceased person: *khatyg agastyn özeni pol pardy* ‘he became the core of a solid tree’ (Butanaev, 2011: 684). The coffin (*khomdy*) was often called *kizi agazy/agayy* ‘a human tree or tree for a person’ (Butanaev, 1999: 17). Therefore, the process of making a coffin was denoted by the expression “making a tree for the deceased” (Katanov, 1907: 353).

The Khakas people most often made coffins from larch, pine, birch, or poplar trees. These tree species were chosen because they were clan trees to a large number of seoks. In addition, these were most suitable for creating dugout coffins due to their physical parameters. Each Khakas seok, whenever possible, used exclusively its “clan tree species” for burials. For instance, the Kachilorovs (seok *khan*) made hollowed logs from birch trees; the Chichinins (seok *chon’mai*), from poplars; the Chebodaevs (seok *piltir*), from larch trees; the Chptykovs (seok *khaskha*), from aspens, etc. (Borgoyakov, 1969: 10–11). The representatives

of seeks having no direct “clan” relations with the *tyt* tree were also allowed to be buried in larch logs. These people were mainly those whose sacred trees (for example, the willow, rowan, or bird cherry tree) could not be used for making full-sized coffins because of insufficient thickness of the trunk. This custom was based on the fact that the larch, just as the birch, was perceived as the sacred tree of all people, and served as a universal symbol of man.

Tree – individual

The correlation of the tree with the image of a person is the most important aspect in the perception of the tree in the Khakas culture. In the popular worldview, the ontogeny of the tree duplicates the complete lifecycle of a person: embryonic—seed, childhood—sprout, juvenile—young tree, maturity—fertile tree, old age—dried-up tree, and death—broken or fallen tree with upturned roots. Vestiges of such ideas can be seen in the following subject of folk tales: the protagonist deceives the main deity of the lower world Erlik Khan to eat young willow branches instead of babies, and ordinary trees instead of young people. Rotten trees replace old people for him (Katanov, 1907: 522–523).

These ideas appear both indirectly and directly in the oral folk art of the Khakas people. The semantic parallel “tree-individual”, in its indirect form, is widespread in numerous proverbs, for example: *agyryg kizi tynga pik, ygyrakh agas chilge pik* ‘a sick person is strong in his soul; a creaking tree is strong in the wind’, that is, a sick person will not die soon, and a creaking tree will not fall soon; *agyryg kizi ainaa pik, ygyros agas chilge pik* ‘a sick person does not succumb to demons; a creaking tree does not succumb to the wind’, that is, the tree will not fall quickly, and evil powers will not defeat the person; *köndei agas kygdýridir, khortykh kizi titridir* ‘a hollow tree hums; a cowardly person shakes’; *chalgys agas chilge kibrek, chalgys kizi kiziden’ khortykh* ‘a lonely tree is afraid of the wind; a lonely person is afraid of people’, etc. (Butanaev, Butanaeva, 2008: 259, 264, 274, 276, 284, 298).

A direct expression of the identification of trees with a person appears in a folk riddle where a person is associated with a log having nine holes (Katanov, 1907: 238). In this regard, the phraseological expression, which often appears in Khakas folklore, takes on a completely different, deeper, meaning: *tögee polza, tögege pararbyn* ‘if it’s a log, I’ll go [get married] to a log’ (Ai Khanat, 2018: 411). This expression is usually

perceived as an abstract metaphor associated with the marriage tradition of the Khakas people. It testifies to the hopeless situation of a young girl—the lack of right to choose when concluding marriages and her complete subordination to the will of her parents. This statement of a girl in symbolic form indicates her consent to marry any man proposed as a groom by her parents.

In Khakas folklore, the image of a man does not always appear in a direct phytomorphic form. Identification of man with a tree is often manifested through comparison with a tree rather than directly: “Is there a tree that has not grown crooked / is there a man who has grown without fear?”; “A tree does not grow without crookedness; a man does not live without deception”; “A tree will grow from a yellow willow growing on pebbles, if the pebbles do not crush it; a man will grow up from an orphan who goes to work as a farm laborer, if the creator helps”; “Khan Myoke fell from his horse / like a dead tree, he is burning / like a resinous tree, he is crackling” (Katanov, 1907: 420; Butanaev, Butanaeva, 2008: 193, 276; Khan Mirgen, 2018: 48).

In oral folk art, such plant symbolism is often used in ironic form to describe physical features and mental capacities of the protagonist. For example, the height of the protagonist is often compared to the height of a tree:

*Altyn-Sabakh chachazy
Tapsap-khalchykh mynnan’:
“Tun’ mam, Aidolai, saga
Chogar turgan togys chayan
Tirekche syn pirgen,
Tikpeche sagys pirben!”*

‘[His] elder sister Altyn-Sabakh
Said in anger:
“Younger brother Aidolai,
Nine supreme chayans
Gave you the height of a poplar
[Yet] they did not give you the intelligence
[even of] a tree stump!”’

(Aran-chula..., 1946: 49).

In the traditional beliefs of the people, the spine being the basis of the human skeleton is the embodiment of his personal physiological tree of life and core of his vital force. The Khakas epic poems typically manifest a correlation between the size of the protagonist’s spine and some other parts of his body with the tree. In our opinion, comparative phytomorphic hyperbolization, designed to enhance the perception of his appearance is of secondary importance. The protagonist has *a priori* an arboreal nature. A typical scene in the epic poems is breaking the backbone and other bones of the defeated

enemy. At the same time, the death of the protagonist is consistently likened to the death of a tree:

Ölbes Khara Khannyn'
Os agascha oorkhazyn
Olystyra tudybyskhan,
Khazyn' choony khabyrgalaryn
Khazyra-pýge tartybyskhan

'The undying Khara Khan
 Whose spine was [the size of] an aspen tree
 Twisted [himself] in different directions,
 His large ribs [the size of] a birch tree
 Broke in different directions'

(Kurbizhekova, 2011: 154)

Tazyr Mirgen Khan Mirgennin
Aryg tynyn sygara tastaan
Syyt tabyzy istile khalgan.
Ulug agas uskhan'ya pildirgen,
Ulug alyp östep azy-pölgen

'Tazyr Mirgen took Khan Mirgen
 And knocked out [his] pure soul throwing
 [him to the ground]...
 The sound of crying was [immediately] heard.
 It seemed [as if] a large tree was broken,
 The mighty warrior, groaning, passed [into the
 other world]—and died'

(Khan Orba, 1989: 167).

The Khakas culture uses the image of a tree that has no clear signs of sex; therefore, it is equally associated with both male and female principles. In flirtatious songs, which are essentially the dialogues of young people, a slender tree is a common image of girlhood. Here is an example:

"The guy: 'Come out, come out, Khan's daughter! I will look at your stature, Khan's daughter'.

The girl: 'After looking at my stature, what do you want? Haven't you seen a slender tree?'" (Khakasskiye narodniye takhpakhi, 1980: 44). Further, it is no coincidence that the situational emotional state of the girl in folklore is conveyed through the metaphor—"a young and flexible tree which was doused with water" (Altyn-Aryg, 1988: 28, 269).

The plant code is common in marriage traditions. Felled young birch trees are an attribute of every Khakas wedding, and serve as an embodiment of female symbolism. In the social normative culture of the Khakas people, the choice of a bride is compared to mechanical processing of wood: "A tree cannot be hewn without an axe; a girl cannot be taken to marriage without knowing her disposition" (Tak v Sibiri..., 1964: 28).

Female tree symbolism widely appears in small genres of folklore, such as riddles: *Iki tirek ton'khar*

turlar (tulun'nar) 'two poplars stand upside down (a woman's braids)'; *uzun agas pazynda ulug khus odyrcha (tylgý pörík)* 'a large bird sits on the top of a tall tree (a female matchmaker's hat made of fox fur)'; *pis khazyn' arazynan' ai sygyp odyr (chýstýk)* 'the moon comes out between five birches (a women's traditional ring with an eyelet)' (Domozhakov, 1951: 74, 77). The characteristics of some personal qualities of a woman, sometimes negative, are often reflected in folk proverbs and sayings through the image of a tree, for example: "A branchy tree can be clinging; a woman can be tenacious"; "A spreading tree can have branches; a woman can be meddlesome" (Ungvitskaya, Mainogasheva, 1972: 249; Butanaev, Butanaeva, 2008: 287).

In the Khakas tradition, a mature tree is often identified with the fertile feminine principle. In folk songs, the phytoanthropomorphic image is often endowed with pronounced erotic symbolism. For example: "Should I climb a bare birch tree? Will you let me touch your bare breasts?"; "The top of the birch tree is lumpy, while the black female organ is smooth! The top of the poplar is tuft-shaped, while the deep female organ is smooth!" (Katanov, 1907: 321, 421). In the religious and mythological consciousness of the Khakas people, the tree personifies the feminine essence with its typical properties of fruitfulness and childbearing. Accordingly, the idea of isomorphism between a tree and woman formed the basis of ritual practices aimed at increasing fertility. These include the ritual of *Khoça-khan oiyn* 'The play of the fertility deity Khocha-khan'. The high point of this sacred ritual was symbolic intercourse of the leader of the ritual with a birch tree. He hugged the tree and imitated the act of copulation with the help of a wooden phallus (*khoça*). At the same time, the participants in the ritual sprinkled the birch tree with sacrificial home-brewed beer (*khoça pozazy*) and asked for the fertility of people, livestock, and prosperity of life (Butanaev, 2014: 246).

In the Khakas mythology, the image of a tree-woman is associated with maternal function. Human life develops in the womb of a woman. Vestiges of these ideas appear in the folklore story about placing children inside a tree where they grow up:

Tizip papgan chas palalar
Altyn saryg söötké kirze.
Ala kharakhtyg kizi
Palalaryn körbeyen' poltyr.
Chas palalar anda össin!
Saryz söötin' ictinde össin!

'If newborn babies who were taken away
 Enter a golden yellow willow tree,
 The man with gray eyes

Won't see the children, as it turns out.
Let newborn babies grow there!
Let them grow inside the yellow willow!'

(Sugqul Mirgen, 2018: 216).

It is quite natural that the plant code extends to children in the oral folk art of the Khakas people. The comparison of phyto- and anthropomorphic images is often found in the Khakas folk proverbs and sayings. The traditional judgment about a child and need for his upbringing from a very early age is conveyed through the image of a young flexible tree: *chas agasty khuraalaakhkha eg, palan'y kichigden' yigret* 'bend a fresh tree before it dries, teach a child from childhood'; *agasty chaskha pyk, palany chaskha yigret* 'bend a tree from the shoot, teach a child from a young age' (Abdina, 1994: 7; Butanaev, Butanaeva, 2008: 259, 276).

Conclusions

The provided evidence suggests that sacralization of the tree is typical of the traditional spiritual culture of the Khakas people. In their worldview, the tree is one of the modules that constitute the image of the world and of the person. Nature is comprehended and its events are interpreted both through anthropomorphization of its objects and symbolic "dendronization" of man. The subject-object relationship between man and nature is expressed in the concept of "tree-clan-individual" based on identifying a person with a specific tree and a group of people with a specific type of trees. This is reflected in the mythological and ritualistic system of the Khakas people. Despite transformations in the worldview of the people and reframing of many of its aspects, a respectful attitude towards trees continues to this day.

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