

Introduction to the Present-Day Shamanic Practices of the Buryats in Mongolia

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The aim of this paper is to give a brief (but meant to be overall) view of the shamanic practices of the Buryats living in Mongolia. We abound in descriptions of recent Buryat shamanic rituals, analyses of prayers, chants, invocations, etc. Still, we lack a frame which would designate the position of each shamanic activity in a given type of ritual and in the whole shamanic context of the Buryats. This introduction is to be followed by studies discussing certain shamanic activities as parts of various rituals. Besides the recently published data on this issue, the present paper is based on materials collected during my fieldwork research in Mongolia in the years of 2004 and 2005. This collection includes video-footages of shamanic rituals and interviews with relevant individuals, three of whom are cited below as the main sources of information. As a secondary source, I also have to mention the outstanding work of Bum-Ochir Dulam *Mongol Shamanic Rituals*, certain parts of which (Bum-Očir 2002: 21–45, 65–76, 95–113) have been a mainstay of this article.

SHAMANIC ACTIVITIES AND THEIR SPIRITUAL BACKGROUND

Buryat shamans' spirits are spectres of ancestors and individuals who used to live in the human world and practised as well-known shamans or were famous for other merits. Mongols believe that three or more years after their death, shamans become spirits (*ongon*)¹ and are able to come back to the human world by seizing the body of another shaman, who is (in most cases) his/her descendant or apprentice (Inf. D. Namsarai 2005.). Considering the fact that certain people from the past can also come and take possession of a shaman, we might assume that the ability of becoming an *ongon* is not only the shamans' privilege.

¹ The Romanized forms of Buryat-Mongolian words reflect the language usage of my informants, who speak a Buryat dialect strongly influenced by Khalkha proper. For this reason, some words are identical with their Khalkha equivalents, while others are closer to Buryat proper. Unless signed (Bur.: Buryat; Xalx.: Khalkha; Tib.: Tibetan), the Romanized forms in parentheses derive from the informants.

Spirits do not want to part from the world they used to live in. They do exert a significant influence on their descendants' lives—either by taking care of them or by being angry with them. Spirits demand their descendants' attention and want to be served and entertained by them on a regular basis. Since they do not have body, their only possible way to come to the living people's world is to use one of them as a vehicle for appearance. That is why they choose and even force certain people to be their mediators, i.e. to become shamans.

Shamans have to be possessed by their spirits (*ongon oruulax*) regularly; else they become seriously ill. They are similar to artists, who also show signs of depression or even fall ill if they do not have the opportunity to produce works of art. An even more striking similarity between some features of shamans and artists, and also the fact that Mongols, too, closely associate them can be apprehended by considering that in modern Mongolian, the same expression (*ongon orox* “the spirit enters”) is used for the shamans' trance and the artists' inspiration. When someone, for example, does not feel like singing when required, s/he might make excuses saying: *ongon oroogüi* lit.: “The spirit has not entered”, which means: “I am not possessed by the spirit”. (A similar expression can be found even in English: “the spirit does not move me”.) According to the Mongol way of thinking, the creative/performing activity of shamans and artists is conceived as a meeting of the shaman/artist and the spirits. Considering their relationship, the spirit—or we could say “inspiration”—is undoubtedly predominant. Similarly to the poet who feels to be forced by his/her thoughts and feelings to put them down on paper, the shaman is forced by their spirits to invite them. Mongols hold that if the shaman does not fulfill the spirits' requirements, they will be angry and might even kill him/her (Inf. Dašbalbar 2005).

In order not to offend the spirits, Buryat shamans have to perform their spirit-pleasing rituals three times a month. The ninth, nineteenth, and twenty-ninth of each lunar month are the days on which these rituals (called *yühen* “nine”) have to be performed by the so-called black shamans, whose mount is their drum and whose costume is regarded as their armor. White shamans², who wear a blue brocade gown (*xiixe xamba nümerge*) and use a bell and a *vajra* instead of a drum and a drumstick, perform the same ritual on the eighth, eighteenth, and twenty-eighth, or on the second, eighth, and sixteenth day of each lunar month. These days are considered to be the descending days of the White Old Man (*Sagaan übegenei buulttai üder*), the patron deity of white shamans. Buryats refer to spirit-pleasing rituals as *naima naimanai nagalga yühe yüheni yürgelge* “swaying of the eighth, swinging of the ninth” indicating that these rituals are performed on the aforementioned days.

Spirit-pleasing rituals can be conducted indoors (*yühengee xexe*) or outdoors (*taxilga*). Those performed in the shamans' yurt are of smaller importance than those celebration-like rituals observed in the nature at a sacred place, usually once a year. The main purpose of a spirit-pleasing ritual is to maintain the good relationship with the ancestral spirits by inviting them to the shaman's home and by entertaining them to food and drink. On the days spirit-pleasing rituals are conducted, rather the spirits want to be invited than the people want them to come.

² In fact, white shamans are rather bonesetters (*bariaš*) than shamans—according to the Buryat informants. However, they are called “shamans of white descent” (*sagaanai böö*).

People attending the ritual take the advantage of the spirits' presence by asking them questions and seeking their advice. At the end of the ritual, they also receive insurance (*daatgal*) from the shaman.

When somebody has a problem, s/he can turn to the spirits through the shaman, and ask them to help solving it. These problem-solving rituals (*zasal*) are conducted at the request of a patient or more patients; still, it is always the spirit who has dominancy over the shaman and the public, which is often expressed by calling the clients to account for having summoned him/her, saying: "*Yuungaad duudaa geešeb?*" "Why have you called me?" (Inf. Cerenxand 2005).

It is essential that we make it clear that problem-solving rituals should never be treated as being a part of spirit-pleasing rituals. Moreover, during these latter types of rituals—when the spirit is being entertained—not any problem-solving activity can be conducted (except for asking questions related to a problem by anyone present).

THE COSTUME AND PARAPHERNALIA

Spiritual Background

The shamanic costume (Balogh 2007: 95–103) in general is regarded as a suit of armor protecting its wearer from the possible attacks of harmful spirits during trance. Buryat shamans, like warriors, also have weapons, which can be found on their costume and whip. These weapons are believed to have been forged by Damdin Dorlig (Tib. *Rta-mrgin dor-legs*), who is the patron deity (*haxiuha*) of blacksmiths, and is also regarded as the blacksmith and armorer of shamans. Considering the fact that those who become shamans are characteristically not those with the best natural endowments (either physically or mentally), shamans have to compensate their certain kinds of incompetence with abilities the others do not master, in order to become an accepted member of the community. Based upon the idea that a shaman is an armed warrior, we can assume that in earlier times, those who were in lack of physical or mental strength and thus did not have the potential to take their share of battles and fights found their way out of this situation by becoming warriors of an invisible realm. The members of their community believed that they were the only ones who could defeat the invisible enemies, i.e. the harmful spirits who caused diseases and misfortunes. Thus, the "weak" had an alternative to become a beneficial member of the society by obtaining the ability the "strong" could never have. In times of unceasing fightings and rivalry, there was only one possible way to be recognized by the community: namely, to become a warrior irrespective of what kind. The power of the shaman is expressed by the number of weapons s/he has on his/her costume. Those who have been practising for many years have more elaborate costume than the beginners. The reason for this is that stronger and more experienced shamans encounter stronger spirits. Consequently, they need more protection since although the spirits invoked by the shaman are usually not malevolent, other spirits accompanying them can be harmful and ill-willed. Mongols hold that spirits are never alone: the ancestral spirits (*ongon*), the different kinds of harmful spirits (Bur. *šulam*, *šütger aliban*, *üxeer xaxaar*) and patron deities (Bur. *haxiuha*) live in symbiosis (Xalx. *nöxcöj yawdag*), or even

merge (Pürew 2002: 271). Accordingly, the shaman often has to face mischievous spirits when seized by a benevolent ancestral spirit. It can also occur that a harmful spirit takes over the shaman's body from the spirit invoked and without proper armor and weapons, the shaman could easily be defeated by it. Those who are not strong enough to undertake conducting serious rituals (which means to deal with dangerous forces), do not have armor and weapons, only the basic tools.

The Distinction Between Black and White

There is a clear distinction between black and white shamans (Van Deusen 1999: 153–157). White shamans are considered to be weaker than black ones, and in this manner, their costume and paraphernalia is conspicuously simpler and they are hardly ever referred to as armor and weapons. They wear a blue brocade gown (Bur. *xiixe xamba nümerge*) and a cap (Bur. *maixabša*) made of blue textile, with fringes on the front hiding the shaman's face. On the forehead of the cap a face is embroidered, which is believed to be the face of the spirit invoked (Xalx. *ongodiin nüür*). However, scholars claim that it is rather a fake-face, which is meant to deceive harmful spirits (Diószegi 1961: 540). White shamans wear a mirror made of copper or brass (Birtalan 1995: 90.), which they use for divination and healing practices.

The primary mount of white shamans is a bell (*xonxo*) with a *vajra* (ošor). As a subsidiary device, they also have a jaw harp kept in a wooden case with a horse carved on the top. Confusingly, both mounts can be used during the same ritual and also for the same purposes, but an order of importance is still to be noted. Since white shamans are often referred to as 'shamans with a bell' (*xonxotoi böö*), the bell is clearly an attribute of them, while the harp should be recognized as their secondary mount. White shamans also use a wooden staff (*bayag*) with a head of a horse or a dragon carved in it, in place of the *vajra*. A sacrificial ribbon (Xalx. *xadag*) is often tied to the carved horse's neck as a sign of sanctity (Xalx. *seter*), which means that the animal is the spirits' mount. Since there is a disagreement among scholars and even among the shamans concerning whether the mounts are ridden by the spirits (Xalx. *ongodiin unaa*) or by the shamans (Xalx. *böögiin unaa*), the only thing we can conclude is that the staff—similarly to the *vajra*—is also a mount subordinated to the bell. The conditions under which the staff should be used instead of a *vajra* are unclear, and regarding that the jaw harp is much more often used than the staff, one might not be mistaken thinking that it has become a tertiary mount in favour of the harp. The cultivation of the harp might be a result of the influence of Darkhad shamanism, and a new element in Buryat shamanism, since the jaw harp and its case used by the Buryats is identical with that of the Darkhats.

As mentioned above, the black shamans' costume and tools are referred to as armor (*xuyag*) and weapons (*zebseg*). Besides the textile cap of the white shamans, they also wear a metal helmet (*üülen amitai/orgoi*) with two antlers on the top, each with a number of branches showing the number of the initiations the shaman has got. The armor consists of a back-armor (*arxaali*) and a front-armor (*elgebše*) with the metal figures of three animals: a lizard (*gürbel*), a wild-boar

(*bodon gaxai*), and a Garuda bird (*garid šubuu*) representing the three layers of the world (Pürew 2002: 66–80).

The black shamans' primary mount (and their attribute at the same time) is the drum (*xese*). Similarly to the white shamans, the black shamans are also referred to as *xesetei böö* 'shaman with a drum'. The drumstick is the whip by which the shaman urges his/her horse (i.e. the drum) while being the black equivalent of the white shamans' *vajra*. Besides the drumstick, black shamans have another tool that also functions as a whip: the black *bardag*. It differs from the white one by having a host of miniature metal tools and weapons fastened to it, all of which are believed to have been made by Damdin Dorlig, the protector deity of the blacksmiths. The person who fringes all these weapons, and all the accessories of the shaman, worships Damdin Dorlig, and is called *Dorligtoi xün* "a person with Dorlig". Damdin Dorlig is responsible for everything related to metal-work, machines, techniques, and electricity. All the tools of Damdin Dorlig (his anvil (*düše*), bellow (*xööreg*), hammer (*alxa*), etc.) can be found on the black shaman's whip.

The following two objects help the shaman to overcome the obstacles during his or her journey: the four-cm-long iron ladder (*šata*) on the whip is to climb rocks and cliffs with, while the rowboat (*ongoso*) of the same size and material and its paddles (*selüür*) are used for crossing oceans, lakes and rivers. Two lines from an invocation (Inf. D. Namsarai 2005) refer to these utensils as follows:

"Xangil baisa garwal damžaad garxa šata
Müren dalai xaawal tawiad garxa ongošo"

"If cliffs and rocks appear, the ladder puts (you) through
If lakes or rivers appear, the rowboat takes (you) to the other side"

The ladder can be used for another purpose as well; namely, to transfer the sacrifices and offerings to the thirteen lords of the North (*ariin arban gurban noyod*). There is also a key and a lock on the whip for opening the door of the lords in case it is closed.

The black shaman often has to face dangerous enemies such as invisible malevolent spirits (*xii xad uuliin aliban sabdag*), or harmful spirits of the dead (*üxöör xaxaar*), and curses coming from unknown places (*xariin gazarhaa yawuulsan xaraal žatxa*). The shaman either captures them or tries to defeat them with the aid of his or her weapons. A lasso (*salama*), for example, is used for catching the bad spirits, a strap (*argamžaa*) and a pile (*gadaha*) is for keeping them in captivity, while for fighting and battling, the black shaman uses a wider range of weapons, such as the axe (*süxe*), pickaxe (*balt*), hatchet (*lantuu*), a pair of scissors (*xaiša*), a bow with an arrow (*num sum*), and a saber (*heleme*).

The Sequence of Shamanic Rituals

Shamanic rituals of the Buryat Mongols can be divided into two major groups, namely spirit-pleasing and problem-solving rituals. The main purpose of a spirit-pleasing ritual is to maintain the good relationship with the ancestral spirits by

inviting them to a feast. In order not to offend the spirits, Buryat shamans have to perform their private spirit-pleasing rituals (*yühen*) three times in a lunar month, with their immediate relatives and acquaintances present. These private rituals are conducted indoors, always in the shaman's home. However, there also are public spirit-pleasing rituals (*taxilga*), which in many cases are conducted outdoors and held annually, usually at a sacred place: for example, in the surroundings of a sacred rock or tree, which is believed to be the abode of a certain spirit. These sacrificial rituals are conducted in order to maintain the general well-being of an extended community, and appear to be more important than the private rituals mentioned before.

While spirit-pleasing rituals are conducted on the demand of the spirits, it is essential to understand that problem-solving rituals (*zasal*) are performed at the request of a client, who turns to the spirit through the shaman with a private problem.

Any ritual, be it a spirit-pleasing or a problem-solving one, can be divided into three parts, which I call the "pre-possessional", the "possessional", and the "post-possessional" parts. Each part comprises sub-parts or shamanic activities following each other in a relatively fixed order, in theory. In practice, however, these activities can change their places within their own parts.

Preparations

As a first step, the shaman, with the aid of his/her assistant, prepares the sacrifices and offerings for the spirits. The sacrifices (Picture 1) consisting of vodka, milk, sweets, silk or brocade, and money are put on the sacrificial table in a particular arrangement. Depending on the significance of the ritual and the number of the spirits invoked, Buryat shamans prepare six, nine or more offerings (*taxil*) arranged in small brass-cups (*cögc*). Apart from the brass-cups, a bowl (*oron delexein ürge*) containing a mixture of vodka (*arxi*), milk (*hüü*), sweets (*id'ee*) and yellow grease (*šar tos*) is placed on the table and is meant to be offered for all the spirits at the end of the ritual. In the middle of the table, there is a wick (*zul*) burning in order that the shaman could see in the world of darkness (*xaranxui oron*). Usually, at public spirit-pleasing rituals, sheep (*xonin*) are slaughtered (Aranyosi 2004: 27–40) and placed on the altar (Picture 2).

Another essential part of the preparations is the purification. Before the ritual starts, every participant has to be purified with special regard to the shaman and those who are involved in shamanic activities. Sometimes they need a more thoroughful purification than the others. During the initiation ritual (*šanar-šandruu*), for example, the candidates are purified with the steam of boiled thyme (*ganga*). The relatives and friends of the candidates attending the initiation ritual gain the purification by being slapped with a juniper branch dipped into the boiled fluid, while the candidates and their helpers have to inhale the steam or rinse their mouth with it three times. This is called *ugaalga* "washing" in Buryat (Manžigeev 1978: 74–75). Before any other rituals, the purification is usually an *utalga* "incense purification" with the smoke of a juniper branch or that of the bark of *abies sibirica* (*žodoo*) (Manžigeev 1978: 20, 51), which is done by the shaman's assistant circling three times around each participant's head. If available, Buryats

prefer to use the resinous bark of *abies sibirica* for this purpose, but this tree is very rare in Mongolia. If a ritual or a shamanic activity as a part of a ritual takes place in a yurt, dried, burning or smoking dung is placed in front of the threshold so as people stepping over it could purify themselves before entering the sacred space.

Invocation (*duudlaga*)

The invocation is the song by which shamans call their spirits to take part in the ritual. Shamanic invocations show significant resemblance to the so-called “praising songs” (*magtaal*) of the Mongols. One of the most well-known *magtaals* is the *Altain magtaal* “The Praising Song of the Altai”, which is the compulsory intro of every western-Mongolian heroic epic. Mongols believe that when someone sings this song, all the spirits of the Altai gather around him. Seeing it from this perspective, the *magtaal* might be regarded as a kind of invocation. (Moreover, there are also other elements, which allow us to draw a parallel between the presentation of heroic epics and shamanic rituals: as the *magtaal* helps the bards to get into an inspired mood, the invocation’s first part, the *magtaal* of the spirits (*ongodiin magtaal*), has the same effect on the shaman.)

When shamans carry out divination or examine a client (*üzleg*), they call their spirits, but do not let them enter their bodies. During spirit-pleasing or problem-solving rituals, after calling them, the shaman lets one of the spirits possess his/her body.

Possession (*ongon orox*)

The first sign of possession is that the shaman drops the invocation and starts singing another song in a different tone of voice. Sometimes it is accompanied by movements or gestures peculiar to the possessing spirit. This song is claimed to be sung by the given spirit relating his/her brief life-story. Its Buryat name, “*durdlaga*” means “remembering”.

It is believed that the shaman is not present during the possession: s/he merely places his/her body to the disposal of the spirit. Thus, everything apparently done by the shaman is done by the spirit, in fact. It occurs that the shaman under possession (or shall we say in trance) speaks to a certain person from the public in terms s/he would never do under ordinary conditions. Sometimes even a young shaman can address an old and reputable member of the community disrespectfully when possessed by a spirit. Spirits of deceased shamans and ancestors are dominant and respected by everyone. Accordingly, it is not the shaman who has power and control over the public but the spirits s/he is possessed by.

After introducing themselves, spirits greet the public (Bum-Očir 2002: 40–45) saying: *Mend amoor* (literary: “Health and peace”), who reply in the same way. The assistant introduces the scene of the ritual, the participants, and the shaman to the spirit, while offering a cup of vodka, milk, or tobacco as part of the greeting and the welcoming process. Spirits use body language and assume certain postures expressing different meanings. The most commonplace posture is the one with the right hand akimbo, which is to express dominancy over the public. There

are situations in which they do not seem so powerful and self-confident, though. Sometimes, especially when a foreigner is attending the ritual, spirits act as if they were afraid of something, and try to hide behind their assistant's back and put the drumstick to their forehead (Picture 3). They ask the assistant if the new-comer is a demon or an enemy since in the spirits' eyes, a strange-looking Caucasian person is more like a threatening diabolical creature than a human being. Then the assistant calms the spirit down introducing the foreigner as if s/he was an epic hero who has come from a distant country to meet the spirits. The same posture (with the drumstick put on the forehead) is often assumed when the spirit has just arrived at the scene. In this case, the shaman looks like someone who does not know which way to turn, and looks to the right and to the left as if s/he was trying to recognize the place s/he has just dropped down. Shortly, in both cases the posture in question expresses the spirit's perplexity, uneasiness and anxiety towards the new and unfamiliar environment.

After this, people can talk to the spirit, but not by themselves but using the assistant as an interpreter, since the spirits' language is different from that of the ordinary people, and can be difficult to understand for them (Bum-Očir 2002: 21–45). When someone turns to the spirit with a question, the assistant introduces him/her using the spirits' language. It also occurs that it is spirits who take the initiative in chatting with one of the participants. When they are asked by someone from the public, they always answer in riddles, in a poetic way. Nowadays, clients take notes of the spirit's answers so as not to forget the important details. The poetic language usage of the spirits has a practical reason: the pieces of advice given by the spirit are easier to memorize in a poetic form than in a colloquial one. Hundreds of years ago, when common people did not have paper and pen at their disposal, the only way not to forget the important words uttered by the spirit was to learn them by heart. Consequently, the task of the assistant to translate the spirit's poetic utterances into everyday language might be a recently evolved element in Buryat shamanism.

During a problem-solving ritual (*zasal*) clients can turn to the spirit with various problems ranging from illness to financial difficulties. In case of illness, of which they believe to be caused by a curse casted by an enemy of the client, an effigy (Heissig 1992: 158–167) is made of flour and water representing the ill-willed person. By destroying the effigy, the curse returns to its caster, and the ill person may recover. After the climax of the ritual, the shaman (still under possession) puts a cup of milk or vodka on his/her drum or bell³ and s/he circles three times clock-wise with it, and throws the cup away (Bum-Očir 1999: 184–196). If the cup falls to the ground with its mouth up, it means that the offerings were accepted by the spirits and the ritual was successful. In this case, the client or the person responsible for the sacrifices and offerings circumambulates the cup three times (also colck-wise), bends three times before it, and drinks the few drops left. If the cup falls upside-down, the divination has to be repeated, and additional sacrifices have to be offered.

³ In theory, the shaman using a bell instead of a drum is not allowed to perform problem-solving rituals, but it still occurs that more experienced white shamans do fall into trance and perform one.

At the end of the ritual, when the spirit has consumed what was offered to her/him, s/he gives blessing to each participant. In fact, this is the very part of the ritual the most participants come for. When people go to attend a ritual, they often say: *Bööd daatguulyaa* “I’m going to get insured by the shaman.” The word “*daatgal*” is used for this rite and it also means “insurance”, as for example in “*erüül mendiin daatgal*” “health insurance” (Bum-Očir 2002: 108–113). The purpose of this ritual is to entrust the participants’ fate to the spirits. The insurance can either be performed by the shaman or one of his/her spirits. In other words, the shaman insuring them can be under possession or not. When the shaman is in trance, someone from the audience bends before him/her so as s/he could slap the person on the back with the whip. In this case, the assistant introduces the person to the spirit. In other cases, when the shaman is not in trance, he or she sings the invocation presenting him/herself to the spirits, while the participants are standing in a line waiting for the insurance. While singing the invocation, the shaman stops every now and then to put questions to the participant in turn. The shaman inquires about the person’s personal particulars, which mean his/her clan, age, zodiac, name and place of birth. Then s/he conveys these pieces of information to the spirits asking them to take the client under their protection. The shaman can either use his/her drum placing it on the participant’s back and beating it three times, or s/he can slap them by the whip. According to traditions, slapping ousts every kinds of harm from the body. The stronger or more slappings one gets, the more harm has s/he accumulated. The last slapping is usually the strongest one. According to this, being slapped by the shaman’s whip can be considered as a form of purification. Right after having got the insurance, the participant has to bend down and go through under the right armpit of the shaman, just the same way the defeated wrestler does under the winner’s armpit during the Naadam festival. Most of the times, the insurance is the last act of the spirit while possessing the shaman, though it can also take place at the very end of the ritual, and can even be performed by an apprentice who does not wear his/her shamanic costume—not even his/her headgear. When a spirit leaves the shaman’s body, the assistant purifies him/her by smoke. It helps the shaman to get rid of the spirit and all the demons which may have come along with it from the world beyond. The shaman jumps and shakes his/her costume and tools in order that all the invisibles could get off from it. A possession can be followed by another until all the spirits the shaman wants to work with have possessed him/her. There are shamans who often appear to fall asleep as their spirits leave their bodies. While they are in sleep, the next spirit is believed to take over the place of the previous one (Picture 4).

The invocation of the second and the third spirit takes much shorter time than that of the first one. It is partly due to the fact that the shaman is already in a more inspired state of mind than at the first time. On the other hand, the first invocation serves also the purpose of inviting all the spirits belonging to the shaman, while for the second time the shaman only has to ask one of them to enter his/her body. Generally, all the spirits invited are eager to come to the human world by possessing the shaman, but the ritual can also be complete without letting all of them enter. That is why the shaman has to control his/her spirits, and see them off when it is necessary.

It occurs, however, that the shaman cannot take control of his/her spirits, and one of them seizes him/her unexpectedly. Buryats refer to this case as *ongon dairaad orožo yirexe* “the spirit attacks the shaman”. Once the spirit has entered, s/he must be served according to his/her expectations.

Seeing Off the Spirits (*ongodoo degdeexe*)

When all the spirits invited have been treated and have left the shaman's body, s/he usually takes a break and prepares for the last part of the ritual. Although the spirits have parted from his/her body, they are still believed to be present at the scene of the ritual. Singing the parting song (Bum-Očir 2002: 69–76), the shaman calls their names and offers them all the sacrifices put on the table (*taxilaa degdeexe*). By means of the aforementioned divination, the shaman can enquire the spirits whether they have accepted the offerings or not. Then s/he continues the song asking them to leave the scene and to return to their homes in the nature.

Appellation for Blessing

After offering the sacrifices at the end of a ritual, the audience (under the shaman's leadership) applies for the spirits' blessing. Handling food in both hands, they circle clock-wise with them uttering the word: *xurai* (Bum-Očir 2002: 99–105) repeatedly (Picture 5). The meaning of this is “come” or “gather”. The circling movements towards themselves and the repetition of this word express the people's will that in return for the sacrifices they want abundance and fertility.

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INFORMANTS

Namsarai, D.: Assistant of Altanceceg Buryat shamaness both of them live in Dašbalbar district in eastern Mongolia.

Dašbalbar: Buryat shaman, lives in Ulaanbaatar, native of Dašbalbar district, eastern Mongolia

Cerenxand: A half-blood Buryat-Khalkha shamaness, lives in Ulaanbaatar.



Picture 1. Sacrifices prepared for the spirits in a ritual performed at a shaman's home



Picture 2. Sheep sacrifice in a sacrificial ritual held in the nature



Picture 3. The moment when the spirit enters the shaman's body.



Picture 4. While the shaman is in sleep, the next spirit takes over the place of the previous one.



Picture 5. The audience applying for the spirits' blessing.