Ayur Zhanaev

The Human Being in Social and Cosmic Orders

Categories of Traditional Culture and the Problems of Contemporary Buryat Identity

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The book is based on my doctoral thesis, *The Human Being in Social and Cosmic Orders. Categories of Traditional Culture and the Problems of Contemporary Buryat Identity*, which I defended in 2017 at the Institute of Applied Social Sciences at the University of Warsaw. Some fragments of this work were created, or later published, as separate papers. Nevertheless, only being brought together, within one work, they could make more sense.

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Note on transliteration

Transliteration of both Russian and Buryat follows the American Library Association – Library of Congress (ALA-LC) system for Cyrillic. I adopted a modified version of this style, rendering *ë* as *yo*. The three additional letters of the Buryat (and Mongolian) alphabet, *Өө, Үү* and *Һһ*, are represented with *Öö, Üü* and *Hh* respectively; besides, I denote the letter Ээ as *Ėė*. For transliteration of the examples written in Classical Mongolian script, I used the system proposed by Stanisław Kałużyński [1998: 20–21]. These rules do not apply to citations or instances that already have more familiar conventional spellings.

Introduction

From the interesting encounters I had while compiling this project, the strangest of all was at Tsugol. The proximity of the Chinese-Russian border had created the possibility for local Buryat lamas to have easier contacts with the Buddhist world and their kin in the Qing Empire. Consequently, in the 19th century, this area grew to become one of the largest centres of Buryat Buddhism with thousands of lamas resident, and yet was desolated during the anti-religious campaign soon after the rise of the Soviet state. After this, the border region became heavily militarized in order to avoid the threat from the pro-Japanese Manchukuo state and, later on, due to worsening relations with China. When in 2012 me and some Polish anthropologist colleagues were there for a short fieldwork study, I saw the typical post-Soviet scenery of an abandoned and devastated semi-urbanized settlement. Unlike other Buryat monastic compounds, the main temple complex has been preserved, primarily because it had served as an important military supply depot and, then, it seemed out of place, almost anachronistic. It appeared as a mismatching object from a parallel world. After recent restoration works, it was the only island of relative prosperity amid the general backdrop of relative decline. However, while there were neither crowds of lamas, nor regiments of soldiers, the flow of history in this place was always present to its observer.

We met a local school teacher, a pleasant Russian woman who had been gathering materials over the years and was truly interested in the local history and culture. She had come there from a different region of Transbaikalia in the 1980s and witnessed many macro-changes, which were transforming this place. I decline to elaborate on the much-exotisized

topic of the post-Soviet frustration, which is actually my everyday reality, because a more pertinent topic demands my attention. It was clear to me that this woman was trying to tell us something that she found of cultural significance. She began more than once with phrases like: "This was peculiar…" or "I was stricken with the fact that…", but could not continue because she had to introduce the historical context first. She found it necessary to say that there were few Buryat families in the surrounding area whose children attended her school since a big part of the local Buryat population had been driven away from the state border. Those left there, as a rule, adjusted to shifting cultural trends and inevitably became more Russified. Eventually, she came closer to the topic:

> During the first year of my work, I was stricken with the fact… at that time, in 1985, the military personnel left the settlement and it [the temple – A. Zh.] became free for public access, and everyone who wanted it started visiting it there. And, we… I had the school graduation, the farewell bell… and I with children went there to the temple to have a look at… And, what was peculiar, the Buryat children… they transmit it through generations… none of the Buryat children came upstairs higher than the ground floor and touched nothing there… in contrast to the Russian children… because we, Russians, have a different religion. And the Buryat children would say to their Russian fellows and they also tried not to touch… those who kept company with the Buryat children would also not touch... [DS750616].

It was clear to me that what she was stricken with was that after more than a half century of Sovietization and the erosion of loss of the native culture and language, the local Buryat children, who had likely never previously visited a Buddhist temple, still observed the common rules of behaviour there. During our further conversations, she brought up also other interesting evidence of the vitality of Buryat culture, which contradicted manifestly the cultural policy of the Soviet period (which declared the radical cultural change of "traditional" societies due to the rapid modernization [Zapaśnik, 1999: 22; Chakars, 2014: 210]) and contemporary Buryat lamentations of linguistic assimilation, and the loss of the "native" culture (which has almost become the symbol of the national identity). Perhaps, despite those processes, from the perspective of a presumably impartial non-Buryat observer, many

elements of their "tradition" were still strong despite these significant transformations.

This episode during the initial year of my fieldwork remains in my memory and I found it later to be a useful metaphor in summarizing the contemporary state of Buryat society. It introduces us to a wide range of issues of social and cultural transition, for example, how the Soviet version of modernity transformed local cultures, or even to what extent Soviet culture was truly "Soviet". Problems of these types have been of a staple concern for contemporary social scientists, often arising from their discontent with the banal statement that "modernity" replaces "tradition".

Theoretical considerations on the problem of social order

I will be interested in the traditional Buryat social thought and its contemporary changes. My investigation departs from many sociological analyses of continuity and social change because I claim that there existed the reflections of the social order which influenced the way Buryats perceived and reacted to those social changes. The problems concerning sustainability, forms and change of social order are central for contemporary social analyses [Falkenhayner et al., 2015: 9].

The problem of order is a vast theoretical issue in social sciences. Niklas Luhmann even positioned the "problem of order" as the catalyst that led to the crystallization of sociology as an independent academic discipline [Luhmann 1981; Luhmann 1996: 21; after: Falkenhayner et al., 2015: 9]. In general, the problem could be called the fundamental, if not central, issue of social sciences. The matter of social order was developed as a rule in macro-theories, such as functionalism or Marxism, which saw the order as constructed by shared norms, values, distribution of labour, power or property [*Słownik socjologii*, 2006: 175–176]. However, to describe the changes of contemporary Buryat identity, I will go beyond the categories of the macro-pattern of social order which does not include cultural vision in analysis.

In my research, I will apply the methodology proposed by the interpretivist generation of the social sciences (symbolic interactionism, social

phenomenology, discourse theory). In particular, I was inspired by the interactivist assumption of social order understood as the product of shared sense-making practices of a group member's concern. This individual experience never maps on the complete cultural set of a symbolic universe and represents Alfred Schütz's "finite provinces of meaning" [Woroniecka, 2003: 34]. This knowledge existing both as conscious reflections and as unaware assumptions constitutes the sense of the social world and its orderliness. This practical reasoning could serve as a self-sufficient interpretative grid without giving precedence to those proposed/imposed by the privileged methods of academic social theory. This "indifference" to the objectivism and the multiplicity of interpretation possibilities fits well in the postcolonial protest against the dominant narratives.

Nevertheless, I am fully aware of the impossibility of not referring to a more general theoretical perspective in the descriptions of the social order. The ordinary, everyday interaction could not be imagined without relations with the intellectual tradition of thought and its impact made through the history. Many categories born within academic social theory (so-called "reflexivity") have already gained currency as colloquial ideas. This is what Anthony Giddens claims in his theory of double hermeneutics: "the 'findings' of the social sciences very often enter constitutively into the world they describe" and the other way round [Giddens, 1993: 150, 153]. On the other hand, historians of ideas clearly show the "folk" roots of many scientific concepts. Thus, despite the ethnomethodological skepticism, the division between "folk" and "academic" descriptions is not so evident: there are no "common practices" without background theory.

Thus, interpretivist orientations in the social sciences attribute meaning to two conditional contexts: actual and heuristic [Woroniecka, 2003: 42]. The actual context implies the changing nature of meaning. The researcher in the field has contact with people and contributes to the change of the meaningful context. It is open to transformations, negotiation and dialogue. No ideas should be thought of as stable and non-changing – one deals with multiple transforming meanings, which are expressed in particular contexts. The context, however, proposes multiple interpretations and invariants that should be seen from the various positions. The heuristic context implies reference to the earlier

interpretive experience. For the needs of my research, I am going to incorporate some elements of history of ideas into this heuristic context. It would imply that certain meanings have their own more or less vivid "genealogy" and "geography".

In the manner of the Western division into the "folk" knowledge and "science", the Buryat-Mongol culture of knowledge also contained the imagination of more privileged and less privileged epistemology. As I will show in chapter 1, Buryat understanding of folk (*jure-jin*) knowledge was distinguished in opposition to that produced in the Buddhist institutions. I include there various canonic Buddhist literature, didactic texts addressed to the Buryat masses, historical chronicles and other texts, which, directly or indirectly, considered the ideas of social order as defined in the culture as the evidence for "reflexivity" on ongoing social processes [Giddens, 1993: 90]. These two spheres, however, did not exist in isolation and they determined mutually the knowledge production. For denoting this knowledge, I apply the term "epistemic culture" which I borrow from the works of a Swedish and German Mongolist Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz [Kollmar-Paulenz, 2014: 139]. In connection with this, I also use numerously the word "version": a version of history, a version of sociology, despite the general tendency of using distinct epistemic vocabulary for Western and non-Western cultures [Sneath, 2007: 64; Carsten, 2004: 189] due to either evolutionist assumptions, or the fear of performing possible "intellectual colonialism".

Together with the accelerating contacts with the Western science in the 19th century and its triumph during the Soviet era, the local culture of knowledge, both its "folk" and "high" versions, were classified as illegitimate. On the one hand, the institutions producing the "high" sphere of social reflexivity were totally eliminated. On the other, many practices, which people performed in their everyday lives, were stigmatized and, consequently, subjected to the "refinement". The ideological hegemony of Western science strongly influenced social reflexivity, while cultural ideas were seen as relics of a traditional, archaic world vision or superstitions doomed to vanish in the contest with modernity. Nevertheless, I claim that these ideas still constitute an important factor of social processes along with a still strong ideological and practical influence of the Western "science" in the Buryat society.

The approach brings another serious theoretical problem that I cannot ignore. Fredrik Barth, in his essay, highlights the gap in defining culture as abstract cultural material and variations of its social embeddedness [Barth et al., 2001: 435; Barth, 2004a: 189]. Thus, I needed a definition of culture that could bring the consensus between the two orders. In the dispute between those who claimed knowledge to be obtained from the individual experience (empiricists) and those who believed it to be universal and located within the mind *a priori* (rationalists), Émile Durkheim took the third position, arguing that knowledge is of cultural origin. The basic "categories of thought", like: time, space, number, causality, etc., have been invented by human mind and they are different depending on the culture that mind belongs to [Durkheim, 2001: 16–19]. Culture can be understood as a system of logically interrelated categories of thought, which are unique *représentations collectives* of a particular community. Individuals are not isolated in their subjectivity and they receive the categories of culture due to socialization and social interaction and they do not create them. They are the part of the broader context in their whole and totality, which deliver its significant meaning. Among the scholars influenced by the Durkheimian ideas was his student, Marcel Granet, who – in his prominent book *La pensée chinoise* (1934) – confirmed the views of his teacher using the example of categories of traditional Chinese thought. Granet denies the significance of abstract categories, like: time, space, number, or substance in the traditional Chinese thought, making way for the categories connected with order, totality and rhythm instead [Granet, 2008: 20]. Another prominent scholar, who was a reader of Granet [Zapaśnik, 1988: 19], Aaron Gurevich, applied a similar methodology for description of the medieval European past. Culture becomes the dimension for human interaction and mutual understanding with all possible diversity of beliefs, concerns and ideologies. One cannot think of the world without the categories of culture, which are not something one is conscious of, but constitute the reality preceding individual experience [Gurevich, 1972: 16]. This also includes the so-called "pre-understanding" in the philosophic hermeneutics [Woroniecka, 2003: 47].

This approach to culture dissolves the cognition and acts as distinct ontological orders. The social life could be considered as a symbolic

manifestation of the way of thinking, specific to a particular society in a particular historical period [Zapaśnik, 2006: 20]. This is what Barth proposes as practicable epistemology, which traces "how people interpret the world and act on those interpretations" to avoid seeing culture as ideas detached from practices [Barth et al., 2001: 435]. I deal with a certain fragmental participation in social reality, a fragmental imagination of the social wholeness, as expressed by people, or observed from particular situations. That is why I am not going to analyze the categories of the "privileged" discourse (whether it is science, high culture, etc.), unless they appear in the field. The present work, though deals with some texts produced by culture, pays more attention to common (everyday) practices and knowledge that shape and produce reflections on the social processes. I am also aware of the high level of abstraction in distinguishing these loosely defined categories of culture. Nevertheless, I would like to implement it in my work as a different sphere from the "ideas", "concepts" and "meanings", which could be more or less consciously defined in the culture. Meanwhile, the categories of culture as a certain logic of producing and perceiving these ideas are required to explain why certain ideas did not appear or they function differently in the Buryat culture.

This approach also offers the possibility to go beyond the essentialized restrictions of a "national culture". Certain ideas transgress the borders of ethnicity and languages. I mention this to underline that the ideas discussed in the book extend well beyond the selected geographical area. The Buryat culture should not be locked within such terms as a "Siberian", "minority", "indigenous", or "local" culture, which even was not the way they viewed themselves:

> In contrast to many scholars, who have seen Buryats purely as "native", "indigenous", or even as "a fourth world" people, many Buryats have long viewed themselves as cosmopolitans, regarding the long history of Buryat Buddhist pilgrimages to Mongolia and Tibet as a prominent marker of southern Siberia's transnational history and identity [Bernstein, 2013: 34].

Considered together, the strands of this research will illuminate the crucial peculiarities of the social organization of the cultures of "Inner", "Central" and "East" Asia, which historically were neighbouring to that

of Buryat-Mongolian and developed many shared ideas. Thus, the research reveals many of the ideas shared with Tibetan, Chinese cultures (e.g. ideas of Dao, Yin-Yang, etc.), and also other cultures of Central Asia, which could serve as alternative "East" – "East" ways of translation to the dominant "West" – "East" perspective. I assume that there is no shared meaning between the distant cultures without preceding "interaction". The definition of cultural circles, which I call East and West in my book, is always an arbitrary procedure, because the borders of these circles cannot be objectively established. Over the centuries, these cultures have been in touch with each other and borrowed different ideas, institutions and behavioural patterns. In my work, I distinguished the concepts of East and West, bearing in mind the differences in the categories of thinking. It is obvious that both societies that I count among Western and Eastern societies are very diverse internally.

In this case, each of them guides its own logic and language. These particular "modes of knowing" produce unique meaning [Hastrup, 2004a: 460]. One cannot describe the culture with the established antagonistic categories like Eastern–Western, collectivistic–individualistic, spiritualism–rationalism, nature–culture because the culture in its emic perspective is neither this, nor that. Moreover, if one element of the dichotomy is missing, it is no longer valid. Here, then, we deal with the problem of expressing/translating the meanings of one culture with the language of another and the borders in cultural communication. That is why the context, which interpretivist methods could (re)construct, is a necessary step of any intercultural dialogue through distinguishing these metaphors. There could not be a pure interpretation of meanings or description of facts without the background assumptions. I consider my research generally as an interpretation and translation following the Clifford Geertz comparison of doing social research with trying to read a manuscript: "foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour" [Geertz, 1973: 10].

The case of the Buryat culture is even more complex. It has to be described and expressed in the language of alien cultures, like Russian, English, or Polish, which is another level of a hermeneutic barrier.

The issue of translatability is crucial for understanding texts produced by cultures distinct in terms of time, actual knowledge and concerns. Regarding texts of the Buryat culture, as well as many other "Oriental" cultures, there dominates the dictionary model of translation, which pulls the words out of the cultural and cognitional context in which they were originally created [Hansen, 1992: 8–9]. It leads to the faulty conclusion of similarities of the words and their meaning. However, the meaning cannot be determined independently from belief. One should not ponder sentences in isolation. The understanding of Buryat culture was based on the assumptions of the traditional translation model, which very often favoured different degrees of symbolic violence [cf. Bourdieu, 2011]. I consider dictionaries to be projects and aspirations for intercultural communication and mutual understanding but not as a fixed and final documentation. That is why I will introduce non-conventional translations of various ideas to convey their contextual value. A researcher has to deal with complicated configurations, perspectives and origins of knowledge and disentangle the "mess of encounters" to reveal the role of non-European epistemic cultures played in the formation of a global modernity [Kollmar-Paulenz, 2014: 123].

Questions and claims

The interpretative social sciences attempt to bring reconciliation between the sociological theory and actual life practices [Woroniecka, 2014b: 8]. It is contiguous to the world through being qualitative, relativist and constructivist. However, this theory is a point of departure for me, not necessarily the point of destination. It gives the possibility to disclose another theory, grounding and interpreting the colloquial sense-making practices that could be based on some distinct assumptions.

Such an angle leads to a certain conflict of theoretic perspective where cultural ideas are contesting with the sociological categories in terms of applicability and serving as an interpretational grid. I claim that Buryat-Mongols possessed reflexive "sociological" ideas. My definition of a social thought is very broad and includes those reflections which were considered as the "high" knowledge as well as those accompanying

everyday practices. This would give the possibility to consider social reflections and their interpretations on various levels. The goal of my research is (1) to explore the ideas concerning social order in Buryat traditional culture and (2) their implications in shaping contemporary Buryat identity.

In connection with the goals, I raise two types of questions for my analysis. The first one concerns the characteristics of this thought: how is this social thought different from the Western social thought and sociology understood in academic categories? (I am aware that this question is very broad and in my academic education and observations from the field I identified some specific areas that could serve as examples of this difference.) How/whether are the three conventional individual, social and cosmic orders defined in Buryat thought? What theories, categories and metaphors is this thought resting on?

The second series of questions is devoted to the feasibility of this thought in the face of cultural changes: what was the history of this thought? How does this vision of social order exist in the modern Buryat community facing the challenges of assimilation and acculturation? How are these challenges seen and defined from the prospect of this social thought as presented by common people? I pose these questions because I am aware that the assimilations processes are interpreted by people according to categories of the local social thought in a specific way.

My contention is that the comprehension of the questions depends much on the interpretation tools one applies. That is why I will attempt to present the Buryat social thought and introduce it as an independent interpretational grid in the analysis. I argue that this knowledge could be found in conceptualization of order among common people. I am studying the Buryat social thought as cultural base of considering contemporary social processes (e.g. assimilation, identity), in order to show my reader that academic social theory despite its prominent achievements cannot fully comprehend these processes. This is because there is no such thing as sociology without a cultural framework. Sociology, and social science more generally, is thought and interpreted differently within different epistemic cultures. The sociological categories used in each culture are distinctive and must be taken into account. Doing so in the case of Buryat culture corresponds to the general tendency of

making the academic sciences more responsive, inclusive and dialogical [Odora-Hoppers, 2002: 4].

Methodology of data collection

The fieldwork process and the problems one encounters are the integral part of the research because they reveal the implementation of methodological knowledge in field and disclose ethical issues of the work. In most of the cases, however, this part of the research process is preferred to be concealed in fear of betraying possible deviations from ideal methodological standards [Thøgersen, Heimer, 2006: 2]. Indeed, the fieldwork as an integral part of the learning process of PhD students never meets the forethought plans and expectations, which require working out one's own "coping strategy" [Saether, 2006]. Both success and failures in the field could be useful in learning from it and making conclusions, which is richly described in scholarly literature. In my opinion, the process of gathering empiric data and the role of researcher's personality in it would be an interesting topic to discuss. I would like to share my own fieldwork experience with special emphasis on the researcher's position in the field and the knowledge one could have access to due to it.

I conducted fieldwork in different regions of ethnic Buryatia, Mongolia, in close cooperation with my mentor, Ewa Nowicka, and Wojciech Połeć, Blanka Rzewuska in 2012, 2013, 2014[1]; and, independently, during summer vacations 2012–2016. My PhD project was dedicated to the ideas of social order in the Buryat culture. This is not something that could be asked straightforwardly, but a topic that demands a lot of creativity and good imagination from the researcher to (re)construct/discover the theory used in the everyday practices. Conducting research itself could be seen as a sort of disturbance of the

[1] The research project led by Nowicka entitled *Between Russia, Mongolia and China. Buryats and the Challenges of the 21st Century* funded by the National Science Centre, the decision number DRC-2011/03/B/HS6/01671. I accompanied the fieldwork only in Aga Okrug, Ulan-Ude and Kizhinga aimag of Buryat Republic, Khentii aimag of Mongolia.

order of things as a kind of "breaching" experience [Garfinkel, 1991]. This is how the ideas of social order, which are the main topic of my research, grasped me from the very first steps in the field. In the case of the loosely defined outsiders and insiders, the reaction of the field was very different, which I want to develop in the following parts.

Map № 1. Map of the Republic of Buryatia and two Buryat okrugs.

Guest researchers in Buryatia[2]

Despite the controversial ways of applications and its effects, the Western scientific discourse could already be counted as common meaningful ground between the Western researcher and the non-Western community. It is not the 18th–19th century, when the Western researcher could arrive into an "intact" community, draw the line between the scholar and the local. The ideology of objectiveness and privileged position of "science" has already performed the dialogue (though often unfair) and

[2] The fragments of this part are going to be published in my article *The Falling Rain Will Stop, the Guest who Arrived Will Leave. Once Again on "Insider" and "Outsider" Positions in the Buryat Field* in volume of the Faculty of "Artes Liberales" UW entitled *Searching Identity: Personal Experiences and Methodological Reflections*.

transported various ideas between these worlds. Thus, the academic categories and elements of sociological analysis are common discourses uttered by the Buryat field. One should also add the common use of the Russian language as the factor of easier interaction for both sides. Moreover, as in the case of Polish researchers, the common historical experience within Russian empire, the influence of USSR policy and many other historical events do not allow the researcher to consider their fieldwork interaction merely in terms of "cultural" differences. It is only one chain in the history long dialogue. Nevertheless, I had a general impression that the distance between the Western researchers and the Buryat field is often exaggerated from both sides.

When I was offered to become a co-researcher and interpreter at the fieldwork of Polish anthropologists, I took it as a perfect opportunity to learn about their methodology and to gather my own field materials. During my first visits in the field, I decided to see my work as an open-ended explorative project. I was overwhelmed with the conceptual cosmologies of these worlds, which – despite the processes of globalization and some common historical experience – still were very distant in many aspects. The project of the Polish team was dedicated to the modern cultural canons of Buryats living in Russia, Mongolia and China. During the previous researches of Nowicka in Ust-Orda Buryat Okrug (2000, 2010) and in the Republic of Buryatia (1993 and 1994), she was constantly told about Aga Buryat Okrug as the most "traditional" Buryat region with the language and culture surviving in a most undisturbed form in all ethnic Buryatia. This was also the information I heard many times myself in the regular life. Thus, let me emphasize this point here. I do not define and contest the status of these regions of being more "traditional" because this definition was taken from the field.

My experience of accompanying foreign anthropologists acquainted me with the privilege and prestige they enjoyed and what I later missed working on my own (I will consider it below). Foreign anthropologists were classified as "the respected guests" and as Uradyn Bulag noted as important "cultural brokers" [Bulag, 1998: 6] that brought certain "outsider possibilities" [Young, 2004: 192]. Their position of "teachers" (*bagsha*) and scholars (*erdemten*) at universities added more prestige

than if they would be just regular guests, since education (*erdem*) is traditionally a highly valued trait among the Buryats.

People in Aga Okrug were extremely helpful. Nowicka in her book *Korzenie Ałtargany sięgają głęboko…* (*The Roots of Altargana Run Deep…*, 2016) written on the material of these fieldworks called these conditions even "luxurious" [Nowicka, 2016: 9]. Indeed, the local people did much to accommodate the "guests". In Aginskoe, local administration even supplied us with transportation to get to the remote villages. With their help in 2012, we first visited Duldurginski district – villages Duldurga, Alkhanay, Togchin and Uzon. In Duldurga, a local TV-journalist shot a report for a local news-channel and another journalist conducted an interview for a newspaper about the Polish researchers, so that when we visited other localities, many people already knew about us. Later, we visited towns and villages of Aga district that is Budalan, Kunkur. We were shown all the key places of local importance, places of cult and historic sites. I had an opportunity to watch the image and symbols of Buryatness that local people tried to present for the foreign guests.

In 2012, we visited the town Aginskoe of Aga Buryat Okrug, in July, at the opening of the "international" Buryat festival Altargana, uniting the Buryats from Russia, Mongolia and China. According to rough estimations, there were gathered around 10,000 guests. We had a chance to conduct interviews with guests who arrived from various places of ethnic Buryatia and even with those living abroad. Moreover, we made contacts with people from other parts of Aga Buryat Okrug whom we visited during the remaining period of our stay after the festival. In 2013, during our second visit to Aga Buryat Okrug, we decided to visit the third and the last part of the okrug – Mogotuiski district. Here, we used our own contacts from the Buryat State University in the village Mogotui and the local administration, again, helped us with transportation and accommodation. After that, we made short and longer visits to the villages Usharbai, Zugaalai, Kusochi. In every village we were met by locals and accommodated in their homes, local school dormitories and even, once, in a Buddhist temple.

In 2014, we visited my home region in Republic of Buryatia that is Kizhinga district. This is another region treated as most "traditional",

where I spent most of my life from the kindergarten to the end of the school. I had a net of relatives and acquaintances in this place. They were very helpful and took us to the important places of the region, proposing their assistance and guidance. We had a chance to visit a mass ceremony dedicated to Buddha Maitreya in which there were gathered more than 13,000 people in Kizhinga and a minor *oboo* ceremony in Ulzyte dedicated to the respected lamas from this locality.

After visiting Kizhinga, we continued our research in Mongolia in a predominantly Buryat village Dadal of Khentii aimag. We managed to participate in the 10th edition of Altargana festival. For me, it was an astonishing experience to see how a small village became full of various people sharing some Buryat origin. Long trails of buses and cars were bringing the participants from different regions of ethnic Buryatia, Mongolia and China. We were also pleased to see people whom we knew from our previous fieldwork in Aga. They were glad to see the Polish anthropologists once again, took pictures with them and talked like old friends. There were many unidentified "friends" who would wave to us while driving past in buses and cars and we waved to them in reply. I was also surprised to find some relatives in Dadal whose grandfathers migrated there from Kizhinga during the civil war in Russia. It is during such mass events that many Buryats have chance to meet and communicate with their kin. After the festival, we spent a few days in the village communicating with local people. Apart from making interviews, a huge part of our research activity was dedicated to the observation and the participant observation.

During the fieldwork with the team of Nowicka, our informants were mainly representatives of local elites or those who are counted to be them. Since teachers traditionally possessed high status in the Buryat society (*bagsha*), we often were referred to them as to the best specialists in the local culture. In the Buryat villages, teachers apart from instructing their main subjects, often volunteer in various kinds of workshops and organize local cultural life. For example, a teacher of Maths was the person who organized a local museum, gathered artefacts and provided some educative lessons for children. Many of them are also keen on researching local traditions and respectfully

called *kraevied*[3] (a local historian or a regional ethnographer). Generally, school and teachers in the Buryat village could be called the centre of cultural life of community. Apart from teachers and cultural workers, we conducted numerous interviews with the representatives of local administration and religious institutions – lamas and shamans – who also have enormous influence on the contemporary shape of the Buryat culture. In Ulan-Ude and Aginskoe, we met many activists of cultural revival, artists, singers, actors who eagerly shared with us their experience, plans and opinions on the issues of the Buryat culture. Of course, many accidental people made an important contribution to our research material.

The contacts with our Buryat informants always evoked panic among them. Clueless what to do, the Buryat hosts turned to me for advice how to treat the foreign guests from Poland. Numerous times I was asked about very practical things like what they eat and drink or what not, how could they react to this or that. Many of them felt uncomfortable because of their poor living conditions or unawareness in the topics they would be interested in, and I had to calm them down, explaining the cultural background of European guests. They told me also many things they never uttered to the guests directly, identifying me as an insider (*manai Buryaad khübüün*, "our Buryat boy/son" or *nyutagai khübüün*, "a boy/son from our homeland"). During the fieldwork, I often felt as a mediator (and interpreter) between the Buryat world and the world of foreign guests, which I partly understood during my stay there for study. By the time of our first visits, I had been learning Polish for 3–4 years and staying in Poland for couple of years and was able to interpret ideas when it was necessary. Priceless were our conversations with professor Nowicka and doctor Połeć who would share their thoughts and explain to me various aspects of the anthropology and sociology. The border between our cooperation and friendship was getting more and more fluid and, thus, perhaps, also fruitful, as well as sensitive [Nowicka, 2012: 109].

I would not like to idealize the local hospitability for, of course, both pleasant and unpleasant situations took place during the fieldwork.

[3] *Kraevied* was also the status which was applied to me as to a researcher and, what is most important, as to a "local" researcher.

I also sometimes felt uncomfortable when I would notice some abrasive situations. Various sensitive topics like the attitude to World War II in Poland and Russia, or contemporary political situation could appear in our conversation [Nowicka, 2014]. During the three years of our visits, we could observe certain changes in views and attitudes, various other topics could gain currency – both the field and the researcher changes. Every contact brings a new insight to the culture and serves as empirical material. Nevertheless, despite the whole trickiness and controversies, it certainly brings new opportunities and multiple perspectives to experience the culture.

This way, I spent the fieldwork not only gathering the empirical data, but also gathering impressions, experience and ideas, which I developed during my further independent fieldwork. While working on my own, I could see how the sense of the Buryat social order was subjectively important for me and for those I came into contact with.

Researcher "at home" and the Buryat social order

"The falling rain will stop, the guest who arrived will leave" (*orohon boroo arilkha, yerehen ailshan kharikha*) – this popular Buryat proverb shows the double-facedness of local hospitality. It means that one should exert any effort to make a good impression on a guest, comforting oneself in mind that his stay will not last for long. However, this recommendation does not refer to those who were not classified as a guest. Let me describe the other side of this proverb that I experienced while conducting my research.

In the Buryat culture, one could commit a sin (*nügel*) by telling improper information (*buruu yume khelekhe*) which could disturb the order of events. It is one of the basic sins in the Buddhist view along with the sin of improper intentions and improper deeds. I noticed that many people whom I met thought of themselves as not capable to say anything of their culture because they did not want to take such responsibility. Especially, when I was asking about some religious issues, they would recommend going to another man or lama who would tell it.[4]

[4] Though it is a very common strategy that could be seen also, for example, in Poland.

In this context *kraevieds*, ethnographers and other scholars bear the same responsibility as traditionally lamas, seniors and wise and educated men did in producing knowledge.

Kraevieds and ethnographers enjoy a high position in the Buryat society as specialists in the sphere of culture who have authority to determine cultural canons and produce legitimate narrations of tradition and history. These are the specialists whom local people trust and to whom they turn to in their undertakings on the revival of local cultural heritage. My position of a researcher who was looking for the culture, understood as the categories of thought and scope of existing ideas, was strange to the image of "a scholar" they got used to. I was often blamed for the lack of knowledge. And, in the opinion of my informants, I asked very "elementary" questions. While the foreign anthropologists could feel free to ask about the sense of commonly known practices, it was irritating when I did. I heard some subtle comments like whether I read books and Buryat newspapers, because "everything was already written", and me as a *kraevied*, in turn, should know a good deal more about the local culture than they do. The local people were very respectful of positivist, certain knowledge and suspicious of the questions indicating uncertainty. By asking them, I definitely was marking myself as an outsider.

I was blamed even more not only for being a poorly educated *kraevied*, but also as a poorly instructed young Buryat who is obliged to learn from his family and relatives. One of my uncles, who introduced me to a senior man for interview, instructed me not to ask "foolish" questions because the informant would think, if not talk, in a bad way of my family and me. Also, my informants very often did not tolerate when I asked some things twice, when I was "chatting" too much, which is considered to be a "female" feature, not appreciated much as a part of my personality. Generally, the attitude to young men in the Buryat culture is sometimes very harsh. I had to consider such matters, while my gender, age and family origin played a huge role in openness of people I met. The configurations of being insider or outsider seemed to me limitlessly relative.

However, there were, of course, those who get my methodological suppositions, but some of them were also not contented with it generally

due to two reasons. This could be described using the example of my communication with a Buryat man. I asked him about the categories of kinship, which for him was elementary knowledge for a Buryat, thus, after initial discontent with my ignorance, he started instructing me as a young, inexperienced person. Soon, due to the character of my sometimes quite subtle questions, he understood that I knew more than I pretended to know. He was quite enraged after realizing this because he thought that I was just proving his knowledge and making fun of him. The second reason I found out after I explained properly that what I was trying to obtain from him was his knowledge, his experience and his opinion about the matter. After some considerations, he finally said that what I was doing is not a good thing because I was just "dragging" rumours (*khob sherekhe*) from here and there. Thus, gathering information "in field" unexpectedly turned to become another "sin" for me – dragging rumours, which is also considered a very impolite and "ugly" (*muukhai*) way of behaviour. Consequently, the work I was writing indeed could be seen as a collection of different rumours picked up from an enormous number of people in various situations which I had experienced even long before having thought about becoming a researcher. The position of inside researcher in the Buryat society challenges to make a range of personal decisions, many of which still are not completed. My position implied that I had to break many norms of "politeness", sometimes even that of "morality" and other restrictions with a limited possibility of excuse in a comparison to an outsider one. This opposes the view that "the insider" position is presumably more conductive for data collection [Young, 2004: 188]. It determined my possibilities and strategy of the research work in the field.

It is a common problem. The researcher asks about matters that lie on the surface, while he thinks about their deeper meaning. As a person who is just learning the way of doing independent research, gradually I tried to modify my coping strategy in the field. Soon, I understood all the limitations of in-depth interviews in my case. Thus, the best method for getting information was observation and participant observation. It actually agreed with local behavioural tradition while, according to Buryat cultural ideal, a young man like me should maintain silence, talk less, listen and watch what and how other people do. Moreover,

my position was strengthened by the role of a student who receives education far away from his homeland, somewhere in Poland. It was considered as extremely positive part of my personality – I was always encouraged and some people I visited even granted me money gifts to support my education.

Thus, in the field, I lived my role of a young man who should be instructed and informants took the role of teachers and the elderly. There is probably a practical strategy to use to avoid offending your informants. However, there is a deeper, methodological question – is it "fair" to pretend to ask about one thing, while really being interested in something else? I did not try to hide my knowledge in order not to be classified as a fool, but I courteously asked them to share their experience to help me in my research. They had to interrupt their routine to talk to me and as a rule refused to record the interview as in their imagination, their words could be not that good to be heard somewhere far in Warsaw. In most of the cases, I had to ask them: "please, let me record you, I will urgently need it in my study" and that sometimes worked. My own circle of relatives and acquaintances was extremely helpful because I could rehearse the interviews with them, test, consult and negotiate many ideas. This was the most effective and for me psychologically the most convenient strategy of getting the knowledge. It was also important for me because one cannot ask directly about the problem of social order but only extract it through a complex analysis.

Through such various situations, I have come to know much about the ideas of social order – through disturbing it and synchronizing with it. I also took inspirations from various academic literature, testaments, documents (in Władysław Kotwicz's archives in Cracow, private archives of Dambinima Tsyrendashiev, regional museums' archives) and Buryat literature. Apart from the fieldwork and analysis of various literature and documents, during my stay in Buryatia, I lived an extremely active Buryat cultural life. I visited all possible exhibitions, museums, meetings, performances, local movies, concerts, theatrical productions, public debates, book presentations, conferences, religious ceremonies and many other events to understand what is happening in the contemporary Buryat culture, for as any other society in the world it is always in the process of change and searching its way. This was almost a paranoid

state of finding, selecting and interpreting the meanings produced and negotiated in the culture.

The research project, however, was not restricted to the fieldwork and the analysis of literature on the topic. My stay in Poland as a PhD student also significantly influenced my own position. I could experience how the field is changing and how the researcher, myself, is changing. Below, let me quote the words of a famous Polish linguist Anna Wierzbicka about her stay in Australia, which perfectly mirrors my situation:

> One of the most important of these personal discoveries, which I owe to my life in Australia, was the discovery of the phenomenon of Polish culture. When I lived in Poland, immersed in Polish culture, I was no more aware of its specialness than I was of the air I breathed. Now, immersed in the very different Anglo (and Anglo-Australian) culture, I gradually became more and more aware of the distinctiveness of Polish culture [Wierzbicka, 1997: 115].

During my stay in Poland, I made important notes on the social order of a distant culture, making comparisons, finding similarities or distinctions. I was never thinking of myself to be purely "Asian" but "assimilated" enough in the European culture. Despite the fact that during my whole life I was in regular contacts with Russian culture and language, I studied in the school and university with Western curriculum and I understood that my own conceptual cosmology is rooted strongly in my native culture. I had not realized it until I have endured several cases of cultural differences while living and studying in Poland. I appreciate much the instructions of professor Stanisław Zapaśnik who spent an enormous amount of time explaining various aspects of Polish and, generally, European culture. I had an opportunity to live and function in a foreign environment and experience cultural differences and similarities on my own.

On the more reflexive level, I had the chance to study sociology, consult with researchers and negotiate the theory I was trying to ground. It is in this context that the cooperation with Polish anthropologists gave me numerous opportunities to observe my own culture from different perspectives. It showed me the prospects and blockades of my own mind and the possibility to construct a particular distance to my own culture following the principle of a methodological relativism [Zapaśnik, 2010: 8],

though I am fully aware that this relativistic demand is the same way vague as the requirement of being objective.

One has to confess that, despite the aspirations for methodological objectivism, the researcher never is able to suspend his personal background and experience. This background, however, should not be considered always as an obstruction, blockade, but also as a fundamental ground for possibility of various ways of interpretation. I do not want to go into discussion on whether it is better to be an inside or outside researcher. Each position opens one sphere of culture and, at the same time, closes the access to others. There are no clear measures of an insider and outsider [Young, 2004: 201]. The advantage of my research is the opportunity to experience both of these loosely defined positions in their multiple manifestations. The multiplicity of these perspectives gives the access to the multitude of meaningful contexts.

Summary

During the fieldwork – my own and within the team of Polish anthropologists – there was gathered a huge corpus of in-depth interviews. I do not include here other records and various unrecorded interviews and conversations, which I conducted during my summer vacation in Buryatia. Of course, I am not aiming to impress the reader with the quantity of conducted interviews – the relativist assumption [Hastrup, 1995: 50] somehow frees me from a positivist requirement of representativeness. The qualitative methodology does not have ambition to prove that the fragment of the world it considered is typical for it as a whole.

The main methodological assumption is the phenomenological view that those with whom I talked represent their "macro" vision of the social order. Through my contacts with those people and personal observations, I find these categories without assertion about the whole culture. I am aware that there exist multiple perspectives within a culture and that the Buryat culture seen as absolutely separate from the Russian environment is merely an abstraction. Nevertheless, I reserve the right for myself to analyze the fieldwork material, select or reduce it in the dialogue with the requirements of academic theorizing.

The descriptions of this order will not be given in their original "raw" form but will acquire a certain macro-theoretic perspective and metaphoric structure: it is my subjective analysis of subjective statements of my interlocutors. I am extracting the repetitive metaphors, narrations and interpretations and putting them into a particular narrative structure. The elements of the theory I ground were also discussed with the informants from the fieldwork area and other parts of Buryatia and Mongolia. I want to emphasize that the field is a reflexive area, not only in the sense of their "practical sociology", but also that the field constructed their own interpretational social theories through the history. The research was a cycle of reflections and metareflections [Wyka, 1993: after Woroniecka, 2013: 39] which brought more confidence in the theory which emerged from the empirical material.

The empiric knowledge I gathered forms a certain grounded theory which could confront and contribute to the existing sociological theories. In turn, the theory does not have the status of a final interpretational model, but is being constantly revised in confrontation with the field data. Such a dialogue between the macro and micro levels conducted by the researcher is the major point of the interpretivist theory and reflexive social science [Burawoy, 2009: 8–9]. In this way, I would like to avoid multiplying of isolated cases [Woroniecka, 2013: 41] and contribute to the wider theoretic discussions on social orderliness.

1

The cultures of knowledge in Buryatia

My main point of departure is the assumption that apart from the European notion of science there are other non-European forms of knowledge which, due to the recent historical events, lost their legitimacy in a different degree. The knowledge labeled as "Western science", or simply "science", does not imply that science, techniques, industry or medicine did not exist outside the Western context. This, for instance, regards many domains of knowledge culture of the Buryat-Mongols, whose historical, philosophical, social, etc. thoughts serve merely as objects of scientific research, not as independent interpretational grids. Meanwhile, many ideas born within these cultures of knowledge were not destined to disappear in clash with modernity, but still are significant factors in cultural processes in contemporary times [Eisenstadt, 2000]. This is the reason why they should be articulated and explored.

In order to distinguish this sphere of knowledge, I apply the term "culture of knowledge" or "epistemic culture" which I borrow from the works of Kollmar-Paulenz [Kollmar-Paulenz, 2014: 139]. I attach it to the interpretativist heuristic context of meaning production and Giddens's understanding of reflexivity of ongoing social life [Giddens, 1993: 90]. It is quite common procedure in the social sciences.[5] Nevertheless, the emancipation of local forms of knowledge is often limited to the victimized "imperialist–indigenous" relation. The term "indigenous", in turn, covers the whole range of differentiated traditions of thought, as well as many domains of these thoughts. This brings

[5] So-called "Indigenous Science" [http://www.wisn.org/what-is-indigenous-science.html] (access date: 30.01.2017).

a certain dissatisfaction due to which I would like to separate the knowledge that could be obtained from the literary sources and the one obtained from the fieldwork and direct encounters with people. I am aware that the two levels are not necessarily compulsory, that they do not have to be in a hierarchical relation to each other, or in any relation at all, but this is one of the main questions I would like to find the answer to during my research. I prefer not to dichotomize and not to attribute knowledge to a specific world vision, but to consider its different levels, layers and configurations. This also leads to the methodological importance of the multiple perspectives of interpretations and reflexivity of this culture through the history.

In this chapter, I would like to provide a brief history of the "epistemic culture" in Buryatia that was shaped in close contacts with other Asian cultures and quite recently was influenced by the European intellectual thought. I want to present different spheres of history, institutions as the embodiment of the cultures of knowledge, the reflexivity of the community. I argue that the dominant, "legitimate" narrations are rooted deeply in the historical experience of the West, which, due to the recent colonial relations, are shaping the contemporary imaginary on culture. I am introducing the chapter because I want to understand the epistemic background of the Buryat social thought – the way who, what and how produced knowledge of the world [Roepstorff, 2003: 117].

1.1. The emergence of "Asia" and "Siberia" in European intellectual thought

"Asia"[6] is an idea invented by and for the European culture. The idea was produced from early contacts of ancient Greeks and Romans with the Middle East to the military threat of Asian powers. Many Christian missions to the East by Jesuit society left numerous letters and records about Asia and largely formed the image and idea of Asia in

[6] The word Asia appears as far back as in the ancient Greek mythology [Hay, 1968: 3]. Discussion of civilization terminology was one of the central points of the workshops in the project *Searching for Identity* held by professor Jan Kieniewicz.

Europe. This image of the East Asians (primarily Chinese and Japanese) regarded the high cultural and technological capacity which meant they were considered equal, if not even superior, to the Europeans until the 18th century, when the idea of race emerged [Kowner, Demel, 2014: 10–11]. Furthermore, Asian history and identity changed much from the times of European expansion in the 16th century when the Asian landmass gradually transformed from a trade partner to a space of rivalry of Western powers, a territory to discover and colonize.

All that experience contributed to the image and idea of Asia both in common and high-intellectual thoughts. It was quite definite and unified through the recent history: "In the eyes of Europe, the image of Asia was changing in detail, while remaining surprisingly constant in general outline" [Lach, 1965: 822]. However, the term Asia still lacks precision and, if previously it referred to the modern Middle East, which developed in close contacts with the European continent, currently it more commonly implies the East Asia. Indeed, the cultures of the huge continent, which is Asia in fact, are even more diverse inside and "there is no such thing as one 'Orient'" [Bingham et al., 1964: 3; Clyde, Beers, 1971: 4]: "In what historic and cultural sense, for instance, do Lebanon and Japan belong together?" [Riasanovsky, 1972: 3]. The differentiation, which resulted even in communal hatred in Asia, was often used by Western colonial powers to rule by playing them against one another [Wilber, 1966: 29]. One hardly can speak about common Asian identity before the European colonialism, and even now it is likely to remain merely a geographical term rather than a symbol of more or less coherent cultural unity.

Such broad practices of "modernization" and "Westernization" of Asian history produced numerous terms and categories that are not precise in their meaning and can convey different concepts. The assumption that "Oriental" cultures can be known and understood through the medium of European mores and values constitute a persistent obstacle [Clyde, Beers, 1971: 7–8], while the idea of Europe itself is the result of a long historical process shaped by multiple circumstances. Even today, it is complicated univocally to assert the unity of Europe, as it falls into various cultural, national and geographical regions. The frontiers of Europe could not be ultimately determined either, as it is

still problematic to embrace Turkey and even Russia within this unity, as well as other certainly European places outside the European continent. All this confirms that Europe is hardly only a geographical region, but rather an idea with its history and still transforming in the modern time.

The problem of Russia's inclusion in Europe appeared as soon as the idea of Europe acquired symbolic features of a lifestyle and values, apart from being a geographic name on a map. Only after the reforms of Peter the Great, Russia "advanced" from being "Europeans by origin" and "Asiatic by inclination" to a civilized European country. Montesquieu said about Peter the Great that he had "given the manner of Europe to a European nation" [Hay, 1968]. However, Russia still was not lacking the Asiatic odour for its "Oriental despotism" as against the European nations striving for "freedom". Nevertheless, Russia was still too important to be ignored and not be embraced, which created further difficulties in demarcation of the geographical-*cum*-cultural frontiers of Europe. Europe's previous eastern border on Don, present as far back as in the Renaissance geography, was moved eastwards to the Urals. It is proven that Europe was merely the idea developing through the history: "Of course many devotees of European union are far from wishing to embrace Russia, even 'Russia-in-Europe', within their program. But, this only goes to show how awkward Europe is as a rallying cry. Western Europe may have coherence. Europe as a whole cannot avoid being the name for the 'western extension of Asiatic land mass'" [Hay, 1968: xvii]. On the other side of Europe's border, on Ural, therefore, emerged an extensive geographical and cultural region of the Russian Orient.

Russian view on Asia was largely associated with extreme hostility inherited from the traumatic memory of the Mongolian conquest (1237–1241) and the control of Golden Horde state (1240–1380). After this period, it shifts gradually its orientation towards Europe-centrism also in the context of being the eastern flank of Christendom. It strives to become a true member of "European" family of nations after Peter the Great's reforms. Russian intellectuals paid little attention to Asia, until Pyotr Chaadaev in his *Philosophical Letter* asserted shockingly Russia did not belong to Europe – thus, breaking up the debate between the Westernizers and Slavophiles. However, Chaadaev did not believe Russia had ever been part of Asia, and the Slavophiles in anti-Western statements did

not readily imply the inclusion of "Asiatic" values either [Riasanovsky, 1972: 8–9]. Russia considered to have distinct from Western principles, though in opposition to Asia, it definitely identified itself with Europe and the West [Riasanovsky, 1972: 17]. The position of the "white" Russian Empire was later the manifestation of a European civilizational choice and the opposition to the "yellow" rivals in Asia – Japan and China [Bukh, 2014: 178].

Consequently, the growth of Empire and accelerating economic and military contacts in the East reoriented its policy towards Asia. There were organized institutes of the Oriental Studies, which, in fact, was related to the colonial extensions and *mission civilisatrice* of Russia: "As the Russians expanded eastwards, they absorbed, subjugated, or made contact in one form or another with many Asian peoples, and in the process transmitted to them not only much of their own culture, but strong elements of general European culture as well" [Vucinich, 1972: ix]. In the first half of the 20th century, there appeared the Eurasianism, proclaiming the turn to the Asian heritage in the Russian culture and harmonic integration with the related Asian cultures of the crushing Empire [Riasanovsky, 1972: 29]. Eurasianism was not deprived of imperialistic character, proclaiming the Russian culture and the Orthodox Church as the core of the new ideology. Nevertheless, it remains an actual tool for the integration of various cultures of Russia's political orbit, up to the contemporary time.

The idea of Siberia (the same as the "Orient") emerged, thus, as a product of colonial activity of the Russian state in the northern part of Asia since the 17th century. It was a long, painful process of turning the northern Asia with nomadic communities into the agro-nomadic space with cultural, economic and confessional dominance of Slavic people. Siberia objectified two European discourses – the discourse of discovering of the North and the discourse of the "dozing" East [Peshkov, 2013: 338–339]. The frontiers of Siberia were far from being stable, including in the recent past the north-east Kazakhstan and northern borderland of China. Russian historian Pavel Nebolsin (1817–1893) wrote:

> With the conquest of Siberia wherever Russian population moved northeastwards from Muscovy – everything was Siberia, and if we had had time, that

> is, if we had wanted to extend further to occupy Beijing, Beijing would also had become Siberia [Nebolsin[7]].

Thus, in historical categories, Siberia is quite a recently invented idea. It will not be a mistake to argue that the whole literal heritage of the imperialist period is now the main and, if not the only, source for forming the image of Siberian people and Siberia. The Buryat culture is often restricted in analytical categories, like: "minority", "native people", "Siberia", which close the culture in terms of "locality" and "indignity". However, whether these colonial ideas mapped on that of native Siberians and whether they perceived themselves as "Siberians" or "Asians" are the matters for further considerations. The elements of ancient cults, like Zoroastrianism, close cultural and economic contacts with China are evidence of intensive cultural connections of Siberia with other regions of Asia.

The territories of current Buryatia were within the geography of numerous ancient states, such as: the Xiongnu Empire (209 BCE–93 CE), Xianbei state (93–234), Rouran Khaganate (330–555), Khitans states/Liao (907–1125), Mongol Empire (1206–1368), Yuan (1271–1368) and Northern Yuan (1368–1691). By the time of Russian colonization, the huge territories of contemporary Buryat Republic, Irkutsk Oblast and Zabaikalski krai were within the aimags/duchies of Tusheetu, Zasagtu and Setsen khans. After the gradual fall of the Mongol states in the 17th century, the Mongolian lands were included in the Qing and Russian Empires. Thus, the territory of Siberia was not closed within contemporary boundaries, but it was an integral part of historical and cultural formations of the continent. After the incorporation of Siberia into the Russian state in the 17th–18th century, there began a long process of cutting off Siberia from the rest of Asia [Peshkov, 2013: 340] (which, however, was not performed completely), reflected in describing Siberia as an empty landmass with a bunch of feeble tribes "discovered" and "explored" (*osvaivat'*) by Cossack pioneers, which had no history before this date in the contemporary popular discourse. This could be compared to the British concept of *terra nullius* – the land of nobody,

[7] This quote I borrowed from the documentary *Osvoenie Sibiri*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLtCMPmZrUI (access date: 03.11.2015).

the uninhabited land or inhabited in improper way, which justifies and sanctifies its colonial expansion [Etkind, 2011: 94].

The time of numerous treaties fixing the eastern frontiers of the Russian Empire was a long and painful process changing the ethnic and cultural mosaics of the borderlands.[8] It is certainly impossible to trace and create the modernistic project of a common history for Buryats because their ancestors were scattered in different Mongolian communities of Inner Asia and hardly could identify themselves in the categories, like: ethnicity, nation, religion, etc. Instead, it is worth considering the history as a sequence of narrations closely connected with the ideological background contemporary to them. This could also be applied in considering and reconsidering the academic, historical narrations, which enjoy a privileged position and consider local views on history in terms of legends, myths, or historic artefacts. The professional history in its status as a science, in contrast, represents itself as searching for the truth about the past without any practical use of it [White, 2010: 14[9]], however,

> […] there is no such thing as a "history" against which we could measure and assess the validity of any "antihistory" or "mythifications" intended to cover over and obscure the "truths" of the past [White, 2010: 12].

The multiple examples show how professional history, despite the proclaimed objectiveness, could depend on the general political and

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[8] See more on: https://www.academia.edu/38465560/Tsongol_B.Natsagdorj_Behind_the_Treaty_of_Nerchinsk_The_Foregone_Fate_of_a_Mongol_Noble_Family_Saksaha_15_2018.

[9] Now, the professionalization of historical studies required, in principle at least, that the past be studied, as it was said: "for itself alone", or as: "a thing in itself", without any ulterior motive other than a desire of the truth (of fact, to be sure, rather than a doctrine) about the past and without any inclination to draw lessons from the study of the past and import them into the present in order to justify actions and programs for the future. In other words, the history in its status, as a science for the study of the past, had to purge itself of any interest in the practical past – except, of course, as the kind of an error or mistake characteristic of memory, to be corrected by a chaste historical consciousness which dealt only with "things as they are" or had been, never with what had served as desire's "might have been" [White, 2010: 14].

cultural context. The idea that professional history developed, in fact, is parallel with the advancement of colonial powers and epistemic culture, which need to "discover" the newly acquired geographical and cultural areas.

1.2. Producing colonial knowledge about Siberia

The first scholars who made important notes on the Siberia (including the Buryat culture) in the 18th–19th centuries were as a rule citizens of the Russian Empire of German origin[10] (also Moldavian, Swedish) who performed research work according to their academic position in Empire or noting the regions specificity in their travelogues. Ethnographic description of the region was rather a secondary task compared with the diplomatic missions to China, exploration of new territories and routes, as it was in case of the second Kamchatka expedition, or the Great Northern Expedition (1733–1743). The scholars in the 18th-century Siberia were as a rule: botanists, zoologists and natural historians, like: Johann Georg Gmelin (1709–1755), Peter Simon Pallas (1741–1811), Johann Gottlieb Georgi (1729–1802). Thus, naturalist and Darwinist metaphors were widely used in the reconstruction of the history and culture of non-European people. It was then that a professor of history and geography, Gerhard Friedrich Müller (1705–1783), developed the concept of ethnography as a separate discipline during the second Kamchatka expedition. Their reports were written in the typical manner of their epoch through the prisms of evolutionism, naturalism and general European enlightenment ideology [Demel, 2014; Girchenko, 1939: 77].

The racial theory widespread in the period from 18th century until World War II conditioned greatly the view on cultural differences. History and social development were perceived as a natural history and biological process respectively. They paid a lot of attention to physical

[10] The role of German scholars was diminished and concealed due to the complication of political relations between Russia and Germany at the end of the 19th century, as well as in the post-World-War-II Soviet Union. Due to the common critiques of the "German dominance" (*niemetskoe zasilie*), many of the German scholars were named Russians and their names were popularized in a Russified form [Krongardt, 1999: 5].

characteristics as important indicators of classification of human beings apart from language and culture which, perhaps, contributed to the formation of an almost "biological" division of groups as "Mongols", "Tatars", "Manhcu", etc. They paid much attention to the comparison between these and other groups which often was backed up with Darwinist assumption on better and worse formed races, hierarchies between them and gradation of beauty, civility, intellect and culture. Interesting was also that Japanese and Chinese "race" were ranked higher than the Mongol "race", and the term Mongoloid was used not only as a term for a human "race", but also as genetic defect, a kind of "degeneration" [Demel, 2014: 85]. The relation between the racial theory and racism in the academic discourse was quite evident. All in all, the view on culture was an aspect of natural history.

The early notes of the Buryats, though shedding light on their history, were still fragmental. A different quality of the researches and travelogues was brought by Eastern European researchers, like Poles, whose large part of population after Polish partitions found themselves in the Russian state. As the result of Polish uprisings in the 19th century, many of them were exiled to these lands as political criminals, many of them settled voluntarily. A very important fact is that different social and educational background, political and ideological orientation of the Polish researchers influenced greatly the wide range of approaches to the research subject and their quality and objectivity [Takasaeva, 2017: 83]. Both Siberian people and Poles found themselves in the position of a colonized population, which created the opportunity to capture the nuances of that reality, which were undistinguishable for the researcher of the West European countries, or the metropolises [Takasaeva, 2017: 65]. Their position, though formed by a dominating superiority discourse, was often empathetic to their researched people, as to the victims of Tsarism and potential allies in a potential battle with the Empire.[11] The image of Siberian people, apart from their

[11] The content of their research was very different. Apart from their undoubtful contribution to the knowledge of the region, I want to mention that many of them were full of racist attitude towards the local population (for example, the diaries of Agaton Giller (1867) *Opisanie zabajkalskiej krainy w Syberyi*); though, it was a norm during this historical period.

representation in Russian colonial discourse, was used as an instrument for criticism of political refugees against the Russian state.

Nevertheless, they were also presented not only as exiles and peasant settlers, but also in the administrative, military and diplomatic apparatus of the Empire. A Polish scholar, Wacław Forajter, even used the term "colonized colonizer" [Forajter, 2014] for them, because being themselves the victims of Russian colonialism, they produced a rich amount of knowledge of the Siberian region which, in turn, in a large measure was used by the Empire to expand its power. This concerns geographic and mineralogical exploration of the colonized territories, military service and anthropological notes often used in management of the local population. The character of the produced knowledge, as I have mentioned, was ambivalent, ranging from the empathic victimized view on the "natives" to the narrations of Western superiority.

Also interesting is the case of the Decembrists, who were sent to Buryatia after the Decembrist Revolt and, according to the Soviet narrations, contributed to the enlightenment and civilizing of the local population, as the forefathers of the Russian revolution. This is also what I could read in the literature and hear in the Museum of the Decembrists in Novoselenginsk, Buryatia. However, in fact, they left scarce notes on the Buryat life, while the Buryat chronicle of Dambi-Zhaltsan Lombotsyrenov in 1868 writes about them as those who "with bad plans initiated the adverse actions against the imperial government". The Decembrists are denoted as "criminals" (*gemte khünüüd, yalatan*) [Lombotsyrenov, 1992: 143] and though the author does not express hostility towards them, there is definitely no devotion towards them on his side. In this context, it is important to give voice to the "locals" who never were passive recipients of such contacts.

Thus, one could see that the academic tradition of ethnography was tightly connected with major European intellectual trends through invited scholars from Western Europe. Russia, in this respect, borrowed many ideas of the colonial ideology and, to some degree, became itself the victim of these ideologies. In the 19th century, Russian intellectuals accused the Enlightenment in Russia of having "colonial character" and the colonial language was widely used in criticism of its own culture [Etkind, 2011: 70].

1.3. Russian tradition of Oriental Studies

The program of expansion to the East found itself on political agenda of the 19th-century Europe with its main powers – Russia and Great Britain. On this ground, there was formed the Russian Imperial Academy of Science, which in time formed its own remarkable tradition of the Oriental Studies in Kazan and St Petersburg. One of the oldest branches in it were Mongolian Studies [Polyanskaya, 2008: 3].

The researcher of a Polish origin, Józef Kowalewski (1800–1878), introduced principally a new method of doing ethnography through combining local written sources and the profound linguistic training. From 1829 he made research trips to the lands of the Buryats with his student Aleksandr Popov, gathered rich collection of Buddhist literature and made various field notes. The Buryats noticed his activity themselves, too. For example, the Buryat chronicle by Lombotsyrenov, after describing their activity, talks about these two scholars as "of subtle sincere behaviour and of great education" [Lombotsyrenov, 1992: 144]. Such an attitude to Western scholars should not be attributed to their position, as, earlier in the text, the author writes about another two scholars Litvintsev and Korolev, who arrived in 1823 to learn Mongolian philology, but "even though they studied for more than one year, did not progress in it and returned home without respect. Both of them loved to drink" [Lombotsyrenov, 1992: 143]. The very subtle manner and attitude of Kowalewski indeed could be seen in his field notes, some of which I could read in Kotwicz's archive in Cracow [Kowalewski, *Brachnie obryady selenginskikh Buryat*: KIII-19/27; *Obrzędy weselne Burjatów*: KIII-19/27], or in his published correspondence [Polyanskaya, 2008].

It is worth noting that Kowalewski practised his knowledge with the local Buryats who were invited to help him to improve his Mongolian language, translated literature and brought Buddhist books for him [Polyanskaya, 2008: 112]. It was then that the practice of inclusion of local "natives" in the research process made a significant progress in Russian Oriental Studies. The first Buryat who graduated from a Western university was Dorzhi Banzarov (1822–1855), a student of Kowalewski. The Buryat chronicles inform also about other four Buryat students who, in 1836, were sent to gymnasium in Kazan, but

one of them died, other two were taken to the military service. One of the two lamas from Boldomor and Tamchiin datsan who accompanied them to Kazan came back in 1842 [Lombotsyrenov, 1992: 147, 149]. Perhaps, Banzarov was not the first one involved in the Western educational system,[12] but was the first to succeed there. Apart from the articles and other works, his chief work *Black Belief, or Shamanism Among the Mongols* (1846) was one of the first academic pieces on shamanism. According to Kollmar-Paulenz, this work, though was influenced by the European Romanticism, also brought the already worked out Buddhist conception of shamanism (*qara šasin*, "black faith") into the European academic tradition [Kollmar-Paulenz, 2012: 15; 2013: 175]. This is how the local epistemic culture contributed to the European academic knowledge.[13]

From the late 19th century, the inclusion of the "native informants" in the Russian academia in large measure shaped the tradition of the Russian Oriental Studies. Russian Buddhologists through attracting "native" scholars (like: Gombozhab Tsybikov, or Bazar Baradiin) were among the first who used classical methods of the ethnographic field research, much earlier than famous anthropologists, like: Franz Boas, or Bronisław Malinowski [Bernstein, 2013: 39]. The term "colonized colonizer" applied by me earlier to Polish researchers, could be applied to the Buryat researchers of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries educated at the Western-style universities. During this period, they were welcomed to the academic circles as practising Buddhists, native speakers of Eastern languages (Mongolian and Tibetan) and specialists in their literatures, as those who had easier access to the Asian regions,

[12] Banzarov's peer, Galsan Gomboev (1822–1863), after receiving the Buddhist education was also sent to Kazan as a lecturer. He also made translations of the Mongolian literature, taught Mongolian at the St Petersburg University. However, due to his Buddhist education, he is not counted as a scientist/scholar (*uchyony*) of European tradition, like Banzarov.

[13] The figure of Banzarov was propagated among the Buryats especially from the twenties of the 20th century when the Soviet policy used his image as the first Buryat enlightener fighting for his oppressed folk [Radnaev, 2012: 25]. However, in 1908, the Buryat politician and lama, Agvan Dorzhiev wrote of him as a scientist who brought only little help to his people [Dorzhiev, 2009: 256]. Thus, there were many views on his work.

such as: Mongolia, Tibet, China – the sphere of interest of the Russian Empire. Their works though were written with different motives and attitudes in result contributed greatly to the great game between English and Russian Empires in the East, shaped both the image of these regions and the character of Russian imperial policy.

The crucial figure in the development of the Russian Buddhology was Petr Badmaev, a doctor of Tibetan medicine who had close relations with the Romanovs' court. Besides promoting Tibetan medicine among the Russian aristocracy, he also expressed political aspirations of inclusion of Tibet and Mongolia, and even China, into the sphere of Russian influence. Badmaev initiated the first periodical in the Buryat language to provide the Buryats with "accurate" information about Russia. His most prominent contribution was the organization of a private gymnasium for the Buryats in St Petersburg [Bernstein, 2013: 44]. The requirement of converting to Christianity (as actually Badmaev did) made some of the students quit the school – this was the case of the future prominent Buryat scholars, such as: Tsybikov, Tsyben Zhamtsarano. Many of them had chance to study because of the stipends financed by Buryat population.

Despite the fact that they all had very different view on both the Buryat (and Oriental) culture and its future form, they were incorporated into the orbit of the Western-style culture of knowledge and it would not be a mistake to say that they mastered it quite well. Anya Bernstein describes how different were the approaches of the scholars, like: Tsybikov (1873–1930) and Baradiin (1878–1937) who both carried out their fieldwork in Tibet [Bernstein, 2013: 45–60; Pidhainy, 2013]. The Russian Buddhology and Mongolian Studies were one of the strongest schools due to the close cooperation and close relations between the scholars from metropolises and the local scholars brought up at the Western universities. This is the case of the cooperation between other prominent scholars – Kotwicz, of Polish origin, and the Buryat scholar Zhamtsarano, who received their education in St Petersburg.

The other side of this cooperation was the ambivalent attitude to the copyright problems. The knowledge of the locals was often used without mentioning their contribution. As Tsybikov wrote at the beginning of the 20th century, the problem was common in their recent past:

> Russian Orientalists indeed used to the full extent the practical knowledge of language of the aborigines, but being sworn scholars, they would deliberately hide their help. Only the new generation of Orientalists does not conceal the names from whom they got to know that or this linguistic phenomenon. This, by the way, exonerates the author from responsibility for the conclusions, not saying about that it is required by elementary decency [Radnaev, 2012: 105].

The researchers sent to Transbaikalia were, perhaps, received as officials who made important reports, their trips were subsidized, they would have access to the local libraries, and they were provided with local assistants. After their field research, they would receive positions in the imperial centres and universities. The local Buryats, however, did a lot to be comprehended – they would donate expensive literature, helped them in trips and established close personal relations with them. Thus, the relation of the Western science in Buryatia could not be reduced to the merely subject-object perspective.

The "exploration" of Russia's eastern territories, besides the scholarly research, was accompanied by extensive missionary activity of the Russian Orthodox Church. Along with the conversion of the local people, this activity included the study and the analysis of Buddhist ideas by Orthodox authors to work out the critical strategy against the "foreign" religion. Orthodox authors, while criticizing Buddhism, tried to interpret it through the common Russian terminology, which paradoxically even attracted more interest to Buddhism in some layers of Russian society [Bernyukevich, 2015: 64]. The strong relation of the Orthodox Church with the state institutions made the missionaries promote the "Orientalizing" ideology even in a greater extent than the scholars did [Tsyrempilov, 2015: 368].

1.4. Buryat epistemic culture

Russian colonization of the Buryat lands is a fact, but does it imply that the view on "natives", as described especially in the early ethnographic literature, was inherent to the local Russian population and influenced their relation with the "natives"? Despite the conflicts about the land issues [Alishina, 2012: 50], according to some authors, Siberian

Russian peasants did not have a culturally superior attitude to the Buryats [Humphrey, 1998: 29]. Moreover, historians find evidence of assimilation to the culture and language of the new colonies.

The Russian colonization of Siberia was performed through different ways and groups from the military subjugation, monastic colonization and free migration of peasant population [Etkind, 2014: 102]. In all the cases, the need of cooperation with local population was evident because of the difficult natural conditions, the need of local fur and expanding trade relations. The Russian colonization of Siberia was conditioned by a harsh climate and inhospitable landmass – the conditions so different from the tropical colonies of European powers, which demanded a distinct strategy of cooperation with local world [Etkind, 2014: 118, 134]. Similar processes took place also in other situations, for example, in North America. Considering the North American history merely in terms of a "frontier" blurs various European powers into a single entity against the seemingly unified Indians, who were often deprived of agency. However, the relations were much more complicated and different European powers made political alliances with Indians to compete with each other [Adelman, Aron, 1999: 816]. The Empires used local roots and trade infrastructure. Illustrative was the example of Yakutia, with extremely low temperatures, where the migrants could not help but had to accept the Yakut culture and language in order to survive [Takasaeva, 2017: 80]. As a result, the Russian population was influenced and intermixed by the native culture and people significantly. The Russian centre was alarmed by such "indigenization" of Russians in provinces and the situation changed dramatically by the end of the 19th century through enlargement of migrants from the European part of Empire [Ėkareva, 2009: 100–101]. According to data from 1834, in particular localities few Buryats could speak or write Russian, but almost all Russians of their neighbourhood mastered Buryat quite well [Balkhanov, 1992: 134]. A prominent Russian Orientologist, Aleksey Pozdneev, in his letter, dedicated to the missionary work among the Buryats, noted that though Transbaikalia Buryats live long under the Russian rule, they have brought few relations with Russia into their life:

> He [a Buryat – A. Zh.] does not know Russian, does not meet Russian people and if he does, they never speak Russian, because the neighbouring Transbaikalia peasants and especially Cossacks between themselves often speak Buryat [Kulganek, 2000].

A Russian historian,Yevgeniy Zalkind, noted that the Buryat aristocracy who had close trade contacts with the Chinese and the Central Asian merchants, ate on silver plates, wore silk dresses and had thousands of herds, could not see as attractive the plain culture of the arriving, not very rich colonizers [Khamutaev, 2012: 69]. Thus, the Buryat vision also could be centric in perceiving the others. Despite the neighbourhood with Russian peasants, adapting some Russian technology, Buryats in the 19th century preferred Chinese garments [Norboeva, 2012: 162] and generally were under a strong influence of art, fashion and spiritual culture of Qing Empire. This was also the civilizational choice of Buryats who, perhaps, saw Lhasa, Urga and Beijing as closer and more important centres than geographically and culturally distant St Petersburg.

Definitely, such state of "capsulation" could be easily attributed to the system of indirect rule, which Russia shared with the British Empire, however, it does not explain the nature of huge influence of local culture on the arriving Russian population. Some Russian intellectuals saw in it the advantage of the Russian way of colonialism, as of an "open" and "cosmopolitan" project, in comparison to the harsh split between native and colonist population in the colonies of America and Europe [Etkind, 2014: 188]. This at least confirms that colonialism was not a unified project and it was implemented differently in various contexts. This shows that the academic and high-class discourse did not always overlap or was not implemented in the common relations between the groups.[14]

Thus, specific conditions of the Russian colonization, as well as the borderland position of the Buryats, let the local epistemic culture be relatively safe through the 18th and beginning of the 20th century. Putting it into the interpretivist perspective, we can say that the

[14] As Alexander Etkind writes, the culture of high classes of colonial powers in Russia and India were more unified among each other than with their own traditional cultures inside their countries [Etkind, 2014: 152].

communities had restricted possibilities of producing shared meaning and existed parallelly, though the influence of the Western knowledge was becoming more and more evident. Still, the confidence of the Buryat epistemic culture was still high. It could be considered independently in a Buryat context, in multilingual Mongolian and Tibetan setting and Buryat Buddhist institutions[15] [Kollmar-Paulenz, 2014: 125]. The Buryat terms for knowledge *ukhaan/ukhaγan, erdem* or *nom* were primarily associated and equated with Buddhist teaching, *Dharma* [Kollmar-Paulenz, 2013]. Metaphors like *gerel* (light) were opposed to the non-Buddhist ignorance (*munkhag*). Acquiring knowledge was mainly associated with *shudlakha* learning the content of the vast Buddhist literature, not empirical *shenzhelkhe*,[16] which was associated primarly with the observation of atmospheric and other natural phenomena [Sajinčogtu, 2000: 9]. Thus, the literary culture was the primary source of knowledge, through which one was called the educated person – *nomchi khun* (the one who learns books/dharma).

Interesting is the description of an exiled scholar Moisei Krol (1862–1942) of his meeting with the Buryat lama Rinchin Nomtoev (1821–1907). Krol asked the lama to tell about the Buryat past and the lama conveyed his "indifferent" attitude towards it: "I heard it all from our seniors! I do not know whether it was true: there is nothing said about it in our holy books" [Zhukovskaya, 2009: 287]. Krol explains it with the shamanic background of these narrations, which evolved

[15] Ancestors of present Mongolian people back from ancient times were acquainted with Buddhism. There are different pieces of evidence of this found in cultures of Hun, Xianbi (1st–3rd century), Zhuzhan (4th–6th century) states, Turkic kaganate (6th–8th century), Kidan state (10th–12th century). At the time of Mongolian, Yuan dynasty court (from 1368), Buddhism in Sakyapa form spread among Mongolian aristocracy but did not take root in masses. From the second half of the 16th century the Gelugpa sect started to spread intensively among Mongols [Zhukovskaya, 1994: 7]. The quick replacement of local cults is partly connected with the fact that Buddhism came from Tibet where it was already transformed under influence of local cults similar to that of Mongols. The mass spread of Buddhism in the 17th–18th centuries on the territories of ethnic Buryatia was characterized with the establishment of Buddhist monasteries, which became centres of Buryat literary culture and intellectual life.

[16] The word *shenzhelkhe* is contemporarily used for denoting "scientific research".

the hostile attitude of the lama. Nevertheless, the prejudice towards the folk narrations (*domog*, *aman uge*) could be seen also in the "secular" historical chronicles. Thus, the mythical knowledge should not be considered as a kind of the firm phenomenological reality of Buryats, because they regarded it critically and often through the paradigm of the Buddhist knowledge.[17] The authors treat the myth as a necessary historic narration unless the more reliable facts and data are available. Non-monastic, let us say, so-called folk knowledge embraced legends, genealogies and historical narrations, which, as we know, were rarely printed in Buddhist centres and they were distributed among population only in manuscripts. This could be considered as knowledge of a different kind, ranked lower or differently than the texts approved in Buddhist monastic centres. Transbaikalia was one of the largest centres of book-printing production of Buddhist literature, apart from such centres as: Beijing, Chakhar, or Urga [Tsyrempilov, 2013: 189].

Thus, one can see from different sources and testaments the Buddhist education (*erdem, ukhaan, surguuli*) was considered in absolutist, progressivist and centric categories regarding the folk (*jure-jin*) and other kinds of knowledge. Earlier in the introduction, I mentioned the Buryat view on the more privileged and less privileged epistemology. The minimal differentiation of knowledge considered to be one of the major traits of "traditional society" does not exactly fit the Buryat community which, despite the absence of the modern understanding of professions and specializations, still considered knowledge of the world order to be distributed unevenly.

The Buddhist monasteries functioned as Buryat version of an educational institution. By 1910, in Buryatia, according to the official data, there were about 15,000 lamas [Rupen, 1964: 37; Gerasimova, 2006: 31] and 46 datsans [Sinitsyn, 2013: 484]. Apart from it, there was a number of non-registered lamas.[18] The disciples were brought

[17] Similarly, the Hebrew canon contained criticism "against certain practices such as divination, idolatry, magic, and the study of the stars, which belong to discipline or disciplines referred to in the Bible as 'knowledge' and 'wisdom'" [Baumann, 2008: 48].

[18] The number of monasteries and the monks was regulated and limited by government.

by their parents at the age from five to ten and had to spend decades before becoming specialists in Buddhist theology, philosophy, astrology, medicine or art. It is quite understandable why a lama was considered as more educated (*erdemten lamanar*) [Badmaeva, 2005: 97–98] and more profound in his specialization than a commoner. The knowledge obtained in the monasteries was the prerogative of lamas, while the commoners were often refused to understand anything from this knowledge. The knowledge, according to its accessibility, was divided into the "highest", "middle" and "lowest" levels [Gerasimova, 2006: 30]. There was a common curriculum of 10 sciences and a system of degrees shared from Tibet to Buryatia [Gerasimova, 2006: 30–31], which contemporarily are often compared to the European academic degrees.

This version of education was criticized much and was not counted as such and not considered in the censuses of literacy. In many ways, the datsans had to function in an "unofficial" or even "illegal" way, having more lamas or more printing facilities than it was prescribed, making pilgrimages, trade and other contacts with the foreign Buddhist centres. There are many gaps in the knowledge of how this institution functioned, what the features of the knowledge it produced were, and how it functioned. Nevertheless, I could assume it as a fact that there existed a certain kind of "theoretical" reflexivity as a counterpart to the Western science.

1.5. Buryat attitude to the Western culture of knowledge

> With adornment/respect, treat the knowledge/sciences of other people
> As if it were a true treasure.
> If you do not know the knowledge of others,
> At some point you will find yourself under their power [Galshiev, 2012: 56].

This is a fragment of series of verses *Bilig-un toli* written by Erdeni-Khaibzun Galshiev at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Though the verse does not talk directly about the Western knowledge, in my opinion, it could still be referring to it. The Buryat lama, who received education in Tibet and came back to Buryatia, was not living

in isolation and, perhaps, in full measure witnessed the atmosphere of the epoch when the "science" became a part of the Western nationalist ideologies and an inseparable part of the European identity. It was the crucial part of "Western" culture, its power, wealth and world dominance [Knight, 2009: 195, 239].

Buryatia, as an integral part of the Russian Empire, had few chances to protect itself from the Western intellectual influence, as it was done by China and some other countries outside the European continent for a long time [Keene, 1952: 123]. Though Buddhism enjoyed some kind of autonomy within the Buryat territory, missionary and academic research work was conducted on a large scale, bringing new ideas into intellectual life. During the 19th century, the Russian government sent officials and scholars to investigate Buddhism for facilitating the work of the Russian Orthodox mission in Transbaikalia [Bernstein, 2013: 42]. They had free access to the libraries of the Buryat datsans where they could outline the state of Buddhism in the other areas of Asia. The arriving officials and academics were considered as representatives of the metropolitan power and the Buryat clergy and aristocracy did a lot to cooperate with them. They used to donate huge collections of Buddhist literature or pieces of art. By the 20th century, there was formed a significant group of the Buryats who received European education (see earlier), but, perhaps, it could not be called a mass phenomenon, despite their paramount political and cultural influence at the beginning of the 20th century. They were mostly publishing in Russian journals, inaccessible for the almost entire Buryat population, and the prestige of the Buddhist knowledge was definitely higher [Zajączkowski, 2001: 84].

Nevertheless, as far as we can judge from the existing materials, the attitude towards the Western science was at least ambivalent. Zhamtsarano, the Buryat who graduated from a European university, in his diaries (1903–1907) described the reaction of a Buryat lama, when he tried to explain to the lama the value of secular Western literature for scholars:

> Why for scholars? For them to talk over us, to humiliate us?! To prove that the Buryats are savage and deal with shamanistic dark deeds?! […] All our

> "sciences" are stated in "our" Ganzhuur and Danzhuur. Europeans borrowed it from us, but due to their inexactness they misapprehended [Zhamtsarano, 2011: 166, 168].

One could see the clash of two different "positivistic" traditions. The opponent of Zhamtsarano operated with the arguments of "facts", authority of the Buddhist literature against the "European tricks". Zhamtsarano also writes that the Buryat lamas generally had a distant position in such controversies and their authority among the Buryats was high [Zhamtsarano, 2011: 168]. For me, it is important that this local culture of knowledge was sufficient and, perhaps, did not have complexes about the Western science. It was not seen as "local" for it referred to the tradition of India, Tibet and China [Kollmar-Paulenz, 2014] and, thus, was "global", "transnational".

Despite the voices of reluctance, the European "science" and technological knowledge was a fact that the Buryats had to cope with. Both the Buryat intellectuals brought up at the Western universities and many of those from Buddhist monasteries would see this as an urgent necessity. This could be seen in the texts written by the Buryat scholars who received Western education, such as Mikhail Bogdanov:

> The time of isolated national groups had already passed away. Capitalism destroys all national differences whatever Chinese Walls they build to protect themselves from it. The help is not fussing over our fictional national peculiarities but in the quickest adoption of civilization [Bogdanov, 1907: 47; Boronova, 2008: 116].

However, there was no unanimity in the degree they would let it into the Buryat culture. Bogdanov was one of those Buryat intellectuals who identified modernization with Westernization, in contrast to others (like Zhamtsarano, or Baradiin) who believed in the fusion of the Western technologies and the local traditions. Nevertheless, the Buryat epistemic culture was interested much in the achievements of European science and it was inclusive towards it because it represented the power the European nations possessed at that time. By the beginning of the 20th century, this openness brought the Buryat intellectuals to the key role in the comprehension and implementation of the European "secular" knowledge in the Mongolian regions

[Rupen, 1964]. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 20th century, these epistemic cultures were existing in "parallel" worlds.

For the Buryat-Mongols, life in the realms of the enormously huge and powerful Russian Empire was objective reality. It would not be a mistake to say that the whole project of Oriental Studies was in fact a colonial project of expanding the power in Asian landmass. However, these scholars, at the same time, often became those who could understand the "natives" and the only people on whom they could rely on in metropolises. They were also those who lobbied for their interest and introduced the metropolis and its rules to them, becoming important media between the two worlds. During my work in the archive of Kotwicz in Cracow, I found many letters sent to him and other Orientalists from the Buryat leaders. I would like to quote their fragments in order to show the character of relations that were established between them. Among others, there is a letter from a prominent Buryat clerk and politician lama, Agvan Dorzhiev, who expresses hopes on Kotwicz's presence during significant political events:

> Dear Vladislav Ludvigovich,
> Mongolian delegation arrived here with a political mission. The authorities from Bogdo-Gegen and the representatives of people are very broad and prominent. Among others MFA have written permission from Khutugta to be in charge of the mission. Because of such important task I would like to ask you if there is no obstacle for you to come to St Petersburg – I miss You, as an independent adviser.
> 13 August 1911, Your A. Dorzhiev [KIII-19/241].

One could see close personal relations between them. In another, more official, letter sent 11 years later, from the representative office of Buryat-Mongolian autonomous region to Kotwicz and Boris Vladimirtsov, the scholars are called "friends" who could help in their political aspirations:

> To the rector of Living Oriental Languages Prof. V. L. Kotvich
> and Prof. of Mongolian Studies V. Vladimirtsov
> The Representative office appeals to you on behalf of the autonomous region as to our friends and people of science to help our *Burmonsovkud* with your instructions and good advice, and through them engage with our national revival of Buryat-Mongolian tribe in particular and with our kin Mongolian

> tribes in general […] About a living relationship that we wish to establish with you in every way and on your good advice and assistance will be reported to our people at their congresses.
> RSFSR Representative Office of Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Region in the People's Committee for Nationalities Affairs 30.05.1922 № 135 [KIII-19/16].

These scholars were engaged as one could see in the political life of the people they researched. But, not only in political – perhaps they were among few people whom the Buryats knew and could rely on in the metropolis. Further, I would like to cite the fragments of the correspondence letters regarding a war hospital for 30 people sponsored and organized by Buryats during World War I in St Petersburg which was located in the premises of the St Petersburg Buddhist datsan. The Buryats appealed to Orientalists to get involved in the organization of the hospital. In a protocol from 23 January 1915, we read that:

> […] we hoped very much on assistance of European Mongolists – to elect as members of the special committee at the Petrograd hospital V. I. Shcherbatskoi, A. D. Rudnev, V. L. Kotwicz, Yu. D. Talko-Grincewicz [Hryncewicz – A. Zh.], however, as the report № 245 informs after the opening they refused to be involved officially, but took an active part in the activity of the hospital [KIII-19/16].

The scholars did not remain indifferent to the Buryat initiatives and participated in the organization of the hospital. Julian Talko-Hryncewicz, who was also a doctor, became one of its chairmen. In his report from 20 November 1915, he worries much about the equipment of the hospital and its possible transportation to Transbaikalia:

> But, the question arises in advance: what fate awaits the Petrograd Buryat hospital and all its equipment after liquidation: furniture, tools, etc., which cost several thousand. Should it all be lost since the sale of inventory is of no value; and if transferred to the Transbaikal region to the native Buryat steppes it can become the basis of the Buryat hospital, at least at the beginning with 20 beds. It could be maintained through small voluntary donations from the local population. I will be happy if I have expressed the idea of the future Transbaikal Buryat hospital which, together with the school, is a cultural objective of the Buryat people [KIII-19/16].

During the period of the hospital, Kotwicz, again, receives a letter from the Buryat clerk leaders on the issue of the hospital:

> […] Buryat people, through their representatives for Your care and attentive attitude to its needs elected You, gracious Sovereign, as an honorary member of the board of their Association. The Association's Board of Directors has the honour of most respectfully asking You, esteemed Vladislav Lyudvigovich, not to leave in the future without attention and patronage of our Petrograd hospital for the sick and wounded soldiers [KIII-19/16].

Thus, one could see that the Buryat leaders appeal to the scholars as to their respected "friends". Certainly, this is only a small part of their correspondence and only a limited range of the issues they tried to address together. These issues were going far beyond strict scholarly work. It is clear that the "local" community whom scholars researched was conscious of their position, reacted and used them as a sort of brokers in a culturally strange metropolis.

1.6. Soviet replacement of the traditional culture of knowledge

Another dramatic change followed the fall of the Russian Empire and the rise of the USSR. The issue of cooperation with the new Soviet state made a split inside the Buddhist institution. There appeared the *obnovlentsy* who tried to incorporate the Buddhist knowledge into the state ideology through making reforms and restrictions inside the institution. It was not accepted by the majority of the lamas, but the former had more political power and determined the relations of state and the institution in the early Soviet period. The major strategy of coping with the atheistic state consisted of denying Buddhism to be classified as a "religion". There was promoted the view that, initially, Buddhism was a philosophical thought, "atheistic religion"[19] which had a lot in common with the communist doctrine. They highlighted the materialistic principles and scientific character of Buddhism [Sinitsyn, 2013: 77]. The Buddhist institution made a lot to prove its non-religious character through the public speeches, conferences, exhibitions,

[19] According to the notes of anti-religionists, the Buryat scholar, professor Tsybikov, who was a Buddhist, participated in the anti-religious work, motivating that he is (as every Buddhist) an atheist [Sinitsyn, 2013: 77].

just to be received by the state as one of the legitimate ideologies. This should have become a gradual merge of the two traditions of thought.

Also, that could be illustratively seen in the clash between the two traditions of medicine. In the pre-revolutionary Buryatia, there was the Buddhist medical education, which enjoyed sufficient authority, both among local population and in imperial centres, such as St Petersburg. There were such large medical centres such as Arshan in Atsagat Buddhist monastery, which had both stationary and non-stationary treatment, where, for example, in 1931 there were 7,862 patients. By 1930, there were working 440 medical lamas among the Buryats, who had a monopoly in comparison to the few in number (93), not always effective, European doctors [Sinitsyn, 2013: 190]. At the same time, this version of medicine was not hermetic and it was open to the achievements of European medicine, especially in the field of venereal and other infectious diseases. Zhamtsarano writes that the Khambo Lama Choinzon-Dorzhi Iroltuev (1895–1910) felt sorry that Russian doctors are suspicious about the Tibetan medicine – "they should first learn it practically and theoretically before condemning it" [Zhamtsarano, 2011: 12].

There were attempts to include the local medicine into the "scientific" and "legitimate" sphere. However, the new medical institutions forcedly replaced it. The struggle with the Buryat form of medicine was quite fierce and ranged from propaganda, through ruining the reputation of medical lamas, to physical extermination of lamas and their institutions. Due to the geopolitical issues of promoting revolution to the East, Buddhism was initially tolerated and, only with the refusing of the plans of world revolution, it was totally destroyed by 1938.

The Buddhist institutions and education as a whole were labelled as illegitimate. The local epistemic culture was classified as "non-scientific", "religious", "backward", "wrong" and even "corrosive". The Buryat local historian Tsyrendashiev (1923–2011), in his book *Süügelei dasan* (2002, 2008) describes this period:

> When the Reds held the reins of government, some faulty ideas were widespread among the masses, such as the following: "they built seventy-story traps (datsans), where ten thousand yellow magic parasites (lamas) were devouring from morning till night, whimpering and rumbling their tambourines and drums, leading the illiterate Buryat people astray" [Tsyrendashiev, 2008: 9].

One of the Soviet Buryat periodicals was entitled *Erdem ba shazhan* (Science and religion), which positioned the Buryat term for Buddhist knowledge *erdem* against religion. *Erdem*, thus, was used to denote a new epistemic tradition – the Western knowledge at the peak of its positivist and absolutist wave. The Buryats, despite having the Classical Mongolian script, were considered as "non-literate" and, soon, the writing system itself was abolished.[20] Instead of the old institutions, the established Buryat-Mongolian ASSR and the Soviet nation Buryat-Mongols were supposed to receive a whole assortment of new cultural and political ideas and institutions of the advanced Soviet culture. However, these institutions were not culturally neutral and were still perceived as "Russian", because the leading language and the logics of their functioning had roots in the European intellectual thought. The Buryats were generally engaged in the educational process in the Buddhist monasteries until the beginning of the Soviet era and faced serious problems of adapting to the newly founded institutions, which started to replace the older ones. The culture had to adapt hastily its language facilities to the new realities and ideas, which had been developing in Europe for many centuries. The Oriental Studies, which in Russia's imperial era were closely connected with power institutions, were rather marginalized in the face of the universalist Marxist science and ideology [Tolz, 2011].

This was the point when the European culture of knowledge became dominant among the Buryats. It was performed primarily through implementation of the European education, which in the Soviet Union was accessible irrespectively of one's ethnic or class origin. In the Russian Empire, the absolute majority of non-Christian Buryat-Mongols were not allowed to get higher education in Russian schools and universities, like most of the Russian peasants had no chance to study – only children of nobles could enrol in lyceums and universities. In this regard, the Buryats, deprived of their traditional institutions, rushed to the Soviet educational system with a great vigour and, after

[20] In the fieldwork, I was told that even the knowledge of the Classical Mongolian writing could be a reason of accusation of pan-Mongolism or nationalism and further purges.

World War II period, gained the leading positions in the Soviet Union by the level of education.

The success in the Soviet educational projects is one of the objects of Buryat national pride. During our fieldwork with Polish researchers, we heard frequently about this achievement. It had its grounds for indeed the census statistics report that, by 1980, Buryats were the leading ethnic group in the Soviet Union enrolled in the higher educational institutes [Chakars, 2014: 123]. Being a minority (about 20–25%) of population of Buryatia, Buryats were overrepresented in all major professional fields.[21] Statistics show that this tendency is continuing in the present days.[22] However, currently, the Buryats like to correlate the high educational ambitions with the destroyed Buddhist tradition of education.

I am not saying that Buryats received the entire European thought through Russians: it was the Russian version of European epistemic culture. With the integration into the Soviet world, a lot of work was put into translating different Russian terms into the Buryat language. The culture had to adapt quickly its language facilities to the new realities and ideas, which had been developing in Europe for many centuries.[23] One can assume that these concepts were very different from the local intellectual tradition in many aspects. The general ideology of the period was based on the universal, denotative character of mind and language. The discrete world and its regularities were accessible to every

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[21] For example, according to the data from 1979, the Buryats, being only 20–25% of population in the republic, were representing 41% of doctors, 60% of journalists, 38% of librarians, 39% of teachers, 37% of academic researchers, 70% of veterinarians, etc. They were overrepresented in most of the professional spheres, except for the industrial one [Chakars, 2014: 96–103].

[22] http://burstat.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_ts/burstat/resources/cb2273004c48b5c1952c9fa94df4cce0/ пресс-релиз+ № 18+уровень+образования+населения+отдельных+национальностей+республики+бурятия.htm.htm.

[23] For example, in Mongolia, in 1924, there was organized a special board on producing and adapting terminology (*Ulsiin ner toimony komiss*) for the needs of newly appearing fields of economy, science and culture. By 1984, there were published more than 120 mini-dictionaries [Danzan, 1963; Tsend-Ayush, 1969, etc.] and more than 140,000 terms were produced (of course not all of them were introduced to be used) [Piurbeyev, 1984: 4; Toivgoo, 1963: 4].

human, thus, the translation between languages was understood as an accomplishable project. And, in the case of language, as the Buryat failed to distinguish this or that feature of the universe, it was just the matter of its temporary state of development.

The European knowledge, however, after the war was not taught in the Buryat language – this sphere was entirely served by the Russian language, thus, the deeper the influence of the European knowledge, the deeper the linguistic shift and assimilation were. It was a popular opinion and joke that the Buryats know the Russian language and write in this language much better than the Russians themselves. The Russian literature first through translations in Buryat, and, then, in original won the heart of Buryats, not to mention the contemporary popular culture. The history of Russia and generally the history of Europe is often considered as the part of their own history.

The knowledge of their past, defined by the Buryat epistemic culture, is in general unknown to the Buryats. The same way, the traditional means of the pastoral economy and cattle breeding is strange to most Buryats, who have a vague (even "Orientalized") understanding of how it works and associate themselves with it on the very symbolic level.[24] But, it does not mean that this traditional epistemology did not survive in form of ideas, attitudes or certain patterns – or, at least some, relics of them. The remaining part of the book, in general, is going to prove this claim.

Summary

The local epistemic culture had not disappeared in a fair contest with the European science, and the Buryats did not turn away from it voluntarily – it was abandoned through a harsh intervention on behalf of state. The replacement of the old epistemic culture resulted in classifying it as illegitimate and backward. This process could be called the "colonization of the imagination" – "the ways by which discursive formations, such

[24] Before World War II, 90% of the Buryats worked in agriculture. By 1989, 75% of the Republic's Buryat residents were engaged in other occupations besides agricultural work [Chakars, 2014: 95].

as modernity, education, or development have come to be dominant interpretative grids in public consciousness" [Sneath, 2009: 72]. I propose not to follow this ideology and see the local culture of knowledge as a full-fledged knowledge with its own reflexivity, interpretational and motivational possibility. The colonialist and Orientalist content, to my mind, could be overpowered only with the introduction of the local culture of knowledge as a living sphere. Besides, I want to show that the Buryat culture of knowledge could not be categorized within the banal scheme: Western–indigenous. I am against considering the "indigenous" knowledge as a single entity all over the world. In each context, the particular cultural setting of meaning production is more relevant than similarities in a historical fate. The interpretivist methodology would give more freedom in (re)constructing this knowledge within its own context.

The overview shows two problematic spheres of our research – the institutionalized epistemic culture, which actually was destroyed in the Soviet era, and the "folk" knowledge, which from then on was developing in a close relation with the European epistemic culture. It gives rise to a line of schematic questions, such as: does this "folk" knowledge have succession and continuity with the institutionalized Buddhist culture of knowledge? How far did the destruction of these institutions touch the traditional categories of culture? In what way the new epistemic culture was incorporated into the previous one? In the further text, I will try to answer all these questions from the perspective of social order ideas. I will consider how "sociology" became the prime medium of the reflexivity, bringing a whole range of concepts, which from now on are commonly used and known. Nevertheless, the previous forms of the reflexivity, though almost eliminated at the institutional level, are still relevant in the interpretation and serve as a heuristic context of the social life.

2

The history of social structures and their conceptions

Having presented the history of Buryat epistemic culture, I will continue by narrowing it to the sphere of social thought. However, in order to make my way to the local version of sociology, I will need to deconstruct some conventional academic views on the Buryat social order. These views determined the major interpretational strategies of the Buryat social ideas, and, therefore, should be considered in a more profound way. I am going to consider a particular theory – the theory of kinship – that serves as a major grid of perceiving the Buryat social organization, both at universities and in popular thought.

In the text, I claim that the social structure of Buryats should not rest on kinship solidarity because (1) kinship in its classic sociological definition rests on particular cultural ideas (e.g. blood, gens, nature–culture); (2) the classic kinship theory was often manipulated in line with the policy of social "upgrade" and its justification; (3) and, it ignored local cultural ideas, many of which fall outside the theoretical reflections on kinship. I state that the theory of kinship and its relations with social order should be reconsidered in the Buryat case, making way for the local ideas of relatedness in any analysis.

2.1. The critique of the kinship society notion

In social science, kinship is regularly considered to be the "irreducible principle", "atom" or an "elementary structure" which, during the growing complexity of society, ceased to be the central, organizational principle in favour of state, politics, economy, etc. [Brandtstädter,

Santos, 2009: 6]. However, this evolution concerned mostly the "complex" or "modern" societies of Euro-America, where kinship is reduced to the nuclear family – the minimally differentiated societies like, presumably, Buryats were believed to be still based on the kinship ties.

There is a commonly accepted assumption of social development from primary kinship ties to more complex other-than-kinship types of relatedness. The view should not be attributed to a specific theory – a generally accepted theory of kinship exists with few exceptions among all major social theories as a kind of "conventional wisdom" [Schneider, 1984: 43]. Indeed, practically few works on Buryats and the Buryat culture go without the extended study or reference to kinship, or kinship ideology. This overemphasis put on the major role of kinship in social structure (clans and tribes), marriage practices, tribalism, labour and property exchange, etc. is typical for the "kin-based" society. Thus, a line of cultural ideas is attributed simply to kinship, which extended almost limitlessly to the whole social structure.

Recent researches (David Sneath, Christopher Atwood, Stanisław Zapaśnik) show that traditional subdivision into "clans" and "tribes" reproduces evolutionist schema, which describes the communities being at a lower stage of political development. This view also implies the single development scenario which allows perceiving the "backward" social organization as undergoing the changes already passed by the "modern" ones. I would not like to develop the critical analysis of social development theories since these aspects have been long discredited in social sciences. However, despite the conscious denial and refusal of these suppositions, many of these categories remain unchallenged for no other alternative versions or proper vocabulary have been worked out yet. This also implies that many categories of social development are rooted deeply in the worldview, based on the vision of linear time and social progress.

Sneath in his widely discussed book *The Headless State…* argues that this kind of perception particularly resulted in image of "fierce and free nomads" organized in pre-state kinship societies of clans and tribes. Sneath, after revision of the history of the Inner Asian nomadic communities, concludes that "clans" and "tribes" were not kinship organizations, but rather political units and products of a firm state

organization. He argues that it is hard to find the tribal entities based on real or fictive kinship:

> Models of tribal, nomadic, and kin-organized society were applied to the indigenous societies of Inner Asia, and led to the misinterpretation of historical and ethnographic materials to support the vision of tribal societies organized by principles of kinship. The subjects of "nomadic" polities were generally assumed to be tribes or clans. The genealogies of noble houses were taken as evidence of the general organization of society on kinship lines, rather than elite techniques linked to the project of rulership [Sneath, 2007: 105].

The decentralized power distributed among aristocratic orders is suggested to be one of the models of state organization, an alternative one to the dichotomy between a centralized state and a non-state society. That is why he proposes the term "headless state" as the title of his book. Sneath compares such a model with weak monarchies of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, though indeed the political economies were very different [Sneath, 2007: 202]. This comparison contributed to the debates over the titles and terms of Western polities which were assumed to have no universal application – e.g. inconsistency in calling Habsburgs "tribal leaders", as it is done in the case of Borjigid aristocracy [Sneath, 2007: 64]. Valerie Kivelson, in response to Sneath's theory, noted that, oppositely, in historiography of Russia kinship structures are often ignored in favour of the overemphasized role of the state [Kivelson, 2009: 133–134].

Atwood in his article *The Administrative Origins of Mongolia's "Tribal" Vocabulary* (2015) in *Eurasia* agreed with Sneath in challenging the "tribal" character of Mongols' social structure. He analyzed critically vocabulary and translations of the social groupings mentioned in the *Secret History of Mongols* (~1237). Also, his analysis covers the administrative documents of the Yuan period. He considers how scholars interpreted the social units in the kinship paradigm as a "tribe". According to him, the terms of the social structure are motivated with the administrative practices, which were changing through the history together with its vocabulary.

Nevertheless, the theory of Sneath provoked numerous discussions, which were published in journal *Ab Imperio* (2009). In particular, it

received sharp criticism from Russian scholars, who argued among others that the state organization of nomadic communities was not denied in the Soviet ethnology, and, if it was denied by some authors, it was hardly attributed to the primitiveness and backwardness. On the other hand, the policy of Russian Empire responded and recognized already existing social structures in the newly acquired territories. Other scholars argue that the concepts of clans and tribes appeared in the Russian context long before the birth of evolutionism, thus, they cannot be attributed to it in the academic sense [Glebov et al., 2009: 159].

Tatiana Skrynnikova also engages in controversy with Sneath on the issue in the discussion in *Ab Imperio* in her article *Terminy sotsial'noy struktury mongol'skogo ulusa doimperskogo i ranneimperskogo vremeni* (2012) and, then, in her book *Kharizma i vlast' v epokhu Chingis-khana* [Skrynnikova, 2013: 64–79]. She thoroughly analyzed the use of terms on social groupings in the *Secret History of Mongols* (~1237) to reach the conclusion that most of them refer to the kinship terms and, if not, it still is a kind of phenomenological reality. Apart from that, she refers to her fieldwork among the Buryats who use the same terms in high association with the kin groups. Others argued that the scholars not always went in line with the colonial policy for not all of them associated the clan and tribe unions with the ideas of social underdevelopment and primitiveness [Kradin, Skrynnikova, 2009: 119]. Some of the other critics considered it unsuitable to mix up the ethnographical traditions of Russia with that of the other Western empires, because it classified differently the concepts of social development and applied it specifically in ruling the subdued people of the Central Asia. Despite the critiques, it would be hard to deny the strong primordialistic and evolutionistic component in both the Russian state policy and academia of different periods with their interconnections. It should not be necessarily associated with the certain "colonial conspiracy" or intentional desecration of scholars, but certain shared categories of culture.

According to many researchers, the rich empirical knowledge and limited range of theoretical reflection were characteristic of the historiography and ethnography in the Soviet science. This, however, is said to have roots in the intellectual tradition of the Russian Empire, in which the obtained ethnographic data was analyzed for the practical use in

colonial administration [Israilova-Khariekhuzen, 1999: 8]. The view on the colonized Asian communities was mediated through the missionary categories of Christian religion and civilization. The missionary discourse of Russia as a Christian state was succeeded by the Marxian idea of a social progress with advanced and backward participants, which was, in turn, accepted by the local scholars [Zapaśnik, 1999].

The theoretic paradigm did not change radically in the Soviet academic tradition, which had to function within the limited framework of historical materialism. The classic kinship continued to be a major operational category in the description of nomadic societies reproducing the nature–culture dichotomy. It is well known fact that Lewis Morgan's unfolding ideas of kinship, property and civil government influenced greatly on Marxism and its idea of social transformation [Szynkiewicz, 1992: 9]. Morgan's work was popularized by Friedrich Engels (*The Origin of Family…*) who incorporated his ideas into the historical materialism [Szacki, 2012: 307; Kuper, 2005: 79]. Adam Kuper even names Morgan to be the most important ancestral figure for Soviet and Chinese ethnology. The major paradigm of considering the nomadic communities in USSR was the "clan theory" (*rodovaya teoria*), which was not challenged until the thirties of the 20th century [Israilova-Khariekhuzen, 1999: 14]. The clan theory was succeeded by the concepts of "patriarchal relationships" [Israilova-Khariekhuzen, 1999: 15], which continued considering the forms of property, power and hierarchy in the context of a tribal structure of the community.

The disciplines like sociology or anthropology, for a long time, were considered to be "bourgeois science" and achieved developmental independence from Marxism only in the post-Soviet time. In the rich academic literature on Buryats, written in the post-Soviet time, one could see that many categories of social development were inherited without any critical revision. In fact, the works on the Buryat social structure admit that the clan division already disappeared in the 19th century but supposedly used to exist previously [Zalkind, 1970: 136]. The lack of the firm facts on existing kinship community sublimate presently into the categories, like: "clan consciousness" or "tribalism", which are perceived as rudiments of clan division and are "still relevant".

Perhaps, it corresponded to the general trend in anthropology from the 1960s to substitute the terms "tribal" and "tribe" with "ethnic" and "ethnic group" respectively [Banks, 1996: 24–35; Fenton, 2003; after: Smyrski, 2015: 14]. Such anthropological construction of "morphology" of a given group accentuates the essentialist character of culture and its association with "race", "ethnicity" [Smyrski, 2015: 15]. Another important issue connected to the biological ideas in social sciences is the category of "ethnogensis". The problem of ethnogenesis was always a political issue in Russian ethnology. The most prominent example is the way the non-Mongolic identity was worked out in Soviet Buryatia with academic invention of Turkic and Tungusic "substrates" in "ethnogenesis" [see more: Bulag, 1998: 77–78; Damdinov, 2005] for avoiding political associations with Mongolia and possible demands of China [*"Buryaad-Mongol" nerye…* 1998: 15]. The linguistic division in Tungusic, Turkic and Mongolic languages turns into essentialized biological categories overused in the ethnographic and historic discourses. It serves as a new form of a political ideology and a lens to read the past. On the other hand, well known is the common use of ethnological works and those categories in constructing the national ideologies.

Thus, I attempted to revise the idea of kinship society as an analytical category. It could be attributed to the colonial practices or imperial knowledge, but equally could be considered free of these connotations, simply as another problem in considering the otherness. Concluding the written above, one can reveal a range of issues relating to applying kinship in considerations on the Buryat society. The first issue is the problem of considering kinship in different traditions of intellectual thought, particularly: the theories born in West European humanities differed in points of departure from that of the Soviet tradition. The Buryat society was considered rather in the categories worked out by the Soviet version of historical materialism, while the Western European scholars developed their theories focusing on the population of their colonies in Africa, America and Southern Asia. Nevertheless, in the contemporary analyses of the Buryat society, both traditions are applied. There is almost no critical review of the typical provisions of "classic" kinship, while the ideas of postmodern cultural anthropology merged uncritically with that of Marxism. Having this in mind, I am

going to focus further on whether the kinship categories could serve as an interpretational grid in the Buryat context – both historical and contemporary.

2.2. A brief historical introduction: Buryat "clans" and their leaders before and after incorporation into the Russian state

The historical introduction is a necessary part because it will serve as a background for separating the kinship from the clan organization among Buryats in the sociological sense. I have to immerse the social categories into the historical perspective for the interpretation of the events is often based on improper methodological suppositions. I would not dare to consider whether the social structure of the medieval Mongols was based on kinship solidarity merging into clan and tribes, for the scarcity of the sources and the impossibility in their interpretation. As it was stated in the discussion of Sneath's book, one cannot deny nor confirm the existence of "classic" kinship communities. For now, it is enough to be aware of alternative interpretational grids proposed by Sneath, Atwood and many others who criticized the general idea of classic kinship. Apart from the historical introduction which will allow me to trace the social structures existing before the incorporation into the Russian state with special emphasis on the role of local power figures, I am going to present brief results of analyses of the 19th-century terminology and the ways they acquired kinship connotations in translation.

Before I proceed to the analysis, it would be necessary to mention the data presented by Atwood in the mentioned article *Administrative Origin*... (2015), which will help in shedding light on the past of Buryat terms of social structuring. The terms of social structuring underwent significant changes from the 13th century and depended significantly on the political position of Mongols. Nevertheless, none of the terminology commonly accepted as "tribal", at least that existing before the Manchu Qing era, denoted any sort of kinship community, but designated the range of administrative and military units into which the Mongolian population was divided. This concerns such commonly

accepted words like *aimag* or *obog* for "tribe" and "clan". The vocabulary denoting the groups of people was strikingly untribal, like: *irgen*, *ulus* or *qari,* which denoted political and territorial unity. Atwood agrees with Sneath that *aimag* never denoted kinship group but an administrative and military unit, the same as *obog*, which should be understood in his view rather as a surname. The significant change appeared already in the texts written during the Manchu Qing rule period from the 17th century, where the previous *aimag* and *obog* received the meanings close to that of tribes and clans. This was connected with translations of the Manchu word *aiman* (which, in turn, is a loanword from Mongolian) used to denote Chinese *bu* 部 and *buluo* 部落. The other reason was yielding to the Manchu-Han view of the peripheral people being organized into "tribal" organizations *aiman*s [Atwood, 2015: 35]. Sławoj Szynkiewicz looks to the Manchu period to explain how during the rule from the 17th to the 20th century they "attempted to impose a system of lineages upon their Mongolian subjects, using any convenient terms that could be made to stand as clan names" [Szynkiewicz, 1977: 32; Sneath, 2000: 204]. This was the pathway through which Mongols assimilated the view on themselves and worked out the vocabulary of rewriting their past. By the 19th century, the idea (or ideology) that Mongols were organized into clans *obog* and tribes *aimags* was commonplace [Atwood, 2015: 37] and later it became the background for the the next theoretic interpretations of Mongolian social structure. This analysis shows clearly that the terms of kinship communities should be considered in the close relation with the political and historical background, but not as essentialized intrinsic characteristic of "nomadic" pre-state societies.

The data presented above should serve as the introduction to the consideration of the Buryat "tribal" terminology. By the time of their complete incorporation into the Russian state in the 18th century, the Buryats already underwent the transformation of their social structure and social terminology, for it does not differ significantly from other Mongolian invariants. It already included the ranks and divisions introduced by Manchu rule, which was transformed to adapt to Russian administrative system. Further on, I am going to analyze briefly the Buryat social organizations after the inclusion in the Russian state with the special attention paid to the role of the native elites. I will

rely on the academic works of historians, anthropologists, also on my own analyses of sources and fieldwork materials from different regions of Khori Buryats.

Buryats, after integration with the Russian state in the 18th century had a "clan" and "tribe" – *под* – system organized by Tsarist administration for controlling the tribute (*yasak*) collection and maintaining a tolerant attitude on behalf of the local aristocracy. Little is known about the previous pre-colonization generation of the local aristocracy, but many of them were previously heading the Buryat clans. For instance, the prince Ukhin *zaisan* after conflict with the Qing administration, brought the Tsongool Buryats into the territory of the modern Buryatia to be included into the Russian Empire at the end of the 17th century and became the first *taishaa* (the tribe leader) of Tsongool administrative clan (tribe?) recognized by Russian administration [Tsongool, 2013; Gerasimova, 2006: 81]. Another important figure was prince Turukhai Tabunan (a son-in-law of the Khalkha's Setsen Khan, wife named Sholon) who was one of the 11 *zasayuls* of Khori Buryats and whose son (?) Batan Turakhin was then the leader of the Khori Buryats, *zaisan* of the *Galzuud* otog. The involvement of high ranked *Chingisid* aristocracy had a symbolic importance for the Russian state: there were also other examples, such as the Khamnigan-Daur-Manchu prince Gantimur who escaped from the Manchu rule to the newly forming Russia [Tsyrempilov, 2013: 40]. The records of loyalty of Mongolian altan-khan Ombo Erdeni and his son Lubsan taidzi (prince) in the mid-17th century and some other nobles were presented by Sava Raguzinski, as a proof of the fixation of their territory by the Russian side during the Qing and Russian Empire border demarcation at river Bura (1727) [*Istoria Buryatii* vol. II, 2011: 63; *Shara Tudzhi*, 1957: 275–289]. The career of others continued after their special contribution during the demarcation of the Russian-Qing empire borders. The head of the Khori Buryats, abovementioned Batan Turakhin, was replaced by another leader (*zaisan*) of Galzuud clan, Shodo Boltirogiin [Khobituev, 1992: 99], who participated in establishing the border between the states.

Thus, by the time of incorporation into the Russian Empire, the Buryats already had their own concepts of the social structure and statehood, which they inherited from their experience in Mongolian

administration and military institutions. The chronicle of Vandan Yumsunov mentions the leading rank *ǯanɣɣi* and others, like: *šiülengge, ǯasaɣul, ǯayisang* before incorporation into the Russian state [Yumsunov, 1995: 63] retained after the Yuan state and Manchu dynasty rule. Russian Empire also incorporated these aristocratic houses in a transformed way into the system of the indirect rule.

Stereotypically, the clan and tribal social structure before the Sovietization is considered to be a kind of a historical authentic state of Buryat community, encapsulated by the Russian Tsar administration. The term "indirect rule" borrowed from the British colonial system in most of the works is used as the argument for the authenticity and genuineness of the social structures existing before. However, the clan and tribes of the 19th century, despite being created by political demands of the locals, in fact, were in large measure the result and the response to the powerful administration of the Russian state. It is also possible that the Russian system of indirect rule which instituted clans (*rod* in Russian) as administrative units actually promoted and extended their importance [Sneath, 2000: 205]. Most of the Buryat clans and tribes were previously parts of the other unions and did not exist as such before Russian colonization. It also regards the borders between the groups – how particular groups found themselves in this or that "clan", the degree of their internal and external integration/disintegration. The borders between the clans and tribes depended heavily on their succession of the incorporation into the Tsar administration. Since then, the administrative system was reformed a few times because the policy of the Russian state towards its minorities was constantly being revised in response to the general external geopolitical and internal domestic conditions.

The clans were from then on fixed for the easier administration and collection of *yasak* tribute and migrations from one clan to another were prohibited. The clan seniors were also responsible for dealing with the internal legal proceedings (except for major crimes) and land issues, without military power. The aristocratic ranks from then on were inherited down the generations and seldom elected. According to *Legislation on Election and Rights of Seniority of People of Other Faith (Inovertsy)* (1812), senior positions were to be appointed by the governor administration after elections, however, the lineal seniority was still con-

sidered to be more influential. According to the Irkutsk civil governor Nikolai Treskin, the lineal senior "is respected by the inovertsy, his word weights more that of a commoner" [*Istoria Buryatii* vol. II, 2011: 153].

In the academic works, the Buryat aristocracy is most often demonized as stratified class of "exploiters" in regard to the commoners. This trend actually remained unchallenged even in the post-Soviet scholarly literature. Indeed, the clan chiefs would inherit the official posts, represented the lineal seniority, and were quite wealthy at the same time. However, it is doubtful if the feudal model could be entirely applied here: there was no feudal land ownership, the people were free [Gerasimova, 2006: 16]. The aristocracy could not be identified as a separate class, too. Neither according to the hermetic marriage practices, nor to a special high-class habitus. The power and legitimacy were still much limited – the separate households had much independence and freedom.

The matter remains ambiguous for very scarce materials and memories of the culture and functions of the *noyons* left today. Zapaśnik, during his fieldworks in Buryatia in 1992, gathered some information about the obligations of the *noyons* among the Buryats in the past. According to him, *noyons* were not entirely "exploiters" of feudal kind and fulfilled important social functions: in case of the cattle loss of one of the commoners (for example, as a result of *dzud*, epidemics, or robbery), *noyon* was responsible for providing him with cattle from his own herds, the multiplicity of which served as a security deposit. After several unsuccessful attempts of the commoner to restore his herd, *noyon* was obliged to take him to his house and treat as a family member. *Noyon* was also the person who remembered and distributed the pastures between people, thus, his role was central in managing his community.

Therefore, these power figures were authorized not only by Russian administration but also they had traditionally ruling positions among the Buryat population. They were not only the tax collectors, the representatives of Russian administrative apparatus, but also coincided with local power practices and, among other functions, they performed important rituals for the communal wealth. The clan chiefs were patrons of rituals, which ensured blessing of the sky, land and ancestor spirits for the good fortune of people [Humphrey, 2010: 46]. As I found in some local genealogies, after a chief's death, the place where his body

was left then would become a sacral site [Ochirov, 1980]. Thus, the leader embodied not only administrative, but also more general cosmic type of power. In the notes of Kotwicz, the formula of the leader's power is connected with the vital forces, such as: *kuč, suu žali* concentrated in his personality [Kotwicz, KIII-19/32]. The other factors, like: high spiritual lineage, the reincarnation of outstanding people in the past just added the legitimacy to his power [Humphrey, 2010: 350]. Skrynnikova, in her book *Charisma and Power During the Epoch of Chinggis Khan*, describes such a vision of power figures in the medieval Mongolia and their ritual functions in social and cosmic orders, which could be still useful in considering the Buryat seniority.

In the Speransky statute of 1822, Buryats were classified as *inorodtsy* (people of non-Russian origin) with policy of a minimal interference into their internal affairs as long as the taxes were paid [Chakars, 2014: 58]. The statute was aimed at stabilizing the economic and political situation in the non-European parts of Russia and their gradual sedentarization. However, it did not change radically the hierarchies of the local social organization [Gerasimova, 2006: 12]. In 1822, after the reforms of Speransky, the previously existing Steppe Contoras[25] were replaced with Steppe Dumas (*Степная дума*), which were the largest administrative units of Buryats. There was no administrative unit that would integrate all the Steppe Dumas under a single body. Instead, the dumas belonged to the different administrations of distinct regions – the net of Buddhist monasteries and religious hierarchy concentrated much more political power than dumas. These dumas existing separately submitted directly to the Russian administration, excluding the possibility of forming a common "Buryat" political body.

In this context, Buddhism was the most important sphere tying diverse groups into coherent "Buryat", or broader "Mongolian" culture [Tsongool, 2013: 110]. In contrast to the local aristocracy presented with *noyons* (*taishaa, shüülenge, zaisan*, etc.) having limited power, the personality of Khambo Lama represented the official authority covering

[25] *Степная контора* was a generalized name of any official administrative unit; the adjective *steppe* just denoted the local character of the unit [Munkhanov, 2011: 97].

the whole "Buryat" population (except for some groups on the western shore of Baikal). Lamas were, perhaps, the only group that could move between administrative boundaries and represent the community with members from all "classes" and groups [Bulag, 1998: 41]. This was the reason why the Russian state strived to support Buryat Buddhist autocephaly independent and isolated from the Buddhist centres in Mongolia and Tibet [see more in: Tsyrempilov, 2013]. Nevertheless, the contacts were not abolished, but took different forms of non-official collaboration with other Buddhist centres of Asia. According to the recent archival researches by Natsagdorzh Tsongool (2013), the rapid spread of Buddhism among Buryat communities was a deliberate protective reaction of the local aristocracy, facing the threat of assimilation and Christianization, which was even ready to switch to the patronage of Qin Emperor in case of oppression on the part of the Russian government. One can conclude that Buddhism was treated by separated Buryat groups as a mode for a political and cultural unity [Vanchikova, 2006: 274].

Thus, one can distinguish "West-Buryat" dumas – Alarskaya, Balaganskaya, Idinskaya, Kudinskaya, Verkholenskaya, Olkhonskay and Tunkinskaya – within Irkutskaya Gubernia; and "East-Buryat" dumas – Kudarinskaya, Barguzinskaya, Selenginskaya, Khorinskaya and, later, also Aginskaya – within Zabaikalskaya Oblast.[26] Then, these divisions resulted in the supposedly tribal division of Western and Eastern Buryats. The dumas located on the western shore of Baikal (especially: Balaganskaya, Idinskaya, Kudinskaya, Verkholenskaya) were isolated from the influence of Buddhist clergy, the migrations and mutual contacts were complicated. The books sent from Transbaikalia to these areas had to go through censorship in Vladivostok, which could last for several years [Zhamtsarano, 2011: 24]. The Western Buryat dumas were less numerous in population and much more disunited in comparison to the Eastern Buryat dumas, in which most of the Buryat population in Russia was concentrated. Thus, doubtful is the "natural" state of the "tribal disunity" (*plemennaya razdroblennost'*) which is so often raised in scholarly works as the objective state of pre-national formation.

[26] Zabaikalskaya Oblast was separated from Irkutskaya Gubernia in 1851.

Such disunity as one can confirm was in large measure the effect of the colonial administration.

The Steppe Dumas were divided into Steppe Councils (*Stepnaya uprava* or *Inorodnaya uprava*) which consisted of a few clan administrations (*Rodovoe upravlenie*), covering the population of a single locality. In most of the cases, the Steppe Councils were skipped and the clan administrations would be subordinated directly to dumas [Munkhanov, 2011: 97]. The relations between the clans were not hierarchical – they would be considered as qualitatively different from one another, but not ranked by these qualities [Humphrey, 2010: 46]. Though the dumas could be perceived as a low rank of Tsar administration and, thus, incorporated into the governmental structures, the state seldom interfered in the internal affairs of the Buryat population.[27] The statute continued supporting the lineal seniority, though in some respects made it elective. The internal social ranking was also different among the clans and, apart from these very formal subjects, one should expect numerous informal structures and orders, which were beyond the reach of the state administration. The social order imagined from the emic perspective, perhaps, was very distinct from the data on the official clan structures that we have at our disposal.

2.3. The "tribal" vocabulary in selected Buryat sources

I analyzed three Buryat sources of their own history[28] in Classical Mongolian script to reveal the vocabulary and usage of the terms of human groupings. I will not include this analysis in the book and present only

[27] However, according to Vladimir Munkhanov, the state also interfered in many areas not associated with administration and taxation, like: marriage rules, the rules on performing shamanic rituals, cutting timber on the Buryat territories [Munkhanov, 2011: 97].

[28] There were discovered about 40 brief and extended Buryat chronicles (18th–20th century). The chronicles were widely distributed among people in manuscripts, though few of them, due to the unknown reasons, were published, as well as the older texts. The later Mongolian chronicles (generally from Inner Mongolia), like: *Altan Tobchi* (17th century), *Shara Tudzhi* (17th century) of Sagan Setsen, *Erdeni-iin tobchi* were widely used by Buryats as a part of their own history.

some results, focusing on presumably "clan" and "tribe" terminology. Two chronicles of the Khori Buryats, written in the more or less similar period by Tugultur Toboev in 1863 from Aga and by Yumsunov in 1875 from contemporary Kizhinga region, show significant differences in the vocabulary and the use of the social grouping terms despite belonging to a single "cultural" area of Khori Buryats. The third work is the chronicle by Lombotsyrenov from Selenge Buryats; those chronicles were published in 1935 by the team of Nikolai Poppe in Leningrad.

Most of such chronicles were written in the period of a relative stability within the Russian Empire, thus, the terms reflecting the social structure were much shaped by the policy of Tsar administration, through which, perhaps, they also revised their own history. It would not be a mistake to consider the pieces as a sort of national ideology, for they were integrating the people found within the clans and distinguishing their roots and ancestry in the all-Mongolian history [cf. Kollmar-Paulenz, 2014: 135]. The chronicles were also aiming at legitimizing the Buryats on their territories, constructing their policy towards the Russian state, etc. [Tsydendambaev, 1972: 168].

The native Buryat vocabulary of social grouping was secondary to the fixed administrative structure with its own terminology. That is why such terms as: *obog, otog*, *omog* and *ečiɣe* denote different levels of administrative units – in some cases referring to the *rodovoe uporavlenie*, and – in the others – a significantly larger unit, which is *inorodnaya uprava*. They seem to be very flexible in their meaning and could extend to various human groupings. At the same time, it would be difficult to distinguish clear social grouping under these terms, which should be perceived free of possible kinship/tribal connotations.

Table № 1. Administrative units of Khori Buryats according to 19th-century chronicles.

In Russian	In Buryat
stepnaya duma	*stepnui duma*
inorodnaya uprava (14 units)	*obog, otog, ecige, omog, inorodnui uprava*
rodovoe upravlenie (108 units)	*obog otog, ecige, omog, rodobui upravleni*

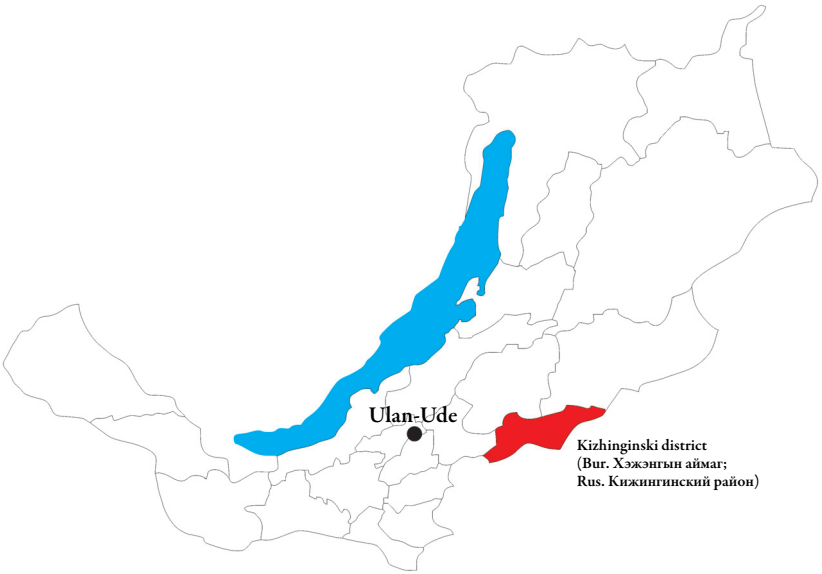
Another important issue is that it is not possible to trace the waterline between the units such as a clan, confederation of clans, tribe, branches of tribe, etc. because the terms are vague in their meaning and they are never used to denote actual kinship group which is referred to in the texts as: *türel, büle, ail*, etc. The relation between the clans is: *medel, khamzhaan, zakhiralta* – "jurisdiction", "power" or "authority" – no kinship relation. The same way the terms of social ranking do not have any kinship connotation. In fact, they were all abolished with the Speransky statute in favour of Russian terms *glavny rodonochalnik* (the main clan chief, the head of *duma*), *golova* (the head of *inorodnaya uprava*), *starosta* (the head of r*odovoe upravlenie*). Even these Russian terms lacked clear kinship connotations and were considered similar to the ranking of Russian peasants. Nevertheless, the Buryat terms of Manchu origin like: *tayiša*, *šiülengge, žayisang* were in more common use than their Russian counterparts. Some of them, like *žayisang*, were applied regarding the head of collective farms even in the Soviet time [Baldandorzhiin, 1990a]. Thus, the words of social structure and ranking were divorced from those applied for denoting kin groups, which in academic descriptions and popular representation are commonly merged. This, once again, confirms that the language, which describes the reality itself, is not free from the existing interpretational grids and the background theory, which should be taken into consideration in research.

2.4. Focusing on the fieldwork area

2.4.1. "Clan" and "tribes" of Khori Buryats

The present part of the research is conducted on the materials gathered in the field research in the villages of Khizhinga aimag of Buryatia – Khizhinga, Chesaana, Zagustai, Mogsokhon (as well as that of Aga Buryat Okrug of Zabaikalski krai, which are all the areas where the Khori Buryats reside). I chose this area because the district is overly supposed to be the most "traditional" in Buryatia for the relatively safe state of folk practices and Buryat language use. Even in the recent past, the area was considered to be the most conservative region of Khori Buryats.

Map № 2. The Republic of Buryatia and Kizhinginski district.



I gathered my material in the rural museum and library archives[29] and conducted interviews with local people, seniors and intelligentsia in order to reconstruct the previously existing social structures, their change during sedentarization and collectivization, the contemporary discourse and practices associated with the supposed clan division. In the research, I claim that the clan structures, if existed in the period of Russian Empire, had few reasons to disappear in the Soviet time, which could point to the very formal character of the formation. Everywhere scholars find only traces of clan structures, which supposedly functioned before. In this regard, what was important among others in Sneath's conclusions is that he doubts whether these clan structures ever existed.

The Khori Steppe Duma, to which the area of my research was subordinated, was one of the largest administrative centres with the chief called *taishaa* governing it. The rank of *taishaa* in 1824 was inherited

[29] The most helpful was the research of local historian Puntsek Baldan-dorzhiin, whose articles and other works I found here and there in private and rural archives.

by Zhigzhit Damba-Dugariin, the descendant of the above-mentioned Shodo Boltirogiin. The Khori Duma consisted of 14 clan councils[30] of different size and territorial areas with the chiefs *zaisans* and divided into 84 clan administrations. The lineal title *zaisan* is known from the Mongolian Yuan Empire and referred to the leader of *otog*, *ulus* < Chinese *žai xiang* "chancellor", "great vizier" [Badmaeva, 2012: 50]. According to the local version the word derives from the Buryat word *zai-* "to roam" for the nobleman would gather taxes from the subdued people scattered over different places, who often considered him to be a suppressive official and would hide from him [Baldandorzhiin, 1990a]. Before 1903 *zaisan* of the clan administration of Galzuuds settled in *Khuorkhe* would gather taxes from all the Galzuuds, as far as the contemporary village *Mogsokhon* [Baldandorzhiin, 1990a], which is a distance of about 60 kilometers. The rights/power (*erkhe*) and responsibilities of such a leader (called also *otog noyon* in one of the rural genealogies) were huge: he distributed the land and water areas, organized collective hunts (*aba-khaidag*), migrations and military organizations. The site where body of an *otog noyon* was left became the place of worship, thus, many landscape objects bear the component *noyon* or *khaan* in their names and still are remembered by people [Ochirov, 1980]. The "clan" and "tribal" organization were not based on classical kinship solidarity but were conglomerated around the certain leaders and aristocratic houses.

Baldandorzhiin informs that on the territory of the contemporary Khizhinga district lived about 18–19% of all the Khori Buryats of Khori Steppe Duma (without Aga Steppe Duma[31]). Before the land reforms of the early 20th century, the area was inhabited mainly by all Khori Buryat clans, except for the Guchid (who were also present, though

[30] Galzuud, Guchid, Khudai, Tsagaanguud, Bodonguud, Sharaid, Khal'bin, Batanai, Eastern and Western Kharagana, Eastern and Western Khuaasai, Eastern and Western Khübdüüd.

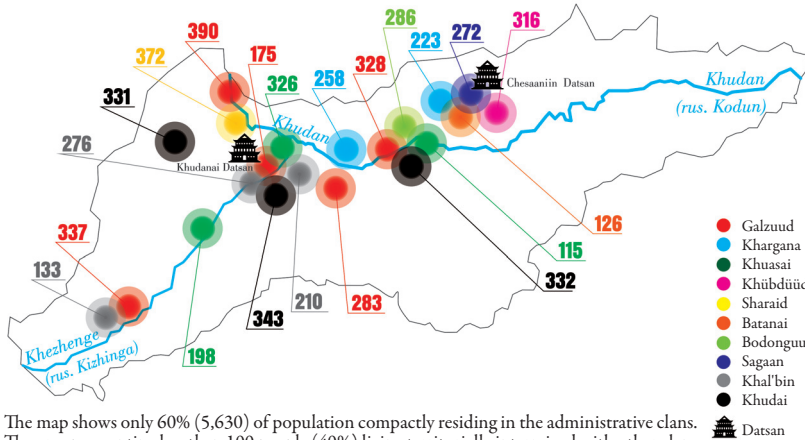
[31] Which also was inhabited by the Khori Buryats and commonly called Southern Khori (Urda Khori) as compared to the other region – Northern Khori. In one of the genealogies kept in Mogsokhon, there was noted another distinction used by lineal seniors where the Barguzin Buryats, though being of different clan origin, are called Northern Khori, the areas of the Khori Steppe Duma are referred to as Middle Khori and Aga lands – Southern Khori [Ochirov, 1980].

perhaps few in number). It is still not clear whether the kinship of single ancestry or administrative matters were the basic ground for the clans. The kinship ties within these clans were not so obvious for they could arrange internal marriages or include the other clan members within their own. This was the case of numerous migrations of the Western Buryats and their inclusion among the local Khori Buryats. The sub-clan Alagui that arrived from Itantsa (a territory near the Baikal shore) was included in the Khudai clan; Khudari Buryats from the Baikal-Kudara were included in the Tsagaan clan of the Khori tribe. This was arranged in response to the administrative, tax and land issues and not always evidence of real (or fictive) kinship ties between them. The division of administrative units was arbitrary and did not reflect the actual kinship, so that people affiliating to the same administrative unit were not necessarily related by blood [Zalkind, 1970: 116]. Marriage between persons within the same clan, in their view, did not violate the prohibitions, but the administration and the Russian Holy Synod considered such marriages as an act of incest [Tumurova, 2005]. The clans contained hundreds of households and certainly they were not consanguineous groups (see the map below). According to the data obtained in 1901, in the researched area, clans contained hundreds of households, which resided in a scattered way. Thus, one can conclude that the territorial relations were relevant in social structure for the community was organized through the parish work and rites in the Buddhist monasteries, local ceremonies and celebrations, which could be more important than the tax issues. These were confessional and territorial units, in which Buddhist temples gained the role of community centres [Vanchikova, 2006: 272; Tsybenov, 2001].

From the very beginning of the 20th century, the clan organization together with its leaders faced significant changes, which brought it to the complete decomposition. After the land reforms (1900–1917), the relatively autonomous Steppe Dumas were eliminated to form *volosts* (administrative districts) governed together with Russian peasants. The newly migrated settlers from the European part of Russia[32] were

[32] In the period between 1898 and 1908, almost four million people moved to Siberia from the western part of Russia [Chakars, 2014: 37].

Map № 3. The approximate location of administrative clans according to the data from 1901.



The map shows only 60% (5,630) of population compactly residing in the administrative clans. The groups counting less than 100 people (40%) living territorially intermixed with other clans were not included in the census.

The approximate map was worked out on the base of [Baldandorzhiin, 1994].

also numerous. The reforms were realized despite the common resentment among the Buryat population, especially the aristocracy, because of the reduction of the land owning territories to 15 desiatines/40.5 acres (30 desiatines, in some exceptional cases) to each individual male – both indigenous and other settlers. This obstructed the extensive pastoral economy in which still large part of Buryats was engaged. The land use territory in some areas was reduced even down to 50% [Chakars, 2014: 38].

Apart from the gigantic land losses, the changes in administration resulted in replacing the local aristocracy with Tsarist officials. The clan seniors were deprived of their status, authority and other privileges, as: salaries, tax remissions and land owning. The obligations of the army service were also the reason for protests. The overall reluctance was suppressed even by the means of military power. Most of the ruling houses did not want to lose their positions and agitated for keeping the dumas and existing social structures. However, there appeared other, not numerous groups called “progressivists” who, though agreeing in their reluctance towards the land reforms, had different views of the self-administration. According to the opinion of the latter, the “clans” and “chiefs” should be transformed into “more progressive” democratic

Western-type institutions. The representatives of the "progressivists" were mostly those representatives of local aristocracy, who received "secular" education in St Petersburg, like the professor of the Oriental Institute, Tsybikov [*Istoria Buryatii* vol. III, 2011: 16–17]. They seem to have received more support from the Tsar administration since one of their representatives, Bata-Dalai Ochirov, was elected as the first Buryat deputy of the II State Duma, which, however, existed from 20 February until 3 June 1907. Scholars admit that the protests against the reforms were exceptionally high among the Buryat population, for the first time during 200 years of being part of the state. This was happening in the context of the general ethnic tensions all over the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 20th century [Zajączkowski, 2015; *Istoria Buryatii* vol. III, 2011: 13].

Thus, the Khori Steppe Duma was broken up into 7 volosts.[33] On the territory of the contemporary Khizhinga, there was formed Kharganatskaya volost, which consisted of 17 buluks (Bur. *büleg*) which did not correspond to the previous clan division. Five of them, now, are situated on the territory of the contemporary Zabaikalskaya Oblast; thus, let us present the composition of 11 buluks according to the data from 1909:

Table № 2. Composition of buluks in 1909.

Buluks	Uluses	Dvors[34] (yards)	Male	Female	Total
Verkhne-Chisanski	9	280	645	687	1,332
Nizhne-Chisanski	15	229	543	523	1,066

[33] Khuatsaiskaya volost (a part of the contemporary Yaruuna district, Mogzon, Upper Khilok and Chita Buryats), Kubdutskaya (another part of the contemporary Yaruuna district and the part of the contemporary Khori dsitrict), Kharganatskaya volost (the contemporary Kizhinga district, the part of the Khilok Buryats), Galzutskaya (from the Okinoborsk to the Ust'-Kurba), Khudaiskaya volost (the contemporary Zagrai district), Batanai-Kharganatskaya volost (the contemporary Mukhar-Sheber district), Guchitskaya volost (the northern part of the contemporary Bichuur district, Obor-Ungo, Balega, Zugmara).

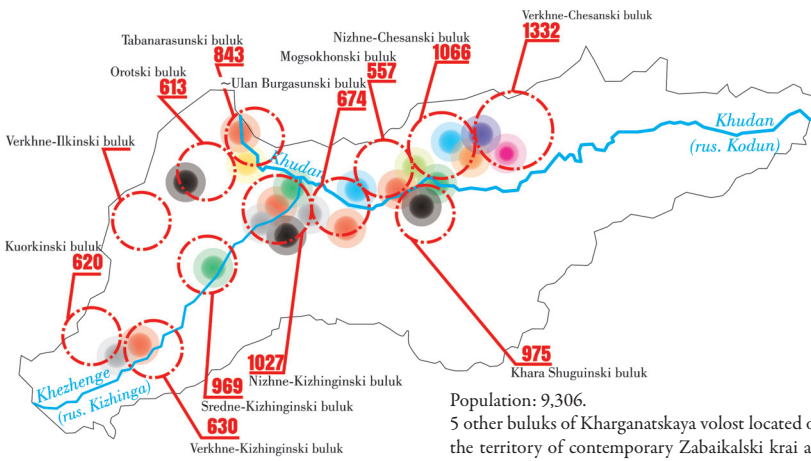
[34] In the censuses of that period, instead of nuclear family, there was used the economic unit *dvor* (household), which consisted of 4.4 members [Baldandorzhiin, 1992: 2], but could also count just one person.

Mogsokhonski	8	148	282	275	557
Khara Shuguinski	5	211	483	492	975
Ulan Burgasunski	7	176	352	322	674
Nizhne-Kizhinginski	8	250	501	526	1027
Sredne-Kizhinginski	8	231	478	491	969
Verkhne-Kizhinginski	22	143	320	310	630
Kuorkinski	9	133	296	324	620
Orotski	5	124	305	308	613
Tabannarasunski	9	191	408	435	843
Total	105	2,116	4,693	4,693	9,306

[Fond 200, CCA of Republic of Buryatia: after Baldandorzhiin, 1992: 2].

Map № 4. Kharganatskaya volost, 1909.

Kharganatskaya volost. The approximate location of buluks created instead the administrative clans (in the background of the map) according to the census of 1909.



Population: 9,306.
5 other buluks of Kharganatskaya volost located on the territory of contemporary Zabaikalski krai are not included in the map.

The approximate map was worked out on the base of [Baldandorzhiin, 1992].

The October Revolution of 1917 approached Buryatia in January–February of 1918 and soon in May was quickly defeated by the Czechoslovakian corps. Until 1920, when Bolsheviks completely seized it, Transbaikalia was controlled by a half-Buryat Cossack, Ataman Grigori

Semyonov with aspirations to become a leader of the pan-Mongolian state. The position of the Buryat leaders was puzzling because they tried to remain neutral and did not support directly any of the parties. This was the case in Kizhinga, where the local lama Lubsan Sandan-Tsydenov organized alternative government, which was supposed to be similar to the theocratic states in Mongolia and Tibet, but also containing elements of European-style constitutionalism [Chakars, 2014: 50]. They were called *Balagads* (<*balagasun* – "town") by the locals, as it is written in Tsyren-Namzhil Ochirov's village genealogy, and the movement appeared in Mongolia. According to the contemporary memories in Kizhinga, the local population turned to the lama for protection from military mobilizations and brutal looting of their herds, both from the Reds and from Semyonov's army. Perhaps, the power of the movement was strong, as they say the lama Sandan-Tsydenov could even hold back mass migrations to Mongolia and Manchuria, which were still huge. However, the state was destroyed and the leaders were imprisoned both by Semenov and, then, by the Bolsheviks. Despite the dramatic reforms and the general instability in the Russian state provoked by World War I and, then, by the civil war, the local clan aristocracy and Buddhist clergy still retained the power among Buryats until their complete elimination in the early Soviet rule in Buryatia in the 1920s [Humphrey, 2010: 49].

2.4.2. Soviet state and the traditional ideas of social order

After the defeat of Semyonov's army by the Bolsheviks, the Buryats managed to create their autonomy, which was in compliance with Lenin's nationality policy, and were to be showcased to the other Asians in Mongolia and China, as an example of the beneficial nature of Soviets [Chakars, 2014: 52]. It initially existed in two forms – Autonomous Buryat-Mongolian Territory within Far Eastern Republic (which was formed in response to the Japanese and White threat as a buffer zone and included the lands from the east of Lake Baikal to the Pacific Ocean) and a similar Buryat-Mongolian autonomous region around Irkutsk on the western side of Baikal. In 1922, after the Japanese withdrew from the region and the civil war ended, the Far Eastern Republic was merged with the rest of Bolshevik Russia. The two autonomous Buryat-Mongolian

regions were united into a single Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) in 1923 [Chakars, 2014: 52]. The previous *volosts* were replaced by another administrative division denoted by the Buryat-Mongolian terms *khoshuun* (flank, banner) and *somon* (arrow), which was a military term introduced by Manchu rule in Mongolia in the 17th century [Ochirov, 1980; Tsyrempilov, 2015: 322].

In Kizhinga, *khoshuun* denoted those who supported the Bolsheviks in opposition to the *balagads*. Thus, the Kharganatskaya *volost* was broken up into three khoshuuns – Tsagaanski khoshuun with the centre in Chisaana, Bodongutski khoshuun with the centre in Khizhinga, Khal'binski khoshuun, with the centre in Upper Khizhinga. The khoshuuns were divided in *somons* (or, somon councils), which were the same as the previous buluks. During creation of the Buryat-Mongolian ASSR in 1923, the three khoshuuns were united in one Khizhinginski khoshuun [Baldandorzhiin, 1992]. The Buryats and Russians, who started to settle in the area only in 1918, used to have different administrative divisions until 1938, when they became nationally mixed, as the majority of the Buryats did not know the Russian language. Thus, apart from the Kizhinginski khoshuun (for the Buryats) there existed a separate unit called Kizhinginskaya volost (for Russians). The Kizhinginskaya volost consisted of two rural councils (*selsoviet*).

The Buryat leaders and social structures they embodied were brutally eliminated during the Cultural Revolution (1928–1931) and collectivization (1928–1935). They became victims of being categorized as the exploiters and feudalists. It was then that the category *noyonstvo* (the lordship) was created to denote representatives of the privileged "feudal" class [Zalkind, 1970: 268], and those who fall within it were imprisoned, killed, deprived of property. The ideas of lineal seniority as a medium between the cosmic and social orders, including the relations between the Tsar administration and commoners, were expelled from the status system [Humphrey, 2010]. Apart from the physical liquidation through executions, imprisonment and exile, the former power figures were also exterminated ideologically from the popular imaginary. The image of "noyon", "lama" or a "shaman" were the figures exposed to numerous jokes and comedian theatrical pieces as a symbol of the backwardness, but what is more important – the symbol of danger of being accused.

The research of Tuyana Dugarova and Lyubov' Ėrkhitueva shows that the contemporary colloquial meaning of the word "noyon" is associated with an imperious, perspicacious and arrogant person [Dugarova, Ėrkhitueva, 2009: 97], which I consider to be the direct influence of the Soviet ideology. The institution of "traditional chiefs" in the Soviet ethnography and historiography was considered in radically negative categories, as the performers of colonial policy and the major obstruction of social progress [Kubbel, 1988: 20]. In many contemporary works on the Buryats, even such important ones like encyclopedias *Istoria Buryatii* (*History of Buryatia*), or the collective monograph *Buryats*, they are still not free of such idioms, which almost justify the repressions against them during the Soviet time. It resulted in the strong stigmatization of the noble origin and concealing it even among those who survived, which, for example, in the post-Soviet Sakha (Yakutia) was the object of proudness [Humphrey, 2010: 52–53]; and, in Altai, the titles of *zaisans* are being reintroduced in local administration [Smyrski, 2008: 144]. Relatively long period of Russian colonization made the Buryat ruling structures more transparent and, thus, more vulnerable to repressions, unlike in some areas of Central Asia where local leaders after the changes often continued their career as kolkhoz chairmen (some of the regions like Tadzhikistan and Khanate of Khiva were finally incorporated into the state only in 1920). Caroline Humphrey, in her article, writes that the loss of traditional ranking in China was also very different from that of Russia. In Inner Mongolia, the local rulers were not executed but were brought back after the "re-education" to their home regions where they despite the loss of their positions were still treated by other people as those of the "white bone" and even often took up fairly high local posts [Humphrey, 1999: 72–73]. Certainly, one can argue that the Buryat community was relatively feeble and decentralized in comparison to those above-mentioned ones and hardly could be reluctant to the changes. Thus, the Buryat administrative "clans" disappeared together with the leaders integrating them.

The Soviet ethnographic tradition was in line with the state socialist ideology of evolutionary development [Zapaśnik, 1999: 5; Bulag, 1998: 32]. This was applied in estimation and justification of the major state reforms, such as collectivization, where the mythical pure

Pic. № 1. "The beginning of collectivization", a picture from the Zugaalai museum in Aga Okrug.

nomadism was described as culturally less advanced in comparison with the sedentary economy [Zapaśnik, 1999: 7]. The collectivization campaign began at the end of 1929 and drew "backward" nomads to form collective farms. To the few existing communes, there were sent so-called 25,000ers – young urban communists mostly from Leningrad, who had no experience in local economy and no ties in local communities, where they voluntarily carried out party directives and helped to fulfil collectivization campaign. Often, they would replace the local commune leaders [*Istoria Buryatii* vol. III, 2011: 50].

At the same time, collectivization met rebellions, both from Buryat and non-Buryat population. This was especially the case of the Russian Old-Believers settled in Voznesenovka at the beginning of the 1920s, who rose in rebellion in 1930 against communists, and the Buryats from the neighbouring areas supported the rebellion by attacking commune "Manai Zam" and killing six people[35] [Baldandorzhiin, 2003: 53].

[35] The commune "Manai Zam" (Our Way) was later renamed "Zurgaanai Zam" (The Way of the Six) to honour the victims.

The Buryat bands made up of those marginalized by the new power roamed the local forests, attacked and looted those in communes and were called "bandits". Many of them had no choice except for being imprisoned or executed. There were also different stories. I was told in Kizhinga about a local communist who received education in Moscow, who secretly advised some local rich to slaughter their herds in order to avoid the planned purges – the latter left only a cow and further were classified as poor class elements and survived; members of KGB organization would save their fellowmen from persecutions. The examples of the cooperation despite the formal affiliation to one or another political orientation seem to have been very common among Buryats.

The herds of the rich class indeed were driven to the newly appearing communes and heavy taxes were introduced for lamas, medium peasants. In 1930 alone, according to Baldandorzhiin, there were slaughtered a few thousand cows in Shuluuta (today's Kizhinga) and delivered to the train stations in Bada and Khiolgo (Khilok) [Baldandorzhiin, 2003: 53]. Overall, in Buryatia, in the period from 1929 to 1932, the estimated reduction of livestock was 62%. The number of livestock by 1937 dropped by 50% from 1929 [Chakars, 2014: 70]. At the same time, the meat plants refused to buy meat from private herders and five years' exemption from taxes was offered to those who joined the collective farms. Both the privileges and the will to survive in poverty and purges completed the collectivization campaign among Buryats.

Collectivization campaign was carried out with enormous costs of human life and significant reduction of herds. In general, the Buryat population which (according to the 1897 census) counted 288,883 in Russian Empire decreased to 237,000 in 1926, and to 225,000 in 1939 [Nimaev, 1993: 45–46]. This happened due to the purges and mass migration of Buryats to Mongolia and China. The early generation of the communist elite, in turn, was also exterminated in Stalin purges in 1937 together with "pan-Mongolists", "Japanese spies" and other "traitors". Together with the 19,000 Buryat deaths in World War II, the loss of the Buryat population in Siberia was quite severe and regained the prerevolutionary number only in the 1960s [Chakars, 2014: 76].

Thus, one could see a great mess of names, places, divisions that overwhelmed the Buryats right from the beginning of the 20th century. The terms like: *bulug, ulus, otog*, etc. do not bear any clear distinctive meaning for Buryats. However, what was interesting to me, in my research, was whether the clan affiliation survived at least in the memory of people at that stormy time, and if not, whether there existed any stable categories of a social structure. Many studies note that despite the drastic changes in the social organization of the Buryats in the Soviet time, many traditional elements did not change, or changed little through the last century. Though the aristocracy and the earlier social institutions were transformed and even physically eliminated in the first two decades of the Soviet policy, the Buryats were provided with institutions of an equally non-individualist, non-capitalist kind [Humphrey, 1998: 2]. The "paradoxical effect of the re-traditionalisation" of local practices in the kolkhozes and "re-establishing" local communities was noted also in some other areas of the Soviet influence [cf. Cieślewska, 2015: 98; Szynkiewicz 1993: 164].

The rapid succession of events was interpreted according to the traditional categories of culture where the ideas of power and hierarchy always played an important role. The kolkhoz took the functions of organizing the whole social life of people – it was the centre of medical assistance, education and work. The land, as previously, was in collective use. The new leaders seem not to have been considered as those who dishonestly replaced the previous ones – the kolkhoz chairmen received considerable social respect. The heads of somons often were called *zaisan*, which is the pre-revolution title of social ranking which refers to "clan" chief [Baldandorzhiin, 1990a]. Szynkiewicz, during his fieldwork in Mongolia (1965–1980), noted that due to traditional prestigious position the local leaders also would perform symbolically important ceremonies and even supported group's sense of distinctiveness and unity [Szynkiewicz, 1982: 38]. Though not of the noble background, the new Buryat leaders were as previously *noyons/dargas* responsible for the wealth and unity of their communities and served as medium in communication with the state. Especially in the early periods of collectivization, many of them worked in terrible conditions of severe material deficiency and huge demands of the state. Local people

would sympathize with them as they had to roam in the steppe trying to manage things, but very often died from cold and wet. A daughter of a kolkhoz chairman in early 1930s tells that in their kolkhoz in one year died three young chairmen, including her father, as a result of the harsh working conditions. Thus, at least in local memories they were respected as those who reconstructed/constructed the disturbed order[36] and were attributed great moral qualities.

The new social structure also was based on the clear social roles and hierarchies, which perhaps matched the traditional vision of order [Humphrey, 1983; Morokhoeva, 1994: 172]. The overall changes of the 20th century were not seen as external to the Buryat society but were incorporated into their vision of a cosmic order – thus, people such as Stalin were incorporated into the legends and represented local predictions [Humphrey, 2003]. The events were said to exist already in the foreseeing (*lünden*) of lamas, shamans, old people, etc. The term "communism" was translated as *eb khamta* (literally: *being together in peace*) [Sanzhanov, 2016: 60] and the communist party as Eb Khamtyn Nam (*the party of peace and cooperation*) which generally mapped on to the local positive values [Tangad, 2016a: 6].

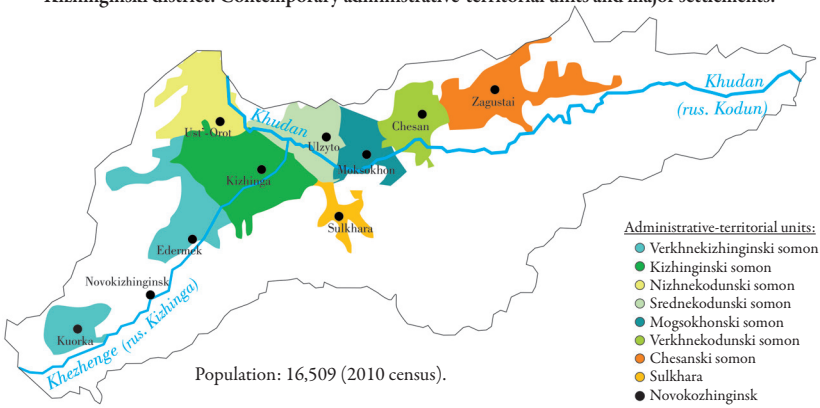
Certainly, these positive assessments could be both motivated by the compliance with the traditional categories of culture and the general positive representation of the processes in media. Newspapers and radio were full of the reports about effective work of party members, successful results of building socialism, its positive influence on traditional societies [Chakars, 2014: 225]. Oyungerel Tangad describes how in Mongolia such extolling speeches reminded the people of traditional praising *yurööls*, long poems glorifying gods, khans or states [Tangad, 2013: 62]. The tradition also existed in Buryatia, thus much of the socialist propaganda, in fact, matched the local traditions of a verbal culture and was not considered merely as an irritating lie.

Apart from the changes in the traditional social ranking and economy, the population endured drastic changes in the places of residence, as well. In 1940, the Kizhinginski khoshuun was separated from

[36] The term power and power structures, *zasag*, derive from the verb *zasa-* "to correct, rectify, repair" [Legrand, 2011: 334].

Map № 5. Kizhinginski district.

Kizhinginski district. Contemporary administrative-territorial units and major settlements.



Population: 16,509 (2010 census).

Based on [http://www.adm.kizhinga.ru/] (access date: 06.03.2016).

the Khoriin aimag to form Khezhengyn aimag for the huge distances of the administrative centres. It was merged back in 1959 and then separated again in 1967. Many of those names and places are long forgotten.

This was a time when the Buryat population, scattered all over the district, started gradually to live compactly in villages. A woman, who was a small girl in those times, remembers the previous settlements of her parents' generation:

> They used to live so far away from each other: in the Turaasagai, which is very far, behind the locality Sulkhara, behind the mountain, here and there they lived. At summer time, they live here; in the winter they live, for example, behind the Sulkhara and drive all their cattle to spend the winter, and for the summer come back here […]. Some of them would nomad from the place called Zhalga in the current Chita region to the place called Soizon, which is less than three kilometers from here […]. Oh, it is the distance in 60–70 kilometers, and, perhaps, even more [150919_0102, translation from Buryat].

Local people say that even after the collectivization people tended to live at a substantial distance from each other, only after the electrification, opening of various Soviet institutions, creating new roads, villages started to become more and more compact. For example, the village

Mogsokhon that consisted of few houses, in 1951, took in dwellers from the places like: Turaasagai, Sagaan Nuur, etc. after the numerous projects on the integration and disintegration of kolkhozes on the previous clan lands. As the result of such changes, from 1923 to 1989, in Buryatia 1,613 settlements disappeared [Potaev, Manzanova, 2009: 40].

In the initial stages of collectivization, the local divisions seem to have been taken into account in order to avoid internal conflicts within newly appearing kolkhozes. The kin related groups were allocated places in neighbouring areas, and sometimes even the whole previous clans were residing in the particular districts. As one of the informants told me, during the merge of two communes, the weaker one would refuse – "we don't want to be their slaves (*barlag*)" [150919_0098]. However, the previous clan background seldom seemed to be a basis for conflicts, and the clan affiliation ceased quickly to be relevant. As far as I can judge, according to my field researches, the clan affiliation and clan solidarity, if any existed, was quick to be forgotten. People, whom I interviewed, that were born in the 1920s or 1930s and grew up in the collective farms, were told by their parents the name of their clan rather in a marginal way:

> I only know that I am of Galzuud clan (ug), I cannot tell more of it, I just don't know about it […]. My mother once told me that we are of Galzuud clan (ug), and I didn't ask her much about that, I didn't know that there will come a time like this [when people will be interested in their clans – A. Zh.]. Nobody cared for their clan (ug), people were a little ignorant and did not know much things connected with it. When the time comes to tell our children about this we don't even know what to say [150917_0095, translation from Buryat].

The statement above is very typical for many of the senior people, not only those I had interviewed in Kizhinga. They also express their regret that they did not ask their parents much about this, and this kind of information was passed on to them incidentally rather than through consciously transmitted tradition. Moreover, while communicating in the Buryat language, I realized that the standard term for "clan" *obog* is not understandable for the Buryats, who associate it with the "surname". While asking about clan we more often had to use the word *ug*, which should be translated as "origin": even on the practical level, it was difficult to talk about those matters.

Thus, few years after the dissolving of the Tsar-time clans, the Buryats ceased using the clan affiliation as the distinguishing feature of their identity. They could not distinguish the boundaries of clans, or their members. Perhaps it could indirectly confirm the formal character of their vision of the 11 clans in the Tsar times, for even then the clans of the Kizhinga district had no clear boundaries and lived territorially intermixed. There were no documented separated clan territories back in the 18th century [Tsybenov, 2001] and the Legal Codex of Khori Buryats (from 1823) in article No. 138 confirms that "people are living on their land not dividing on otogs" [*Obychnoe pravo khorinskikh buryat*, 1992: 256]. In localities around today's Khuorkhe, in 1901 there lived about 620 people, from which 337 were Galzuuds, and the rest was affiliated to Khalbin, Batanai, Khuasai, Khübdüüd, Sharaid, Kharagana [Baldandorzhiin, 2003: 9]. One could see from the data of 1901 on the clan structure, only *circa* 60% (5,630) of the clans in Kizhinga would live relatively compactly in groups of more than 100 people, while the remaining 40% lived territorially intermixed with other clans [Baldandorzhiin, 1994]. In this context, indeed, the local aristocracy and Buddhist clergy, eliminated during the purges, fulfilled the function of cohesive institutions. Similarly, the kolkhozes mostly gathered the entire population of the previously existing clans, for example, according to some data from the Soviet period (I could not find out the precise time period, perhaps it was in the 1980s), the population of Mogsokhon (as well as those descending from it) consisted of the following former clan members: Khudai – 1,399 people, Khargana – 666, Bodonguud – 534, Galzuud – 384, Sharaid – 292, Khalbin – 119, Khuatsai – 53, Batanai – 51. However, little is known about cases when the members of the clans could express any kind of tribal/clan separatism. Most commonly, people do not know the clan affiliation of other people, even of their home-folks.

Moreover, after the introduction of kolkhozes and mass migrations from the scattered areas, Buryats did not forget the place of their previous settlement. This happened due to the Buddhist tradition of the *oboo* (ritual stone cairn) worshipping ceremony, which after the collectivization would point to the ancestral lands *buusa* or *nyutag*. For example, the villagers of Mogsokhon visit as part of the summer

worshipping ceremony several oboos, among them: Tükherig, Turaasagai, Tuzha, Daamai, Ülente, Khükhe Shuluun, Narhata, Bukhata, Nuurai Ara, etc. Those from Zagustai also have a number of oboo Ünder Shuluun, Buural, Khotogor Gurban Maila, Gübee, Ulaan Khada, Uustain Oboo, Bayan Sümber, etc. At the beginning of the 20th century, there existed about 80 oboos in the district, some of them are forgotten now [Dampilov, 2007: 51–52]. These were the places where their ancestors were born or lived nearby and worshipped at those places, which in turn were connected with Buddhist monastic centres. Currently, they are mostly uninhabited. Though it is hard to say how old these oboos could be, perhaps they were not permanent, what is important is that after collectivization and until recently people remembered their previous "clan" territories and gather every year in the summer for worshipping there. This tradition was not interrupted even in the Soviet time despite the anti-religious ideology and was even quite numerous.

According to the *oboo* map, one could reconstruct the approximate geography of the settlements of the Buryat clans. These places show the alternative community to their villages, and supposedly could refresh their clan solidarity, however, it does not happen exactly that way. In the years 2012–2016, almost every year I visited *oboo* ceremony for the field researches. Those I have visited were of different size – from dozens of people at local oboos to a huge oboo ceremony at the Chilsaana mountain in 2014, which gathered about 10,000–12,000 people. Concerning the participants of the ceremony, they were composed of different families, many of them were not related to each other. Some of them had patrilineal relation with this place, others had matrilineal one, or, sometimes, just felt affection for a specific locality. People do not keep in touch after the ceremony and many of them leave the ceremony even without being acquainted with other people. Thus, even the memory of shared ancestral place and meeting of people related through it there does not provide the support for constructing/reconstructing the clan structure (if any existed). They experience the "vertical" relations with the ancestral land *nyutag*, but not the "horizontal" one, which is the solidarity, and integration/disintegration with living people. Thus, in fact, except for the administrative changes there were few reasons that could destroy the kinship solidarity among them for the members of previous clans still

lived compactly, remembered their ancestral places, and in general the structure of the collective farms could contribute to the conservation of the clan ties, but still, they were very soon forgotten (if any ever existed).

The definition of clan, basing on kinship as a component of the social structure, in my opinion, does not fit the traditional categories of culture. The words *ug*, *omog*, *obog*, *otog* for the contemporary Buryats all mean just remote ancestry, surname, not any human grouping; they should not be translated into the categories of clan membership or even clan itself, which, as I tried to show, was a unit associated with a particular type of ruling seniority. The clan affiliation is not shared information or any transparent institution. To my mind, in the cases when the Buryats speak about the clans, what is important is the knowledge of the ancestral name used in rituals for contacting the protecting spirits of the family, while the shared clan name (even if known) does not create solidarity between people.

2.4.3. The uses of genealogies: Creating and contesting Buryat identity[37]

Group identities are often built on genealogies. Buryat culture appears to fit this general rule. Elaborate Buryat historical genealogies have been written and preserved. Today scholars regard them as a key route of access to the structure and character of Buryat society. The genealogies, both written and memorized, are often assumed to be evidence of the general organization of society on kinship lines [Sneath, 2007: 105]. However, I claim that it is not always useful to understand the kinship relations and they could function divorced from the social structure. This view of Buryat culture, by insisting on treating it in ethnographic categories, reduces it to the level of a primordial society.

In this part, I will introduce the brief historical context of the Buryat genealogies in the broadly defined pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet periods which I obtained during my fieldworks. I am interested in the motives of those who created these genealogies and the place these

[37] This fragment is going to be published as an article called *"Repressed Other" of the History: Creation, Use and Interpretation of the Buryat Genealogies* in the series Monografie LIBAL (vol. III).

documents occupy in the contemporary Buryat society and culture. I will note the coincidence of a revival of interest by Buryats in their genealogies in the 1970s and 1980s with the rise of Soviet modernization's power to suppress local cultures. The genealogical knowledge becomes the repressed "other" in history.

Genealogies constituted a significant part of Mongolian historiographical tradition at least from the 13th century. After the 16th century the component was under strong influence of Tibetan (Buddhist), Chinese and Russian epistemological cultures, but retained its relevance and significance through the history. The practices of revision of the genealogies and manipulation of the origin were common [Kollmar-Paulenz, 2014]. Genealogies in the broadly defined pre-Soviet period had a long tradition and depended on political (and religious) orientations of the elites. The genealogies and chronicles of the Buryat-Mongols after inclusion in the Russian state in the 18th century were developing relatively independently and did not agree on the common ancestral origin – there were numerous versions of the legends and names which could not be counted as the attempt to construct a single all-Buryat ancestral ideology [Tsydendambaev, 1972: 50].

The genealogies written in the pre-Sovietization period could be divided into two types. The first type consists of family histories of nobles, which rather remind us of records of service and official documents. The "clan" aristocracy was a part of the indigenous political system through indirect rule, thus, written genealogies were also the way to legitimize the power of the ruling clan, princes *taishaa* and heredity issues [Tsydendambaev, 1972: 168]. The second type of the genealogies includes private family genealogies and general genealogies of localities [Tsydendambaev, 1972: 48]. Gradually, the genealogies acquired a more general and extensive character and included both nobles and commoners [Tsydendambaev, 1972: 172–173]. Further on, I will focus primarily on such extensive genealogies comprising the population of whole villages. During my fieldwork in Khezhenge aimag, in 2014 and 2015, I contacted the local people occupied with maintaining the genealogies (Bur. *harbaalzhi, ugai besheg, ugai dansa*) of the villages: Zagustai, Mogsokhon, Khezhenge, Ulzyte, Sulkhara. Additionally, I collected material on the village Khuorkhe.

Despite the long tradition of genealogical writing, during my fieldwork, I never saw such documents. One has to go to the museums and archives to see the remnants of the surviving documents, though they were used by those who gathered the village genealogies later. For example, one of the records mentions a genealogical list (Bur. *ugai dansa*) of the head of Khudai clan written in 1850, or some of the older written genealogies were written on huge pieces of paper of a "size of a bed sheet".

Most of the genealogies in the villages were created during the Soviet time approximately from the 1970s–1980s onwards. In my opinion, it is not accidental that this was the time when the "model minority" began to realize that it was in danger of losing its culture and language within the advancing pace of Soviet modernization [Chakars, 2014]. As in other places of the world, the local elites played the key role of preserving and, at the same time, shaping the cultural heritage. The genealogists could be all called local intelligentsia, due to the fact that usually they were either teachers, or local historians (*krayevied*). During my fieldwork, I contacted people who were "responsible" for gathering local genealogies. Usually, there were one or two seniors in every village or locality who started gathering the genealogies in their youth. Many of them are not living anymore, though their work is sometimes continued by their successors. Thus, I had to contact their close family or people who would remember them. It was also very interesting to trace their personal background and the motivation of gathering such material. As far as I found out, these people did not have the "noble" origin, which could indirectly point to the continuation of the family tradition or legitimizing their leading position in the society, as it is said to be in the pre-revolution time. Gathering the genealogies was their personal initiative – it was not a task, which they were obliged or expected to perform. Gathering the material was quite a hard matter for them, which they had financed and supported from their own funds.

A 94-year-old senior in Khezhenge started gathering genealogies in his youth and used older written records in the Classical Mongolian script, as well as made corrections during his fieldwork. He keeps the records about the residents of the villages Khezhenge, Ulzyte, Sulkhara, etc. in a few notebooks:

> I began with the old records. There was also a man called Ochirzhapov Dondog, born in 1912, who did the work [genealogy – A. Zh.] on his own locality called Khuurai. The Sulkhari locality was recorded by another old man; and I took the material from the museum of Mogsokhon, then I took material from one man in Khezhenge. From everywhere. It is not a work that could be just memorized, even if it concerns the events that happened a year or two ago; it is also made using the older records. Apart from it, I went to meet people, visit every family and ask what your ancestry/lineage (ug) is, whether you know or not. If one knows I write it down, and if not – not. It is not a work I just created, everything is based on the older records [072014].

They used the genealogies written before, used the materials gathered by other local historians. In the written genealogy kept in Mogsokhon, the author, Tsyren-Namzhil Ochirov, left the names of some of his main informants, who would remember the local lineages by heart. Interestingly, the genealogists also contacted and consulted each other. Gathering data during fieldwork was the major methodology for them. Interviewing people and families of localities was likely hard work, which was perhaps not that much or always encouraged. The daughter of another genealogist remembers the way her father used to gather material in the 1970s and 80s:

> He would go to every person. He would take his case and travel to Khori [Khori district – A. Zh.], to Khezhenge, to Chesaan, he would go everywhere, even to the city [Ulan-Ude – A. Zh.], ask people from there, go here and there, here and there […]. It was the Soviet time and people did not pay attention to his work, they did not think it was of any importance [150919_0101].

The situation is still very similar nowadays. People usually do not care much about maintaining the village genealogy; though they consider it a worthy thing. The role of updating and gathering information is entirely dependent upon the initiative of the local intelligentsia, who are not sure whether the records will be continued after their death since they are all of advanced age:

> After that (after the death of the previous genealogist) nobody cared about it. I was puzzled by it and had to… the new names ceased being recorded and it just finishes. I do not know what will happen with it after, will there be a person who could continue it or not […]. The majority of the data I gather myself. They do not much care… If they move to the city [Ulan-Ude – A. Zh.],

> there are people whom I ask. I ask people. Here I go to the ambulance clinic to ask about the newborn children; of course, I have many people who were not recorded here [150919_0096].

The interview was conducted in 2015, and, when I returned in 2016, the 80-year-old woman, Galina Damdinzhapova, unfortunately, had already passed away. I was told that during her funeral an announcement about the work she did was issued and a search for volunteers who would continue her work commenced, but currently I do not know whether they found one. The genealogies in the Soviet period were made by local elites who realized the gradual loss of the Buryat culture – it was not the matter of the public demand.

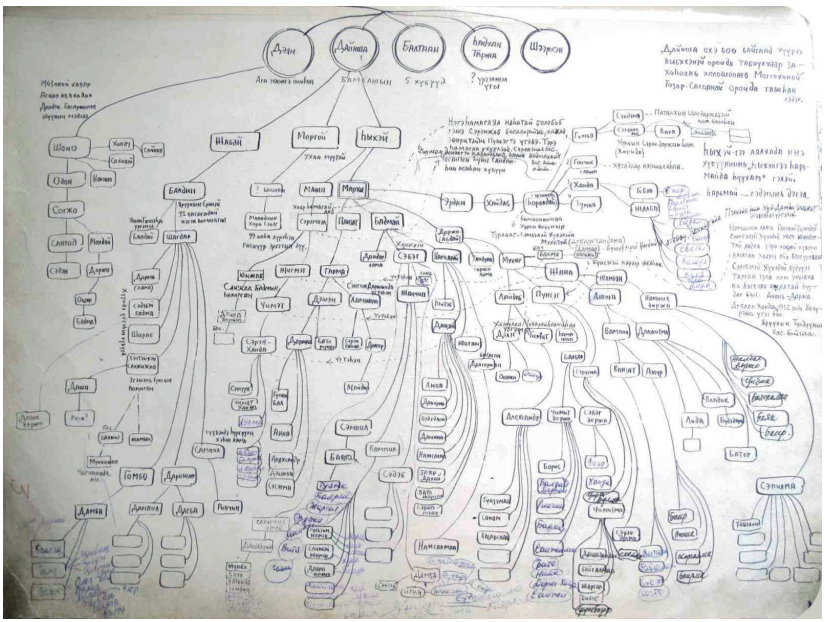
Apart from the extensive village genealogies, people often keep the list of their forefathers' names on a piece of paper. Such written genealogies are considered as a sort of *cultus image*, kept in special places together with the deity images, family photos. Those I was shown were compiled recently, often written down from the village genealogies or consulted with senior members of a family.

At least two important conclusions can be drawn from the data presented here. Firstly, the written genealogies were not a necessary document for maintaining social order: recognizing the "relatives" does not always imply the deep knowledge of "ancestors". Thus, it is clear that the village genealogies back in the recent past and the present are not used for maintaining exogamy, arranging marriages, or for distributing property. At present, they cannot serve as the documents having any role in arranging the community structure. Though they reproduce local lineages, the connection with the clan ancestors remains to be considered free of the biological categories. This is one of the reasons why the written genealogies are not the reflection of the social order and people's relations with each other.

Secondly, the genealogies, comprising the population of whole villages (the same as those villages), are rather a recent phenomenon that appeared in the Soviet time together with changes in the administrative structure.[38]

[38] This spread of genealogies seems to be common among Buryats and rare in Mongolia and is, perhaps, connected with the processes of sedentarization of Buryats (a consultation with Szynkiewicz), or with the spread of shamanist practices [Bulag, 1998; Shimamura, 2014].

Pic. № 2. One of the sheets of genealogy compiled by Tsyren-Namzhil Ochirov in the 1980s.



Perhaps, the genealogies which previously were used by the elites, for example, in the distribution of inheritance and power, under the Soviet conditions lost their numerous functions. After the appearance of collective farms, they may have constituted one of the techniques of drawing the people into a new community. Later, when the loss of the Buryat culture became evident, they took on another important function – the construction of historical myths. This is an alternative history to that written in official books: this history describes the "great ancestors" instead of the "backward nomads". Thus, I found it necessary to pay more attention to their content. The content of the genealogies was the local views of alternative history contrasting with the Soviet modernist historiography. The genealogies, in fact, contain not merely the human names and the scheme of their relatedness with others, but also short histories, explanations and remarks. They rather look like a kind of textbook on local history, where one could trace down one's own family

in the context of many centuries. One is struck by the great number of names of both dead and living people on a few sheets. Not all the lineages are equally presented – some of them stretch to 7 and some of them even to 25 generations back. Besides the names, some of them convey information about profession, character and life facts of people who lived several generations ago. For example, the genealogies of the Mogsokhon by Tsyren-Namzhil Ochirov contain a story of a noble man's daughter Butid, born in 1889, which I will present partially:

> Butid, after she arrived as a wife to Dorzho, whom she did not like, sang the following song […]. Before it, there was an attempt to marry her off to Bambain Seren, and used to sing this song: "The head of Anaa Duma/Says that he wants me as his wife/Is it really the result of good deeds (buyan) of my father and mother?/Is it really my luck? […]".

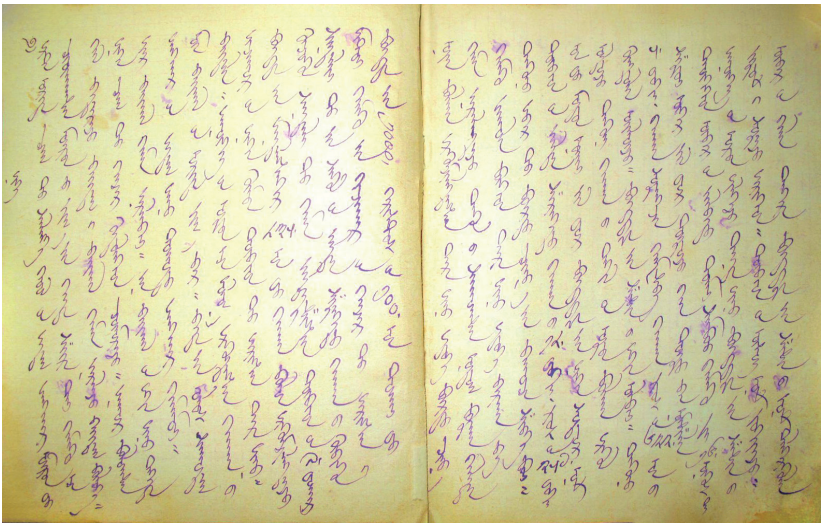
Various phrases people once uttered, remarks on their character and other fragmental testimonies are found in these pages. With regard to some people, there are records on their occupation (usually lama or shaman *böö*), where they used to settle and nomadize:

> Gonchig, gabzha [rank of a Buddhist clergy – A. Zh.], used to travel in China; […]. Dainsha, was a shaman, bequeathed to leave his dead body on the top of Hepkhyen Uula mountain, but people found it to be too far and left it on the top of mount Gazar-Sagaan, they say.

Apart from such information, the texts include all possible data and names of people who contributed to building stupas, datsans, and were distinguished through special achievements, professions and education. At the beginning, or at the end, most of the records contain the history of the Khori Buryats, their ancestry and other historical events. In the village Zagustai, I saw the Soviet copy of the 19th-century Buryat historical chronicle kept together with the genealogy.

Names such as Genghis Khan or other significant people of Mongolian history are not rare in those texts. Perhaps, the village genealogies, along with manuscripts in Classical Mongolian script – both old and written in the Soviet time – should be considered rather as the records of local history, the alternative (not always opposing) one to that abundantly created in the official Soviet discourse.

Pic. № 3. The Soviet period (~1970s) copy of historical chronicle by Shirab-Nimbu Khobituev (1887), Zagustai, Kizhinga district.



These strong, but unofficial, historical narrations emerged out of the shadow during the "cultural revival" in the post-Soviet period. In the early 1990s, 20 Buryat chronicles were published and other literature was translated from the Classical Mongolian script into modern Buryat [Badmaeva, 2005: 8], and, recently, 11 of them were translated into Russian and became even more accessible. These texts did not only revive an alternative version of history, but also served as the reflections of destroyed social structures. I would dare to call the modern nostalgia on clan and tribe division the influence of European evolutionist conceptions on society development and their implementation into the Buryat community first during the Tsar time and, consequently, in the Soviet time, through education and academia. The kinship character of the Buryat community was and is emphasized enough in most of the ethnographic and historical works and, thus, became an important element of colloquial reflection on their own society. The Buryat terms of the social structure and institutions are interpreted in the concepts of kinship solidarity – clan, tribe, houses, etc. Generally, instead of speaking about the "Buryat population", scholars use the

cliché бурятские роды – "Buryat clans" – even in the contexts when clan solidarity is doubtful. The kinship solidarity and clan division became a sort of *a priori* knowledge and determined the character of the whole vocabulary. As Sneath notes, in texts such as the *Secret History of Mongols* (~1237), a series of different terms on social organization, like: *irgen* (people, subject), *ulus* (polity, realm, patrimony, appanage), *aimag* (division, group) have been translated as "tribe", in places when the considered unit was believed to be "tribal". Similarly, the term "clan" is very often inserted to denote any group which the translator believed to be clan [Sneath, 2007: 62]. Interestingly, the paradigm of Buryat social organization based on "clans" emerged in the Russian Empire and turned out to become the major interpretational grid for academic research on other Mongolian communities, which, however, in turn, were shaped under the strong influence of Qing Empire policy [Munkh-Erdene, 2011: 31]. The local social structures were considered in the essentialized way without their general essential dependence on the colonial background.

In the nature–culture discourse the Buryats, as I described earlier, find their place to be closer to "nature", which, apart from strong associations with backwardness, has also the seemingly attractive hues of "noble savageness". The clan and tribe division is now described as the natural, thus, the more authentic and moral form of social organization in comparison to the "modern", less "spiritual" structures. One of the authors of a contemporary genealogical book writes in the preface that, according to some studies, 70–80% of the questioned Russian students do not know the names of their grandfathers and grandmothers – this poor knowledge of the genealogy is then contrasted with the sophisticated system of the Buryat genealogies as a certain proof of Buryat superiority [Tsydenov, 2014: 11]. Some other researchers also note that the extended knowledge about their origin was seen as a point of superiority over sedentary Europeans [Zapaśnik, 1999].

In modern Buryat discourse, the genealogies go hand in hand with the supposed clan division. During fieldwork in ethnic Buryatia, the Polish anthropologists, whom I accompanied, were frequently told by the Buryats that they know by heart their clan and ancestry seven generations back, though, according to my personal experience,

this exists merely as a myth. Many of the people I talked to would remember their genealogy by heart in their childhood, but lost this knowledge in their adult life. Knowing and declaring the knowledge of one's ancestry is an object of pride, confirmation and at the same time an increase of the vital forces (e.g. *sülde*)[39] of one's immediate family, but it is not important in social structuring. Let me further analyze some cases of how the imagination of the kinship community exists in the modern context. This issue can be investigated through examples of the Buryat children's education, the release of the history books and genealogies, and other projects.

School teachers, who in the recent Soviet past were rather important media of Sovietization, currently are often occupied with the "revival of Buryat culture". A senior woman, to whom I talked, was surprised to hear that religious and "clan" issues are taught and encouraged in schools. The educational system was the key part of Soviet modernist and cosmopolitan ideology [Chakars, 2014: 119]. However, contemporary mass events [Nowicka, 2016] and schools for many Buryats are the only sources of getting information on the Buryat topics: "[…] the introduction of knowledge about the ancestry (*ug garbal*) for the growing youth is a holy duty of the whole nation and the first duty of teachers" [Badmaeva, 2009: 29]. Such projects are implemented on different levels of the educational system, clubs, supported more commonly by the teachers of the Buryat language and literature within the possibilities of "regional educational component" included in the regional school curriculum. Apart from such multiple endeavours to revive the endangered Buryat language, customs and rituals, in these projects clan and tribe division are presented as an important element of the traditional culture. Academic works, which in Buryat society enjoy almost absolute authority, are searched for data on the genealogies, clans and tribes – this is another example of the use of ethnological data in nationalist ideology. The local genealogical records written during the Soviet time, described above, also turn into important sources of the reconstruction of the tradition, though few years earlier they were not as popular.

[39] For the topic of vital forces see more in the next chapter, as well as in: [Humphrey, Ujeed, 2012; Skrynnikova, 2012; Tangad, 2013].

What is interesting, the clan and tribe division of the Buryats is presented as an object of national proudness – all other discourses associated with the "backwardness" are skipped or reinterpreted. The teachers, whom I interviewed, believe it to be an important tool for propagating "moral values" and "stronger unity of family, ties between generations, teaching respect towards ancestors" [Tarnueva, 2009: 11–12] and "will not allow children to forget about the native land, beloved father and mother and prominent people" [Badmaeva, 2009: 29]. During Buryat language lessons, clubs and various contests children present their genealogies, "tribal" and "clan" origin. Such tasks are also given to the university students during the Buryat language classes. Students consult with the elderly members of their family or relatives who know the genealogical lineage by heart, or have it in written form. Usually, most of the children are able to reconstruct their lineage in 7 generations back, but there are also many who know it as far back as 25. The genealogies represent the line of names back to the mythical "tribal" ancestor. For example, almost all presented genealogies in Kizhinga had the single ancestor Khoridoi mergen, the son of Bargu-Bagatur. Such genealogies known, kept and now written down in separate families are useless for understanding social distance, because they are quite isolated and contain no information about their relatedness with other genealogies. The best and the longest genealogies, or essays on genealogies, are given awards and prizes. As one of the teachers maintained, such projects will help children to have their genealogies written and reconstructed and from then on serve as a precious memory source of their families.

As scholars note, copies of genealogies suddenly started to spread among people, beginning from the 1990s on the wave of the national revival in Buryatia [Zhambalova, 2008: 76]. Such genealogies published in books and tablets serve as a popular wedding gift, and are often exhibited during the wedding ceremony, or during other gatherings. However, the shape and the form of the genealogies has changed significantly: they are concentrated much on the clans gathered on a specific territory, but not on the separate clans themselves. They started to include the names of the women, which in the older texts were rather omitted. Some researchers do not like that mothers were not included in

genealogies and, therefore, provide samples of genealogical lists, which include them [Lubsantseren, Tserenchimed, 2009: 120].

Interestingly, despite the numerous versions of the Buryat mythical ancestors (from various all-Mongolian ancestors to Indian and Tibetan kings), most of the contemporary genealogies tend to name a particular one, which embraces the majority of the Buryat local groups within a single ancestry. That is the legend of Bargu-Bagatur (the descendant of Burte Chinu-a) who had three sons: Olyudai, Buryadai and Khoridoi [for example, see: Tsydenov, 2014: 23; Ayushiev, 2013: 11]. The first son is the ancestor of the Oirats – Western Mongols, at present commonly associated with the Kalmyks – the second son Buryadai is the forefather of the Western Buryats and the Khoridoi – that of the Khori and Aga Buryats. This legend recorded in the historic report by Dorzhi Darbaev (1839) was preferred by others, often reproduced and is topical in other projects related to the clan revival. The tradition is still alive and developing. However, it does not embrace the large part of the numerous southern Buryat groups (Tsongool, Sartuul, Tabanguud, Khotogoid, Khatagin, etc. who migrated from Khalkha Mongolia), who always played, if not the central, then a significant role in Buryat history.

Regularly, people do not know the "clan" affiliation of other people, nor do they strive to know it. It is not a piece of information shared between people, though almost every family cultivates the memory of their "clan" and uses it during rituals. However, there are numerous attempts to "revive" the supposedly traditional division at least during some national holidays and public events. Thus, during the Lunar New Year feast in 2015, people gathered at the square in Kizhinga and, at a certain moment, they were encouraged to regroup according to their clan affiliation. Symbolic is that, primarily, people who had never met each other before, or who certainly did not think of each other in kin terms, gathered within a single clan. This state of *communitas* was temporarily created during the event "for fun" to be disorganized in another moment. This and the other examples provided above show that the clan system exists merely as an ideology created by the local elites which is presented as part of the "lost tradition" worth being revived (Eric Hobsbawm's concept of "invented tradition" perfectly fits this

analysis). It departs from the actual social division, which is organized on some other principles than kinship.

The written genealogies for the contemporary Buryats should be considered as alternative to official versions of history by constructing, or reconstructing real kinship relations between people. The genealogies should be perceived free of their biological connotations: it is not always useful for understanding the social distance and kinship relations [Szynkiewicz, 1992: 68]. I began my analysis with the embedding of the Buryat genealogies within the Mongolian historiographical tradition. Later, I showed how this tradition was developed in the Soviet time as alternative to the mainstream texts of history, which later gained currency in the post-Soviet time ("the repressed other" [Certeau, 1986: 29] of the official history). I discussed the brief histories of those who wrote them and of those who used them to conclude that their function of social organization was minor to the other functions like construction of the historical myths, ideologies and being the object of religious devotion.

The process of creating, functioning and interpretation of the genealogies contributes to the general discussion in humanities of "who owns the history?". It is not only about the matter of "practical past" [White, 2010], but also about the "practical *interpretation* of the past". The theory of kinship was such a frame limitlessly used in academic research as a kind of "conventional wisdom" [Schneider, 1984: 43].

Summary

In this chapter, I claimed that the social structure of the Buryats neither in the past, nor in contemporary times is based on kinship ties. To prove it, I have compiled various sources, academic works and fieldwork materials. The review of the theoretic works shows that the social sciences often went in line with justification of different kinds of state policy and, at the same time, their elements were deliberately used in constructing the nationalist ideologies. Kinship as a major component of social organization in many academic works was extended almost limitlessly onto very different levels of institutions. It determined even the way the terms of the Buryat social organization were translated

into European languages. Meanwhile, the deeper analysis of literature and fieldwork data shows that the Buryat clans (*rod*) as a unit of social organization were not based on kinship relatedness. I paid much attention to the interpretivist analysis of the interviews to trace various meanings and their configurations.

However, the character of the social relatedness could not be called purely political either. From this prospect, one could assume that there exist other forms of relatedness, which could matter in the construction of social ties. In the fieldwork, I paid much attention to the exploration and interpretation of these ties. Thus, further in the next chapter, I want to introduce an idea often considered to be beyond the reach of academic theories – the relatedness of the vital forces.

3

The human being in the flow of the vital forces[40]

As it was shown in the previous part, the academic discussion and analysis of kinship is usually confined to several established models, applied nearly universally to various human societies. Those ideas are further framed within discourse of technology and scientific progress, with a number of scholars arguing that kinship cannot serve as a concept of shared "natural" background. Because of this reason, there is a pressing need to explore local ideas of "relatedness" and to apply them as independent analytical categories in conceiving human societies.

This chapter outlines the "relatedness of vitality" in the Buryat-Mongolian culture. Using my fieldwork notes, I will introduce three important topics. The first one is (1) relatedness of vital forces, which are rarely included in studies on the social structure. It is important, due to its implications for considering the ideas of (2) human being and personhood.[41] This specific conception of humanity implies also a significantly distinct vision of (3) social order [Gurevich, 1972: 141]. The problem of social order is directly associated with the character of relatedness between individuals [Ossowski, 1983: 92].

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[40] Fragments of this chapter were published in: Ayur Zhanaev (2018) *Kinship vs. the Relatedness of Vitality in the Buryat-Mongolian Culture* [in] *Lokalne i globalne perspektywy azjanistyczne: księga jubileuszowa dla Profesora Sławoja Szynkiewicza*, Warsaw: IAE PAN, pp. 213–222 and Ayur Zhanaev (2015) *"Blood relation" Category as a Social Metaphor in Buryat Culture* [in] *Aspects of Contemporary Asia. Culture, Education, Ethics*, Toruń: Adam Marszałek, pp. 106–115.

[41] The study of personhood was a continuation and it was developed in line with some classic themes, like: procreation, kinship relations and property [Carsten, 2004: 84–85; Howell, Melhuus, 2003: 347].

3.1. Kinship "materialities"

Szynkiewicz in his prominent book *Pokrewieństwo. Studium etnologiczne* (1992) mentions that kinship studies gave ethnology a chance to join the league of "true sciences" since they operated on and explored the phenomenon of natural order [Szynkiewicz, 1992: 5]. Nevertheless, as he showed in this book and his other works [Szynkiewicz, 1977; 1982], kinship always constituted a problematic question for anthropologists due to the paradoxical lack of precision in its understanding. Although kinship was taken for granted, the analytical categories were negotiated through the history of social sciences.[42]

Despite various methodological approaches, the study of kinship, in opposition to other kinds of relatedness, such as neighbourhood, friendship or marriage, is based on exploring certain "materialities" (actual or fictive) which make biological reproduction possible [Brandtstädter, Santos, 2009: 2]. Children share the "biogenic substances" with their parents and other relatives, with the idioms of nature forming the root motive of kinship [Schneider, 1980]. The European imagery behind the concept of "blood" embodies the conceptualization of these materialities and serves as the constituent metaphor of generational continuity tying people within a kin relationship [Ossowski, 1966; Madajczak, 2014: 14]. This also resulted in inventing the terms like: "blood relation", "consanguinity", etc. Stanisław Ossowski suggests that the belief of having common blood is a constituent metaphor in searching for the commonality of many European people, for example Poles believe that they have a distinct blood from Germans and vice versa [Ossowski, 1966]. Current strong atomization of Western society tends to reduce these forms of relatedness to the idea of nuclear family [Carsten, 2004: 15], which was also considered as the natural basic unit of social structure [Ruane, Cerulo, 2000: 156; Malinowski, 1930].

[42] The kinship studies and their criticism were a subject of numerous debates, especially in Western anthropology, while in the scholarly works of the Soviet tradition, they were almost not developed. I rely on the recent discussion on kinship theories carried out by such scholars, as: David Schneider, Janet Carsten, Susanne Brandtstädter, Marilyn Strathern, Bruno Latour; and in Mongolian studies particularly – Szynkiewicz, Sneath, Atwood.

Studies of kinship in the Western societies were rare because it was considered to be the minor aspect of social organization [Carsten, 2004: 15], except for the cases of the technological development and their influence on the new forms of kinship. The "blood" bonds in the contemporary societies are superseded/elaborated with the fascination with gene and genetics as defining crucial elements of kinship. Such an approach shaped the "genetic" family ideal, which gained unexpected popularity among researchers, policy makers, and in the culture at large [Wegar, 2000: 363]. The revision of the classic kinship theories was produced in the Western societies, where the development of DNA studies, in vitro reproductive technologies, assisted conception, appearing of homoparental families, etc. were said to replace, or at least, modify the classic kinship theories in the Western societies. At the same time, the more traditional ("classic") concepts of kinship tended to be located in non-Western cultures [Carsten, 2004: 23], such as the Buryat one, stressing largely the constant features of kinship, the traces of its traditional forms which "up till now", "still" exist and matter. Thus, despite the revision of biological determinism in the anthropological studies of kinship, it remains as the central element of its both colloquial and scientific understanding of the term.

This imagery provided basis for one of the main critiques of the so-called "classic" kinship.[43] It was pointed out that these ideas were inherent to Euro-American folk imagination with such concepts as nature–culture, sexual procreation [Carsten, 2004]. Being transplanted to the non-European context through the academic discourse, they were applied almost without limit to various ideas concerning social structure. As a result, a whole range of cultural ideas were/are attributed simply to kinship [Schneider, 1980]. To date, the main methodology of those who followed this critique is discovering other cultural forms of relatedness, e.g. bonds established through different magic rituals or social activities that could "tie" people by blood [Ossowski, 1966]. Stuart Thompson introduces concepts of "co-associational substances" in the

[43] Under "classic" kinship researchers usually imply the works on "kinship system" which tended to dominate anthropological studies in the early 20th century. In this context, Schneider occupies a pivotal role in the reformulation of kinship studies in anthropology [Carsten, 2004: 18].

maintaining and constructing of kinship, which could be the offerings, food exchange, participation in rituals and other symbolic actions and substances [Thompson, 1988]. The wide range of the term "relatedness" itself was used as an attempt to get rid of biological connotations of kinship in its analysis in order to theorize in frames of more fluid and active terms [Carsten, 2004; Brandtstädter, Santos 2009: 10].

In this chapter, I will follow this trend by introducing a special kind of relatedness from the Buryat case, which I will call "vital forces". From my point of view, this enigmatic idea allows for a broader interpretation of social order than the idea of "classic" kinship as commonly understood in social sciences. This is the very reason why the local ideas of relatedness should be explored and introduced as alternative analytical categories.

3.2. The relatedness of vital forces

Let me begin with a literary fable by Dorzho Sultimov entitled *Mother's Tenderness* (*Ekhyn enkherel*), where the protagonist, Buda, meets a strange old woman who strikingly reminded him of his own already departed mother. He was moved by seeing the old woman during a journey far away from his home place. They had a very short but warm conversation and, at its end, the woman finally spoke the following words:

> What a nice name you bear… The name of Buddha… Buda, I am giving you my age/lifetime. There is such a tradition (*zanshal*) among Mongolian people… Take my age/lifetime – said the old woman [Sultimov, 2012: 106].

The protagonist was deeply impressed with her words and the meeting – the old woman seemed to encompass the essence of motherhood and bestowed on him her vital energy. Despite it being a literary fable, the root motif of the story is based on clear cultural imagination of human relations. During my fieldwork in Buryatia, I could hear similar stories told by the locals. I met a woman who, while herself adopted into the family, used to be a beloved granddaughter and took special care of her grandmother when she became severely ill. She remembers a particular moment when the grandmother told her *Minii nahye*

abaarai – Take my age/lifetime, before she passed away. She found this phrase very touching, a kind of special blessing from her grandmother that she felt will surely bring happiness to her life and reflect on her being a good granddaughter.

These stories introduce us to a fascinating topic of vital forces – a kind of substance, energy or force that can be transmitted beyond the narrowly understood biological heredity. In these examples, one's lifetime, success, and virtue are considered in the category of richness, which can be reduced or multiplied, and can be granted to another person [Tangad, 2013: 118]. Certain "materialities" in this sense, unlike in biological heredity, can be transmitted between even genetically unrelated people.

The biological conceptions of kinship enjoy a strong position in the Buryat society as well. The metaphor of blood as the mode transmitting both maternal and paternal substances is also now common among Buryats, and even more common due to the accelerating language shift to Russian. It was borrowed and cultivated together with the Western medical institutions and technologies from the beginning of the 20th century. In the same way, genetic studies enjoy remarkable authority, though, in fact, many of their ideas are interpreted within the framework of the local culture of knowledge. Local ideas of relatedness did not disappear in confrontation with newly adopted "scientific" explanations.

The continuum of generations in the Buryat traditional culture is associated not merely with biological reproduction or blood ties, but also with the flow of particular vital forces. The term "vital force" is used by scholars of Mongolian studies for denoting multiple notions of vitality like: *amin, sülde, khii morin, zayaa, buyan* and other that I will introduce below [Galdanova, 1987: 54; Morokhoeva, 1994: 19; Sajinčogtu, 2000: 36; Humphrey, Ujeed, 2012; Tangad, 2013: 90–120]. Similar understanding of relatedness was explored in Nahuatl culture by Alfredo López Austin (1988), and also by Julia Madajczak (2014), with both scholars using the concept of "transmission of vital essences". These vital energies of cosmic origin constitute the kin relationship not only within family, but also in various interactions between individuals of broader social groups. Such tradition also existed in Chinese culture

at least of the late imperial China, where the essential element of natural kinship between father and child was the *qi* energy transmitted at the moment of conception. At the same time, the upbringing and education was believed to create ties even between unrelated people [Bray, 2009: 189–190]. These parallels from different cultures are not meant to conglomerate another universalistic model, but to justify the possibility and consistency of such a vision.

In short, parents endow their children with vital forces, transmitted not only at the moment of impregnation, but throughout lifetime. These relations of vital forces could be traced on various levels – family relations, other social or even political levels. I will, first of all, focus on the role of vitality on the level of immediate human relations within family, using material from my fieldwork to prove that "classic" kinship is too narrow a concept to allow for understanding of human relations in this culture.

The channel of the ancestral vital force is the "bone[44]" (*yasan*), which is "visualized as a line of male ancestors going back in time from the subject, or alternatively as a series of lines descending from a single ancestor in the past" [Humphrey, Sneath, 1999: 26]. The concept of *bone* among Buryats and other Mongols is comparable with the role of *blood* among Europeans. It cooperates with constellation of notions like: *ug, udam, esege, obog*, etc. – "ancestral line, ancestry, ancestor", which requires reciprocity through the maintaining of proper social order and rituals. Among Western Buryats people would differentiate by the quality of *udkha* (root, essence) – a kind of "supernatural ability", "vitality" of the bone line, which could reveal itself in skills, physical health or other abilities. Quality and complementarity of one's *udkha* served as an important criterion for matching marriages and hereditary access to the specialties of one's ancestors [Humphrey, 1983: 53; Morokhoeva, 1994: 41, 46–47; Hamayon, 2006: 28]. A similar notion is referred to as *shanar/shinar/chinar* among the Transbaikalia Buryats – "intrinsic quality" [Hamayon, 2006: 29]. Though ideas of the qualities are usually described in the relationship with the "shamanic"

[44] Interestingly, the terms referring to the concepts of "nation", "people" are denoting the bone relation categories: *yahan* (clan), *yahatan* (people of a common bone).

practices,[45] they also exist as ideas concerning regular people, as descent of a particular group and ancestry.

The blood as the transporter of the kinship, as well as flesh, is seen as inherited from the maternal line, thus, the relatives from the mother's side are called *shuhan/čisun türel* (blood relatives) or *myakhan türel* (flesh relatives), who, however, were considered strange to the subject. Blood here is more akin to the European concept of milk. It is worth noting that, up until the recent time, the marriages between matrilateral cousins were allowed and were even considered the most preferable form [Bulag, 1998: 112], which is one more contradiction to the "natural", "biological" taboos of incest (a matter for further considerations). However, this curious fact of considering kinship nowadays is denied by most people that I talked to. It would be wrong, however, to argue the major importance of the patrilineal kinship in the modern Buryat society, ignoring others, like women kinship, etc. Usually in the works, the happiness of having children is attributed to the male-centric interpretations, like the need to continue the family line, etc.; however, the Buryat women, both today and in the past, express their desire of having children with some other motives, which could be very personal in the core sense. Child of a single mother even in that case should be connected to the ancestral vital forces, which more often become that of its maternal grandfather. Usually it receives the mother's surname (*familia*) and is sheltered under mother's patrilineal ancestry (*ug*).

As I found out, the paternal line (bone bonds) was seen not as simply biological continuity, but also "spiritual" one (vital force flow), conceptualized most often in the term: *ug*. It is clearly seen in child adoption – a common practice among Buryats, even more common in the past. In the context of high infant mortality in the past and high cultural value of having children, the society should have generated special understanding of what kin and genealogy should look like.[46] There can be revealed two types of adoption in terms of the bone bonds. When

[45] Similar processes could be seen also in the idea of *kyrgyzchylyk* in Kyrgyzstan [cf. Atipaeva, Molchanova, 2007].

[46] In the pre-revolution period (the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century), the family size was rather small due to the atomization of extended patriarchal families and high rate of infant mortality [Basaeva, 1980: 15, 66].

a child had lost parents and was taken to a relative family, it retained his deceased father's *ug*. The second case regards children adopted by families with few or no children from more often living natal parents [Linkhovoin, 2012: 123]. At the same time, child adopted from a rich and large family could bring the vital force of its previous environment to the childless foster family and, thus, repair their vitality [Basaeva, 1980: 113]. The "given" children should be adopted by clan's "spiritual" lineage or "spiritual" parents – *ug*, which is considered to be a more relevant category than "biological" continuity. One of the informants told me the following story:

> My husband was adopted by his mother from a distant related family. He knows them and keeps contacts up until now. From a particular moment in his life he started suffering from misfortunes and we had to go to the *medelshen* (~"the one who knows") who said that he was stuck between two *ugs*: the *ug* of his origin family had let him go, but the *ug* of his foster home yet hadn't accepted him. We performed all necessary rituals and from now on we try not to search any information about his previous family [a fieldwork note, 2012, a translation from Buryat].

As the woman told me, during rituals, as well as in everyday life, the family tries to manifest the affiliation to the foster *ug* for strengthening the "vital" background of their family. They still have good contacts with the relatives of his origin, but avoid participating in any of their kin rituals. The ancestral line should be strictly defined, at least during the rituals; otherwise, it could be hostile to a human. The rituals involving the "ancestral" force could be both of shamanist and Buddhist traditions, which I will develop in another part of the book. In fact, such vitality background could hardly be called exceptionally ancestral – it could stretch to the vitality of power figures, Buddhist *bodhisattvas*, or be associated with other ideas of precedence. In many cases, the term ancestry is used rather metaphorically. There could be no human included in the descent continuum, or it will be cut off from the ancestral virtue as an electronic device from the plug box: one's ancestors seem to be the only shelter in the world full of alien and unfavourable forces.

3.3. The ideas of vital force

The ideas of vital forces, generally, in Mongolian culture, were noticed among others during the first attempts to translate the Bible into the Buryat (Mongolian) language. The Russian Orientalist Pozdneev in his unpublished letter to Veniamin, the archbishop of Irkutsk and Nerchinsk [Kulganek, 2000], described serious misinterpretations in the Buryat translation of Holy Bible (in the Classical Mongolian script) made by native Buryats under the supervision of Nikolai Il'minski (1822–1879). Pozdneev's highly sarcastic letter argues that the translated version scandalizes the original, the words of missionaries would not be taken seriously and, instead of converting the Buryats, the missionary activity would bring about the opposite result. A large part of his letter was devoted to the ways of translation of Christian soul into the Buryat language:

> The translator did not think about the fact that shamans apart from other superstitions believe that the consternation is caused by temporary escape of soul from body; and if it is not called back, it will be in eternal escape. If the soul "runs away", as they say it, shaman can call it back by the ritual known as "sunesu dudakhu". Such calling the soul back is made by means of *khur*.[47] And if after long cries the ill man will regain conscience, it is said that the shaman *am' oruulazh* to that man, which could be translated as "installed soul to somebody". It is this phrase that is used by the translators regarding the miracles of Christ: "Khristos nege khurer ukhehen ula-ta ami orula" [Christ with single word installed the soul in the dead man]. Christ in the understanding of the *inorodtsy* is downgraded to the level of a shaman, perhaps a mighty shaman, because while regular shaman cries all day long to bring the soul (*ami oruulkha*), Christ installed the live-creating spirit just with one "khur" (*nige khur*), which is the phrase chosen by translator to denote "single word" [Kulganek, 2000].

The dissatisfaction of Pozdneev is quite understandable – all the phrases used in the translation had associations with the worldview offered by Buddhist and shamanic practices. Though criticizing the proposed versions, he did not propose variants that are more proper

[47] Earlier, Pozdneev explains it as the shamanic ritual speech, which is not used regarding regular people and is even pejoratively neglected by Buddhist Buryats. *Khur*, he explains, initially denoted a mouth instrument used by a shaman.

instead. He concludes that the task was impossible at that moment and required time to work out adequate equivalents and solutions in language in future.

However, the solution has still not been found. In the text of *The Book of Genesis*,[48] in the modern Buryat language, the soul is translated using three different terms, while in some places it was simply omitted. That is not to discredit the capability of the translators, but to show the deep conceptual differences, which do not let words and notions be understood and translated so readily.

The ideas of the vital forces could not be seen simply as counterparts of Christian imagination of human soul, because they propose a different concept of humanity and, as a result, a distinct view on social structure. And, if for the contemporary Buryats the ideas of Christian soul could be understandable, they still lack the verbal means to translate numerous notions connected with the vision of vitality in their culture. Thus, not always, the researcher is sure to rely on what the discourse offers; rather deep observations could help to trace the more or less holistic categories, which bear a wide range of labels in speech. Indeed, most of the young Buryats today correctly understand and distinguish the Buryat corresponding terms of soul. Nevertheless, the idea of vital force definitely exists in their world perception and is observed through the rituals and ways of behaviour. This could serve as an excellent illustration of how some cultural categories could endure even a high degree of the language shift and assimilation processes.

For describing the Buryat counterparts of the Western "soul", we should not categorize them as spiritual or material, individual or collective, and all other qualities used to distinguish them through the Christian worldview. It is a great challenge to use the term "soul" for it, while, further on, I will describe what the concept is not. The mentioned concept of "vital force" includes various kinds of ideas, like: *ami, sülde/hülde, sünesün/hünehen, khiimorin, sür, suu, zali, sog/tsog*, varying much from region to region and, therefore, interpreted in different ways.

[48] In the text, I used the translation of *The Book of Genesis* provided under the patronage of the St Petersburg branch of the Russian Bible Society: https://knigogid.ru/books/208173-ehiney-ehin-kniga-bytiya-na-buryatskom-yazyke/toread (access date: 04.12.2012).

There are no common conceptions of what this or that term means for Buryats, as if it were difficult for them to imagine a separate substance or essence the term could refer to.

The term "vital force" or "vital power" was used, among others, by Tu Wei-Ming to denote similar dynamic energy fields to overcome the dichotomy of spirit and matter in description of Chinese world model. The scholar finds it more adequate than other terms, like: "matter-energy", "material force" proposed by other researchers for similar ideas [Wei-Ming, 1989: 68]. In outlining the term "vital forces" I also follow the Buryat ethnographer Galina Galdanova, who defined it as multi-leveled imagination of forces initiating and supporting vitality [Galdanova, 1987: 54; Tangad, 2013: 90]. She writes that the idea of multiple souls evolves into the single individual soul. Though Galdanova considers the belief in vital forces to be the founding element of the individual soul, other scholars, like: Zoya Morokhoeva, Tangad, Zapaśnik consider these ideas without referring to evolutionary conceptions and in the close relation with the diverse ideas of the human individual in non-European cultures, which I am going to develop throughout the whole book. Thus, in the research I will apply the term "vital force", or sometimes "vitality", to denote these various "psychophysical structures" of the Buryat world order.

The idea of vital forces as distinct from the European concept of soul and spirit was the topic of interest of Inner Mongolian researcher V. Sajinčogtu. In his work entitled *Ami-ijn Situlge* (*The Worship of Amin*, 2000), he introduces a line of interesting implications for introducing the native concepts of vitality in academic analysis. In particular, he protests against using the term "animism" regarding the beliefs systems of Mongols, because the concept of soul (anima) never existed in this culture. Instead of it, he introduced the term "aminism" derived from one of the vital forces *amin* [Sajinčogtu, 2000: 3]. According to Sajinčogtu, *amin* is the central category of the strongest kind of vitality in the Mongolian culture.

The Book of Genesis in the Buryat language offers the term *amin* (and its derivatives) for the concept of Christian soul. The very concept *amin* is translated both as a "soul" and as "life" in various texts. However, *amin* should not be understood as a soul-like animistic entity belonging

exclusively to the human beings, but rather as a kind of vital ability possessed by animals, plants, landscape objects, etc. It is a vital force circulating all over the universe, the same as breath and blood flows through arteries.[49] It marks no difference between humans and the rest of the world – a landscape can live, feel and die the same way as a living creature.

This vital force is distributed all over the universe, though in different proportions. The areas without this force are in decline and dying; a person (or, other animal) with weak *amin* (*hula amitai*) should receive this vital force or die to be consumed by other "creatures". In order to avoid this, multiple rituals are held for bringing *amin* to the person suffering from its lack. This is the case of very common rituals *amin goloi andaldaan* of transferring *amin* to a weak person from a horse, or other domestic animal [Tangad, 2013: 93]. Another related rite is *amin zolig* – the exchanging of *amin* using twin dolls of a weak person, which is known both in shamanistic and Buddhist rituality, especially in Chod practices. The motif of transformations of one thing to another perceived in the metaphor of birth and death. *Amin*, the same as food, is received from many sources, consumed, renewed and transferred to other objects. It cannot be imagined as a substance with specific ontology as every object is a child and the body of this force flow – there is no need to think of it in the categories of transcendence.

Perhaps *amin* was used for denoting Christian soul for it could be granted to the object (*ami ugekhe*; *amiluulkha* – "giving breath") and its loss brings the death of the object (*ami tahalkha* to "interrupt ami", *ami tabikha* "to leave ami" – all meaning "to die"; *amigüi* "without ami" – meaning "dead"). However, as we have already discussed, it has the meaning of universal vitality, which is not inherent exclusively to humans.

A different concept that could have functioned as the Christian *soul* is the *sünesün/hünehen*, but translators of *The Book of Genesis* into Buryat did not use it and I wonder why. Perhaps, the *sünesün* lacks the properties

[49] The word *amin* is the root for the words, like: *amilakha* – "to breathe"; *amidaral* – "life" and is closely associated with blood [Sajinčogtu, 2000: 39; Tangad, 2013: 93].

of that strong vitality that *amin* possesses – a person who loses the *sünesün* stays still alive. It can be the result of a sudden fear, constant stress that makes *sünesün* depart from the human body which, therefore, is becoming less resilient to life difficulties – the loss of *sünesün* means shortage of vital force, and if the proper rites of "summoning the *hünehen*" (*hünehe duudakha*) are not held, it is going to lead to the mortal end. Other sources of vitality such as *buyan* (virtue) can suspend the death, so a person without *sünesün* can live another half, or a whole year, and if the lack is not noticed by the subject or his environment, there is no chance of avoiding death. In contrast to *amin*, after it leaves the body, it is not dispersed, but lives its own life as a "demon", or a wandering "spirit". In the Buryat Buddhism, the term is used also for denoting the reincarnating substance (though not all the Buryats that I talked to are quite sure about this particular term for the reincarnating unit). It is different from the Christian soul in various other aspects. In contrast to the Russian understanding of a soul, as the sphere of inner experience, it has no connection with the "seat" of human emotional life, or feelings, and, thus, it has weak connections with the definition of the self.

Not only humans possess *sünesün*, but also animals, and it is believed to dwell in their cannon bone. Because of this, the Buryats do not throw the cannon bones of domestic animals out unbroken to let the *sünesün* find its further reincarnation. The popular Buryat contest *heer shaalgan* on breaking the cannon bone of cow has also the purpose of this kind [Galdanova, 1987: 53; Sodnompilova, 2009: 339].

While *amin* is perceived as a general vitality and existence, the other vital force is more connected with the structuring and ordering force – *sülde* (Humphrey and Ujeed propose the following translations: *might, life force, inspiration* [Humphrey, Ujeed, 2012: 152]). Certainly, *sülde* is associated more with the masculine force, which is connected with humans through generations of ancestors in the male line. It serves as the major component of "kinship" and generational heredity in the association with other notions of ancestry such as: *ug, udam*. A good way to express it is the term "collective soul" or "clan soul" as it covers communities of different size – beginning with family members and ending with clans and even nations. Thus, flags and

national symbols could be called *sülde*, not only because of being the symbol of folk pride, but also the source of nation's vital power and security. The group leader who is perceived as the father of community concentrates this force.

In old Mongolian astrological books, the term *sülde* sometimes is used to translate Tibetan *rlung-rta*, usually interpreted as *kei morin* "wind-horse" [Zhimbeeva, 2010: 18, 50]. The word *kei* or *khii* is of the same root as Chinese notion *qi*, which according to Wei-Ming denotes overall vital force close in the meaning to that of *amin* in the Buryat culture. *Khii morin*, which, in the recent past, was associated with the masculine power similar to the *sülde*, in the modern Buryat culture becomes a general vital force, regardless of the gender. One can feel a scarcity of this energy because it leads to constant weakness and bad luck. The *khii morin* could be also disturbed due to the bad treatment in family, thus, the harmony in family determines the vital force level of its members. The special flags *khii morin* with the depiction of the wind-horse are installed in special places during the ceremonies, or the recommendation of lama. These vital forces[50] should be renewed and maintained through participation in different rituals and can apply both to single individuals and to larger social groups [Humphrey, Ujeed, 2012: 155].

The belief in the collective character of the vital forces is closely related to the ideas of social order. Back in the beginning of the 20th century, Kotwicz considered the notions of vitality and their relations with the ideas of power in the medieval Mongolia. There, he states that the figures of power were considered to concentrate forces, like: *sü žali, küč*, granted form the heavenly order. He calls it the "formula of power" [Kotwicz, KIII-19/32]. Thus, the ideas of the vital forces in ethnography and anthropology were often attributed to the Weberian concepts of charisma. Skrynnikova proposed a similar conception in her book *Charisma and Power During the Epoch of Chinggis Khan* (2013), which analyzed the idioms of power among the Mongols, basing on her research of the early medieval sources. She reveals a range of important ideas, like

[50] Charles Bawden distinguished the division between vitality (*sur, sulde, kei--morin*) and soul (*sunesu, ami*) [Sarkozi, Sazykin, 2004: 2].

the centrality of a leader who concentrates and represents charisma of the whole group. The idioms, like: "son of Heaven", "khan" fixed the central status of a leader as the universal monarch and attributed to him the ability to fulfil the rituals of cosmic importance. The charisma of the leader after his death becomes communal treasure worshipped in ancestor cults. Though these materials inspired me much during the writing of the book, I would like to opt out of seeing the vital forces in the categories of Weberian charisma, because it implies the linear change into the more "advanced" ("legalistic") concepts of social authority (though it should not be this way) [Weber, 1975: 545, 550].

The modern vision of vitality apart from the relations with the ancestral origin or leadership depends much on the cosmic environment. Galdanova also writes that with the spread of Buddhism, the Buddhist clergy in their contest with the shamanic influence of spirits attached the Buryat souls to astrology *zurkhai* and astrological predispositions recommendation [Galdanova, 1987: 190]. The impressive Buddhist knowledge of astrology, therefore, could monopolize the inner life of the human being, because human being was the combination of these cosmic processes, which are accessible to the lamas. One's illnesses, misfortune and other disasters are evidence of the disturbance of his relations with cosmos, or disharmony with the universe.

Despite the rejection of eternal soul in Buddhism, it had to accept numerous rituals related to the soul after death. The ideas of reincarnation, in fact, were not a surprise for the Buryats because the belief in animistic entities moving and incarnating had been already existing. Even though in Buddhism the souls' next incarnation depends on the karmic issues, the Buryats still prefer to think that reincarnation takes place within the group of relatives. Moreover, the karma has not individual, but collective consequences [Dandaron, 1995: 7], producing negative or positive vitality for the group of descendants and relatives. As Galdanova writes, the condemnation relied not on the threat of suffering in hell, or bad incarnation, but on the loss of descendants [Galdanova, 1987: 90]. Despite the Buddhist influence on the understanding of the vital forces, the basic categories of thinking survived the changes. These are non-individual character, the motif of circulation and dependency on the social and cosmic environment.

The Buddhist idea of karma has received validity in the Russian culture almost as a colloquial idea [Linquist, 2009: 339–341]. This is also a word which one could hear always in the Buryat field. Curiously, it is used as a borrowing from the terminology in the Russian literature. The Buryat literary word for karma *uiliin uri* is almost absent in the field. The metaphor of dynamic vital forces is more current in the common imagination than the simple cause-and-effect rule. These two imaginations of external objectivity are perhaps intermixed on certain levels, though should be perhaps divorced. Vital forces are the major category which embodies the Buddhist ideas of karma, incarnation with the shamanist view on the ancestry, blessing.

Apart from denoting the kind of "animistic" entity, most other important ideas, like: being rich, age, life, wellness, feelings and emotions are perceived in the categories of the vital forces. For example, one's richness and wealth depend on the vital force denoted as *khesheg*. The predisposition to the wealth depends on one's ancestral background which, due to the proper behaviour, accumulated such force. The Buryat understanding of wealth is very different from the Western perception. Here, wealth is an indicator of personal and ancestral merits – the one who does not deserve it will never be wealthy. The wealth accumulated in a wrong way does not stay (*togtokhogui*) for long and will quickly disappear.

To understand it better, let me quote a family legend of one of my senior informants. One of her ancestors, called Tegshe Bayan, was extremely rich with numerous horses. He decided to bring a wife from southern regions of Khori who was a daughter of another rich man. According to the family legend, the bride came to his house on hundreds of camels with her goods, and her father asked a special bride price for her:

> He demanded 99 horses for his daughter… from those parents of the fiancé. Of course, he had horses to give, but the 99th horse was very little, humbled. They were all whitish (*sankhir*), all 99 were of single coat color. What a bad man was that rich person to use such a trick! He just told him to give him 99 white horses. They could not find the 99th, but there was a humbled three-year-old horse of similar colour. But it was very hard for them to take him – though he was very little and humbled, he was *khüleg*. But, they used all their forces to

> drive him with all other horses to the destination. Perhaps, there was a person from that family who was to take them all. After the horses were driven away, his horses [of Bayan Tegshe – A. Zh.] died one after another. Because the 99th horse was *khüleg* and was taken by the family of the girl. Perhaps that family consulted with an *udagan* (a shaman woman) who instructed them to take 99 white horses and thus take all his *khesheg*. […] Perhaps, she told them to bring at all costs that 99th humble horse […]. Thus, they took all their *khesheg*[51] [151027_001, translation from Buryat].

According to the informant, the couple did not live together for a long time, and soon they divorced, and the bride came back to her parents. The informant concludes that rich people would "try to eat each other" *edilsekhe*, which means that they strived to take wealth of their rivals through different ways. Here, wealth is not the material good, but the vital force of wealth *khesheg,* which could be transmitted to another person, taken or stolen. The 99th humble horse embodied the *khesheg* of Tegshe Bayan and by driving him away, he also drove away the vital force. Thus, his wealth started to degrade.

The motif of the story is very familiar for the Buryat listener. Such behaviour was also noted by Roberte Hamayon, who described how western Buryats used wordy provocation to attract the rival's wealth [Hamayon, 2006]. Apart from these rival connotations, much more popular is the motif of sharing *khesheg* with other people. The gifts given by wealthy people bring wealth to the receiver, as Tangad wrote – the the wealth of other people is "passed on" to the receiver [Tangad, 2013: 120–121]. The *khesheg* also is repaired by the intervention of lama, or shaman, which is very common phenomenon among the Buryats. According to the opinion of my informants, all the entrepreneurs, politicians have their trusted lamas and shamans to accumulate their vitality, wealth and protect it from their rivals. Apart from *khesheg* of kin group, there exists *khesheg* of locality, land, or a region. *Khesheg* of locality is embodied in the richness of its dwellers, the multiplicity of livestock, the high fertility of soil and animals. Annual summer rituals *oboo*, among others, should accumulate the *khesheg* of the locality,

[51] The plot of this family legend resembles another folk story of the white orphan camel colt.

which is expressed in the proper amount of rain and the general wealth of the people.

Khesheg is often paired with the notion of *buyan*, which is Buddhist idea of a virtue and merit. *Buyan* is accumulating positive karma through good deeds and merits. Doing *buyan* (*buyan khekhe*) includes numerous monastic services and forms a section of ceremonies, such as: offerings to mountain gods, etc. [Humphrey, Ujeed, 2012: 154]. In fact, *buyan* is thought of in the categories of the material richness – one can inherit it from worthy ancestors, accumulate it, spend it necessarily (*buyanaa edlkhe* – to use/to harvest the fruits of one's *buyan*), and it can expire. It is a common story that children have lucky life because their grandparents gathered *buyan* through the good deeds, prayers, visiting holy places, etc.

Humphrey and the Inner Mongolian scholar Hürelbaatar Ujeed in the article *Fortune in the Wind…* (2012), based on their fieldwork among Urad Mongols, write about the terrain of ideas of fortune, which is connected with the idea of vital forces:

> The main groupings of ideas translatable as "fortune" are the following: Buddhist karmic fortune, which determines one's life chances by the deeds one had performed in previous lives (and since these are unknown, the effect can appear to be fortune-like); astrological fortune, whereby a person's time of birth is linked with auspicious/inauspicious zodiac signs, the 12-animal cycle, and so forth; and, the fortune of place, which designates certain landscape configurations as favorable/adverse. Then, there is the non-Buddhist idea of destiny (*jiya*), which is often described as a person's lot or share (*huv or huv jiya*). Another kind of fortune is that of pure chance or luck (*az, zol, zol zavsiyan*) [Humphrey, Ujeed, 2012: 153].

All these terms function in the Buryat culture in the same way. Besides, the ideas of vital forces also find their embodiment in the Russian terminology. For instance, the concept of Lev Gumilev's *passionarity* (1989) is very close to the ideas of vital force I am describing here. It could be one of the reasons why his works are popular among many people of the Central and Inner Asia and played an important role in the nation-building processes. It is quite commonly used notion that I met in the fieldwork. In the Buryat TV program, *Mungen Serge*, the Buryat writer, Basaa Valera, in an interview says:

> That his [Gumilev's – A. Zh.] passionarity perhaps falls on the fifties and sixties in Sheberte. Because, suddenly there were born dozens, two dozens of children, not only Dondog [the poet Dondog Ulzytuev – A. Zh.], but also many other children… Some of them became writers, some of them singers, some of them painters, all of them were talented boys [Basaa, 2016,[52] translation from Buryat].

Concluding this part, let me emphasize that, unlike the soul, which is a substantial individual entity, the Buryat vital forces have communal origin. That also implies the communal, not individual, sense of virtue and sin and their consequences. The human has a much longer history than that beginning from the moment of his birth or conception. A child is not *tabula rasa*, but already has certain predispositions, which are not seen as purely biological genome, but depend on the state of his or her vital forces. The biology deals with descriptions and ordering of a very special part of the universe, which is called life [Morowitz, 1989: 37]. In fact, we can say that the Buryat view on a human being is not conceptualized in the terms of biology, but rather in the categories of physics. There is no popular division between the "inorganic" and "organic" sciences because the categories of vital continuum blur these spheres and make them inter-penetrable. It problematizes the demarcation between the physics and biology, social order and the rest of the universe [Kabzińska-Stawarz, 1992]. Social relations are incorporated into the physics of the universe. The state of the human body depends largely on astrology, environment and the flow of vitality – and vice versa – the state of the environment depends on the acts of the human beings. They are shared between the offspring of single ancestors and can even circulate between unrelated people and objects of non-human origin. And, none of the Buryat souls is able to serve as the base for a self-referential autonomous entity. In the succeeding part, I am going to present the practices of distributing and maintaining vitality in order to offer a deeper insight into this idea.

[52] http://www.arigus-tv.ru/news/video/193/89711/ (access date: 12.12.2016)

3.4. The hierarchy of vitality: Some practices of maintaining the relatedness

Let me return, again, to the stories about what was described at the beginning of the chapter. Both heroes of these stories received lifetime/age (*nasal/naha*) for fitting into the role of a good son or a good daughter. They are focused on the topic of "parental love" which serves as a significant metaphor of social relations. Parents precede their child in being close to the ancestral vital forces and, thus, they act as a medium between them – this position constructs the core of the hierarchy. The parents themselves are the deities for their children, and should be treated with reverence, despite their possible faults and misdeeds. Children who offend their parents are considered to have lost the protection of the deities (*sakhyusan*) and rarely achieve any success in life – they are simply cut off from the vital forces:

> The most important thing of Buryat people is paying respect to parents. If you do not pay respect to parents, senior people, you do not have future. Making *buyan* (virtue) is the most important task of our education from childhood. […] We are not living due to our own achievements, we are living due to the *buyan* (virtue) of our parents [151028_0137, translation from Buryat].

Parents are often called *sakhyusans*, which is the word for Buddhist *bodhisattvas*.[53] The "living deities" (*amidy burkhad*) can feel the vitality of their children, foresee and prevent their future disasters:

> Treat your honoured father and mother
> According to the way (*yosun*) of Buddhism,
> People of this world call them to be living deities in this life [Galshiev, 2012: 94].

The relations between parents and children are one of the major topics in the Buryat public discourse, literature, songs and theatrical plays.[54]

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[53] The Sanskrit notion for "anyone who has generated […] a spontaneous wish and compassionate mind to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bodhisattva, access date: 09.09.2018). In common thinking of Buryats, bodhisattvas are associated broadly with divine beings.

[54] For instance, *Mankurt* staged by Oleg Yumov, on the basis of the novel *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years* by Chingiz Aitmatov; *White Orphan Camelcolt*

Parents are incorporated into the sphere of "sacrum" and serve as the necessary medium between such "sacrum" and an individual. The image of parents, especially that of a mother, is one of the most impressive motives in the Buryat culture extolled not only in songs, but also in the literature, poetry and other arts, and it is comparable to the ideas of a romantic love in the European cultures. An interesting case was related by one 90-year-old informant:

> In the past, when the Buryats were exiled to the north and imprisoned, they would take their mother's boiled urine in a bottle.[55] They would add a few drops to their meal and drink it when they missed their homeland or when they were ill. This cured and helped them [a fieldwork note, 2013, translation from Buryat].

Thus, apart from the biological act of procreation, the human being keeps receiving certain "materialities" from parents through his or her lifetime. Despite the common usage of biological idioms, kinship is not simply the "natural" fact, but a form of relatedness that in the Buryat culture should be maintained and renewed. Otherwise, the "essence" which we describe here as a "vital force", stops circulating between the individuals and brings on their gradual decline. This requires a particular way of constructing relationships. After their death, ancestors lose their distinct identity and turn into an impersonal vital power, which needs to be transmitted to the descendants and be sustained by them [Tangad, 2013].[56]

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based on the folk legend staged by Soizhin Zhambalova; *Ekhe* "Mother" staged on the motives of the novel by Dashzevegiin Mendsaikhan, etc.

[55] The text contains multiple references to physiological extracts, which bear different connotations in this culture. The Buryat-Mongolian social norms had little in common with the European ones, distancing from nature and "shame" of bodily functions [Humphrey, 1992: 176]. Thus, interlocutors in the fieldwork seem to be less reluctant to discuss, or to mention such topics. Quite often, however, they used euphemisms like *yuumen* (the thing).

[56] However, the category of ancestors as an anonymous collective should not be mixed up with simply dead people. The former have the chance to become ancestors unless a life full of suffering, their outcast position, or a tragic death prevent them from being included in the anonymous community of ancestors. Such spirits of the dead people retain their individuality; they are tied to particular places and people from their lifetime, and, thus, usually seen as unwanted, or "abnormal" by living people [Hamayon, 2006: 36–37].

The descendants, in turn, need their vital power for success and well-being, and connect with it through rites and rituals in honour of their ancestors. This cooperation guarantees the continuity of the parties and preserves the normal state of things, while both of them depend on each other.

The understanding of hierarchy in the Buryat culture should be read within this order of dynamic vital forces – something precedes and grants the vital force and something receives it. One's proper place in the universe allows one to receive the vital forces, thus, breaking such hierarchy is considered to be destructive for a person, and also concerns the relations within the related kin groups. Such an interpretation of hierarchy might seem opposite to its colloquial understanding. The superiors in this combination grant vitality to the inferiors, but do not take it. Those, who are residing closer to the sources of vitality become media in relation to those who are further. The proper place in hierarchy is the condition for a normal circulation of vital forces. Such relatedness is realized through the ritual norms, etiquette and prohibitions (*seer*) which do not substantially change within or out of family sphere. One of my interlocutors told me the following story:

> They were told that every family should take in the mother for at least a couple of months and take care of her. Their mother was in a poor state. Therefore, they performed the rituals for prolonging her age at the moment when she was in a very bad condition. This way they gained another year, thus, during this year even their grandchildren had a chance to look after her. I asked why they did it this way, and I was told that they were receiving *buyan* (charity, vital force of charity) [151028_0137, translation from Buryat].

Thus, what is important is not a simple act of respect towards age or position, but the way in which the vital energy is gained or even extracted from the senior person by other family members. With the approach of senility, a person is believed to be on the threshold of the worlds of deities, of ancestors. Although they already stopped having a decisive role in favour of the younger members of family, their words and opinions are considered with a special attention as if they could foresee the future, and bring blessing to their descendants. In everyday life, this attention is expressed through such acts as, for example,

performing massage for the seniors: a child doing massage is considered to receive the vital force of virtue, charity (*buyan*), while the senior, on the contrary, takes in the sin (*nügel*). If an old man scolded a child, the latter also should accept that as a way of receiving the vital forces (*buyan*). Any other assistance to the elderly has always been regarded as acquiring virtue. It is widely considered that looking after a senior person, cheering them up and satisfying their wishes and needs brings longer lifetime, welfare and success:

> My uncle, not long before he departed, asked me to throw out his excrement. I took the latrine and saw that there was almost nothing there. I wondered why he bothered asking at all, but I said nothing and threw it out. When I came back, my uncle said to me: "Live and keep thinking that you looked after your uncle, my dear". Then, I understood that it was his best wishes (*yurool*) for my future life, and I was a fool to hesitate over his intentions [a fieldwork note, 2013, translation from Buryat].

Here, an old woman related a very common belief among Buryats, according to which those who are taking care of seniors, especially helping them with their physiological needs, receive great amount of vital forces and life success. The old people are perceived as radiating vitality, and proper relations with them will allow for it to be granted to other people. The same view could be found also in the work *Bilig-un toli* (*The Mirror of Wisdom*) by lama Erdeni-Khaibzun Galshiev (1855–1915):

> Treat seniors
> As if they were your father and mother.
> There is an old belief of people of the past
> That this will expand your lifetime and wealth [Galshiev, 2012: 94].

The longevity of seniors is also one of the good marks of a group's vitality. In a village of my fieldwork (Zagustai, Kizhinga district of Buryatia), a person died at the age of 103 years, and was considered to bring good luck for locality and people living there.

However, seniors could also hold on to the vitality and effectively take away the vital forces of other people, living or yet unborn, if they live long enough to see their third-great-grandchildren (*düshe*). This belief explains the custom of organizing an honourable funeral

during one's lifetime [Zhimbeeva, 2010: 41]. In the unidentified past, the long-livers were killed or left in the steppe to die. In the Western Buryatia, there was a record of a practice performed on an old person's honour called *öökheüngüülkhe* "make (an old person) chew fat" by driving a long piece of fat into his (rarely her) mouth until it caused breathlessness [Hamayon, 2006: 33; Khangalov, 1958: 11] A similar practice in Mongolia was known as *am' barikh ach* [Hamayon, 2006: 33]. Such a ritual cannot be explained by merely economic accounts of a family – the rituals are products of the specific cultural reality based on the belief of the common vital force and its distribution between family members.

The vital force accumulated by ancestors is, thus, distributed between family members according to their needs. The most vulnerable family member is of course a child, who needs to be protected and endowed with the life forces. Thus, from the very moment of the birth, the child is engaged in a network of dependence regarding its vitality, the same as all other parts of the universe. The parents grant *amin* to their children and, through them, they receive vital forces, success and well-being from the deposit of their ancestral force.

The birth of children depends on the vital forces accumulated by parents. The most important function of a family is not the love and sacral relation between spouses, but the extension of family lineage [Basaeva, 1980]. In the case of problems with conception, apart from the medical assistance, young people resort to visiting places of fertility[57] to enhance their vitality, or look for potential problems in their "spiritual" heredity. In this light, an individual should not be perceived as ontologically autonomous, but as a representative of the whole continuum of descent. The quality of ancestry (*ug, shanar, udkha*), a spiritual bond with ancestors, or the vitality accumulated by past generations, is a matter to which one might relate and, at times, owe the quality of one's character, habits, but also of life success and well-being. It does not resemble the general tendency to attribute the human character,

[57] These are special places where people "beg for children", leaving toys and praying. In Aga Buryat Okrug, we visited two such places: near lake Nozhii and Alkhana mountain range.

human nature and human behaviour to the DNA codes combinations (along with socialization processes), or conceive of them in other purely biological terms.

A lifetime is counted from the moment of conception and the woman bearing a child is restricted with numerous rules and prohibitions. She is to avoid crowded places, being present at funerals, or watching frightening things, etc. The unborn child is already considered to be within its generational continuum, thus, its health and character directly depend on the quality of the ancestral vital force, which can be both weak and strong. This also overlaps with a belief in reincarnation and karma, which in the Buryat case takes place within the related community. A newborn baby is not shown to others, and the family does not receive guests for the first month (or even a year) after a birth. In contrast to Europe, where one can see parents with newborn babies walking on crowded streets, or even during public events, the Buryat babies are hidden from others, and, if necessary, transported in cars or taxis away from the potentially dangerous influences of others. In the evening, especially after the baby has been outside, parents wash it with *arshaan* (water from holy springs or sanctified by lama) and purify it with incense (*sanzai*). Throughout this time a child is nurtured with maternal substances and receives life-force with them. According to some of my interlocutors, such a practice seems to lie behind a common reaction of Buryat children to hide upon seeing strangers. Rituals performed for children are not connected only to "physical" or "psychological" health of a child, but aim to accumulate and enlarge its vitality.

The Buryat idiom associated with one's ancestry and origin (*ug*) is not a tree (as in the case of a genealogical tree), but a water spring (*bulag*) which flows and nurtures its environment.[58] In the same way, a newborn child receives a stream of vital forces (*amin, sünesün, sülde, zayaa*, etc.) from its parents, allowing it to fulfil its potential. One's physical appearance, predisposition, confidence, wealth and life success are believed to be the result of either strong or weak ancestral vital forces, and in the lesser extent that of the soul, DNA, law of consanguinity

[58] "The water spring has its source, the human being has its origin" (*ug*) (a Buryat proverb); *ug bulag* "the origin/water spring" and other idioms.

and individual merit. As I have already mentioned, the ties bonding the child and its ancestry are not a biological fact, but a relation, which should be renewed and maintained through proper rituals and social order. Otherwise, the "spirit-matter", or "vital force", stops circulating between the individuals and brings them a gradual demise.

As such, relations are also based on the exchange of vital forces. A child is perceived to be on the border between a human and a divinity, between descendants and ancestors, and requires special treatment both to protect it and to be protected from the spiritual forces. Due to the high rate of infant mortality in the past, a child was not given a name up to its third year of life and thereafter was considered to be on its way to becoming human (*khün bolokho*) [Basaeva, 1980: 90]. The child's behaviour, especially that of one who does not speak yet, is considered as reliable indicator of vitality and fortune. The child is said to feel the vital force – *amin* – of people, thus, in case it is well disposed to an elderly person, the latter should anticipate a long life. In the opposite case, the child will cry and refuse to approach:

> Children in one house would cry enormously staring at such person. They would see how one breathes (*amilga*), his vitality (*khii*) and everything that one is going to take back. They are amazing fortunetellers (*medelshe*) [a fieldwork note, 2012, translation from Buryat].

If during a visit to one's home, a child wants "to make a poo", it is considered as a symbol of good fortune, bringing richness and wealth to the house – a *khesheg*, or "grace", and vital power [Tangad, 2013: 91], making the master of the house very happy. Those whom children like and eagerly approach should anticipate well-being or new offspring, and when the child gives money or money-like round or glittering objects, one should take and keep them and await good fortune. One informant told me how a polite little son of her friend once unexpectedly spat on her face. The boy's mother, being shocked to the core, immediately started to scold and punish him, but the woman stopped her, saying that the child was just curing her this way (spitting on an ill person's face is one of the traditional curing methods by lama) and that she should be graced with both good health and wealth. Thus, on the one hand, a child receives protection and vital forces from adults, but

on the other hand – adults can receive the forces of richness (*khesheg*), longevity (*uta nahan*) and fertility from a child. This is the other side of "hierarchical" relations which require exchange of these forces.

The examples discussed here were, of course, only a few of the numerous practices which are performed to maintain the relatedness of vital forces. This understanding of substance as flowing and transforming phenomena builds relatedness between persons and remains beyond the current theoretical vocabulary on kinship. What is important here, is the way in which social relations are embedded within the processes of the vital forces' circulation. The principles of the flow of vital forces serve as a basis of numerous beliefs and behaviours which could be mistakenly interpreted as a simple tradition, respectfulness, or economical and hierarchical considerations. Instead, the principles are behind a process of constructing and maintaining of different kinds of relatedness, including kinship, and should be considered together with the ideas of the social order in Buryat culture.

3.5. The order of vitality distribution

3.5.1. *Yosun* – the social order of vitality distribution

In the previous part, I argued that the Buryat worldview did not require ideas for defining the humanity – it is not granted as an individual soul from the transcendent God, neither should one seek it in the atomistic human nature, or biological determinism – the humanity is to be acquired through participation and maintenance of the social orders. I introduced the importance of specific orders which enables the vitality to be distributed among the individuals in a given community. The idea of order and hierarchy in the Buryat culture is embedded in the order of circulating vital forces – the one who is closer to the source grants to those who succeed him. The world seen as circulation of vital, as well as harmful, forces is perceived in the categories of dynamics' continuum that changes according to a specific order.

I have been reflecting long over defining this order in the terms of the Buryat language. From a particular moment, I started paying

attention to the term *yosun*[59] and, soon, understood that it could be applied in very different contexts, which, then, I started to see as a single logic. I never asked my informants directly how they could define the term, but instead I waited until the term could appear in regular speech, here and there, to collect its numerous incarnations.

The term *yosun* was not the only word for expressing the concepts of such orders. In fact, one could choose among many options, like: *zhuram, zhama, zarsham, zhayag, gurim,* which all could be translated simply as an "order". It was often used in combination with the term *yosun* because of the reduplication of words and it is a part of lofty style in the Buryat language. This variety of possible expressions could prove that the Buryat culture assigned a huge importance to the notions of order and harmony. It was also proven true in my fieldwork, where I was frequently told about specific Buryat social organization, but more often I could hear the word *yoho/yosun*. The Buryat *yosun* is something clearly distinguishable for my interlocutors. This type of relations, anticipations and reactions is very often compared to such relations in other cultures and constitutes one of the central elements of Buryat identity. "We did not lose our *yosun*" (*yohoo aldaagui*) is one of the most popular idioms of expressing the national pride. As they say, if there is anything the Buryats could be surely proud of, it is their relations with each other. In the worst times of the history, close relations with kin and countrymen, according to the Buryats, *yosun* are said to prove as the most effective strategy for survival. I was numerously told (and instructed) by my informants that the most important thing of Buryatness is mutual help and respect towards the elderly (*akha zakhaya khundelkhe*) based on "the nice Buryat *yosun*" (*haikhan Buryad yoho*). However, the *yosun* includes the relations which are much wider than purely social.

The word *yosun* is translated in various way: "order", "tradition", "ceremony", and even "culture". Another, more conventional word for "culture" – *soyol* – is more associated with cultural achievements and heritage. Unlike *soyol*, the word *yosun* is the notion of a culture

[59] I am using the Classical Mongolian transliteration *yosun* ᠶᠣᠰᠤᠨ to unify various contemporary spellings and pronunciations in the Buryat dialects (*yoho, yoso*), Khalkha (*yos*), etc., except for the interview quotes and citations.

understood as the way of behaviour and construction of relations of a particular community. I will refer to this idea also as the order and apply it as an analytical category along with that of the vital force. Besides the field data, working with dictionaries and other literature helped me to complete the contextual range of this idea. It is important for me to distinguish it because I want to trace the history of this idea, not to mix it with other related categories. In successive chapters, I will describe the result of this analysis.

3.5.2. The universal order and the universal bonds

The social order in many Asian societies is considered by scholars to be centering on family relations [Solomon, 1971: 28; Doi, 1973; Seung-bog, 1991; Basaeva, 1980, etc.]. However, there is a certain contradiction in discussions of the familyist order in the "Eastern" societies, including the Buryats. On the one hand, researchers note the general high value of a family and strong social bonds modelled on family relations; on the other hand, however, many researchers note the weak emotional bonds between members inside families [Basaeva, 1980]. Claiming that the social structure is centred on the family model, few works consider the character of family relations in these societies. In the text, I am going to show the difficulties associated with this contradiction by presenting some other meaningful aspects of this issue.

In spite of the fact that a family was considered to be a universal phenomenon basing on natural human predispositions, various sociological works prove its forms to be highly relational in human cultures. Particularly, evolutionist and Marxist theories associated modern nuclear family with the result of the modernization of Western societies [Carsten, 2004: 10–11]. All the other non-Western social orders were assumed to be resting on the kinship ties – an extended family, lineage, clan, tribe, etc. The category of kinship in academic descriptions was extended limitlessly to the various distinct ideas and institutions of human groupings of the huge non-Western continent from India to Siberia, from the Middle East to America. This was noted by the precursor of kinship study critique, David Schneider [Schneider, 2004: 311]. According to him, all major theories converted "native cultural

constructs into those of kinship" [Schneider, 1984: 6]. Schneider's critique shows how the theory could deflect the focus of the academic description by proposing ready-made idioms, which depart from the native cultural ideas.

Usually, the familiar content of kinship conveyed through the "Western" representations serves stereotypically as a frame of reference for distinguishing kin and non-kin relations in other cultures [Potter, Potter, 1990: 180]. The family, as a sacrament delivered by God for particular individuals, creates a strict borderline between the private and public spheres. From the 18th to the 20th century, the nuclear family model started to be perceived more and more as a "natural" form of co-dwelling which influenced the space organization and intimate practices, like: having meals, sleeping, or hygiene that implied that private sphere was equated to a family [Woroniecka, 2014a: 54, 43]. The relations within a family should be based on "pure relations": affection, legal act and sacral confirmation from religious institution. With the advancing processes of individualization in the 21st century, even the integrity and agency of a nuclear family is being challenged, and the relation of "we" (family) and others is more and more shifting to "me" and others [Woroniecka, 2014a: 54].

This is, of course, not new in the Buryat society for it, to a great extent, is the product of the global changes in the 20th century and, thus, is not formally different from the Western context. With the appearing of the Soviet state, the Buryats were involved in the different processes of social reforms, including the creation of a nuclear family as the legal subject. The small families, in fact, were widely spread, even before the changes in the 20th century [Basaeva, 1980: 15]. Nevertheless, the Buryat family was neither as hermetic as the (post)industrial nuclear family in Europe, nor the processes of individualization of family members were strange to it. I am not going to analyze the morphological characteristics of the Buryat family in this part of the text, but I will stress certain ideas, which constitute its meaningful context of interpersonal relations within and outside the family. This will provide a clue as to the model of the social structure, which, surprisingly, is considered to be "familyist".

What I want to say is that kin relations are not always in opposition to other kinds of bonds in the Buryat society. One could also say that

kinship does not exist isolated in a family, a group of relatives. Such an ideal of human relations does not distinguish the members of relatives and the strangers. It strives to encompass all possible relations of individuals with others, thus, not always should be attributed to kinship. In the same way, one could equally argue that family relations are based on broader social ones in the Buryat culture.

The borderline between the private and public sphere is not that evident.[60] The sphere of kin and the rest of the environment merged in this mentality and easily could interfere and mix. Therefore, one cannot distinguish clearly family or non-family types of relations as the division has no sense (or has a different sense) in this cultural context. Many of the kin terms have no substantial character, but denote numerous types of relations, which in the Western conceptual perception could refer to distinct spheres. For example, the word *khübüün* means both "son" and "boy", thus, it is a usual term for addressing a younger person by an elderly one, without them necessarily being blood-related. This also concerns the word *basagan*, which can be translated both as a "daughter" and simply as a "girl". Let us add that even an old woman could be called just a "girl" in a contact with a relatively senior person. Another form, *akhai* "elder brother", is also used to refer to any elderly man, and *abgai/egeshi*, refers to older sister, aunt and any elderly woman. Thus, the terms used for family members are applied in a broader social environment. The ideal social model was constructing the relation of parents and child between human beings. These roles are also often referred to as *yosun – ekhyn yohoor* "according to the *yosun* of mother", *aba ezhiin yohoor* "according to the *yosun* of parents". The will of being treated like one's son or treating people like a mother are very common metaphors of ideal human relations.[61]

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[60] This issue was also addressed by Haiyan Lee in her remarkable book *Revolution of the Heart…*: "Insofar as it anchors the continuum of the family-state, the Confucian family has always been a public institution" [Lee, 2007: 242].

[61] The parent–child relation is a traditional pattern of social relations in the Buryat literary culture. I list some examples below: *Oyun Tulkhyur* (~13th century): Treat all the creatures as if you were their only son/Instruct them as father, and feed like a mother [Makhatov, Tsydenova, 2009: 16]; *Bilig-un toli* by Galshiev: They will treat you like their own son [Galshiev, 2012]. *Mongol-Buryaadai tüükhe*

The kin terms, thus, do not reflect the genealogical distance, but the social distance and the character of relations between individuals [Szynkiewicz, 1992: 79]. Quite often, such idioms as *aqa de'ü* "brothers" are interpreted as the expressions of kinship solidarity; such "terminology is used in Mongolian for any form of solidary grouping and was not solely a question of kinship, but also of age, a common residence, and comradeship" [Atwood, 2015: 28]. However, would it not be prejudice to call them still "kinship" terms?

Perhaps, the relationships within and outside family are not thought to be qualitatively different in the Buryat culture. I do not argue that the Buryats did not distinguish the members of their family and the others, but I would like to stress certain attitudes to these relations. This is the problematic area in considering ideas such as private or public spheres in the Buryat context.

As I have already written, sociological interpretations generally lacked the major metaphor of Buryat social relations, that is, the exchange of vitality. In my opinion, one should introduce it as an important factor into the interpretation, because one deals not with the scope of individuals and their subjective imagination, but the humans related with the bonds' vitality to each other. The hierarchy in a succession of the processes, the succession of giving and receiving the vital forces is the central point of all the Buryat interpersonal relations, not the familyist model. The relations both within and outside of family are seen as the part of the more universal order which could be called *yosun*. It is, in this sense, that one can consider that the traits attributed to the familyist model that are rooted in the Western thought are not counted as such in the Buryat culture.

To some extent it is a methodologically deadlock statement which makes it impossible to decide between the two extremes. The thing I am going to highlight once again is that the distinction between real and fictive kinship is useless while considering the Buryat culture. There

orshobo (1905–1907) by Dorzhiev: Everybody should observe the nice order (*zhuram*), telling the proper (*ünen*) path and the teachings (*surgaal*) of proper behaviour (*abari zang*), settling them deep into the soul/mind of one's children and youth. It is an important obligation of father, mother and elders. [Makhatov, Tsydenova, 2009: 255].

could not be distinguished the "real" kinship in a pure form, while it is associated with the kind of relatedness through the vital forces penetrating the borders of biology and nature. In this case, the "real" kinship cannot serve as the background for constructing the fictive one[62] [Carsten, 2004: 140–141]. It is hard to give precedence to kinship as its major component of such kinds of relations.

In order to continue the way of thought, I will turn to some basic relations within family and their incorporation into the social sphere. As it was stated in the previous parts, the image of parents in the Buryat culture is associated with many prohibitions, norms and restrictions. This was the importance of the hierarchy, which let the vital force flow in a proper way. For example, the names of parents were prohibited (*seertei*) from being pronounced by children, either while addressing them, or in vain. The tools used by the father are also not allowed to be touched or played with. In addition, the image of the father himself is considered to be restrained, rather than warm. The relation with the mother, of course, is closer, but still not free of numerous prescriptions. Children usually cannot talk or discuss with parents their personal matters, feelings that are considered generally as unimportant.

The thing is that such ritualized behaviour towards parents even in a more exaggerated form is projected onto other adults outside the family. The youth usually do not talk much to the adults, they are not allowed to talk loudly, pronounce their names; they are preferred to disappear from their sight. They are taught to avoid contact with them or not to keep in contact at all. It is rather assumed that the adults of their family should be the medium in such communication. It is quite usual when parents, or other adults, go to school, or even university teachers, because the former are considered to be unable to talk equally. There exists a certain "age class" division, which segregates the ones who are elderly from those of junior age. Friendship (in its broadest sense) between the individuals of a bigger age difference is hardly

[62] The division between fictive and real kinship, in fact, stems from the very basic division in the nature and culture: the "real" biologically based kinship serves as the primary background for the construction of the "fictive" one [Carsten, 2004: 140–141].

possible among Buryats, as this relationship could be against the "proper" order (*yosun*). This causes a relative isolation of generations, which is, at the same time, justified by the categories of the vital hierarchy. The proper order in a community allows the vital forces to circulate and be distributed in a proper way, reaching every single member.

The family members themselves, even if they have a relaxed atmosphere within their family, once they are in public should behave as if they were carefully following the order. The relations built on affection in Buryat families are thoroughly hidden: the wife should not show affection to her husband and children in public; the father should not screen his children from accusations; even more, it concerns the husband who should not chat with his wife and children too much in the public places, or show special affection to them. Everybody should pretend that the family affective relations (which are the most important component in the Western family) are less important than the public ones. This affection indeed exists, but – according to the cultural view – the intimacy within the family should not qualitatively differ from that outside of it. The relations in family should be built on the "universal" ritual norms and duties (*Buryat yosun*), but not on intimacy and affection, at least not shown in the public. On the other hand, it is not a puritan family and the firm hierarchical order, in many respects, is ritualistic, or even could be called: *theatrical* [Lee, 2007: 242] leaving much emotional freedom. The tensions in the family are a part of this pattern, but only keeping the *yosun* could save it from the clash of various characters.

The idea of single emotional attitude (or manifestation) inside and outside the inner circle seems for me one of the most important conclusions for understanding the Buryat ideas of order. I am aware that in practice one could see various cases other than this pattern; however, such opinions definitely exist and they are relevant in the Buryat culture, and even seen as specific trait that makes them different from other ethnic groups (for example, Russians). Thus, the relation of the "inner" sphere and social bonds should be considered in more detail.

3.5.3. The individual engagement with the order

In a series of works dedicated to the idea of morality, Zapaśnik [Zapaśnik, 2006; 2014; 2016] argued that the contemporary idea of morality has been developing together with the idea of the human individual in European culture from the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. Morality identified with Christian religiosity in the 18th century competed with other philosophical conceptions. Though philosophers abandoned the religious idea of "natural law", they refused to connect its source with God. Nature became its only referential background. The law and morality were understood as different ways of the manifestation of this natural law. The norms of law, as well as policy, were considered as the complementation of the moral sanctions, as the only order, which could control and regulate the human nature for the common good. Morality and law, as previously morality and religion, were not separated from one another in constructing the social order.

The separation of these spheres was possible only with the formulation of the idea that dignity was a non-denied right of every human being. The idea of free will and the individual autonomy were accompanying the ideas of dignity. The changes of the Western thought led to basic axiological ideas, which – according to Steven Lukes – form individualism: the dignity of a man, autonomy, privacy, self-development and the abstract individual [Lukes, 1990]. It was the time when the ideas of individual autonomy, dignity, privacy and liberty from social control gained traction in considering the human being and its rights. From then on, according to Zapaśnik, the morality started to separate from other areas of the social sphere and the human being was seen as willing, self-creating and right-bearing individual. This is when the sphere of emotional experience was thought to be an important expression of the self [Zapaśnik, 2016; Lukes, 1990; Hall, Ames, 1998]. Zapaśnik wrote that the most important idea of Western morality is the obligation of one's integrity, being true to oneself. Thus, the social sphere, as opposed to the nature, in turn falls apart into multiple autonomous individuals with their own ideas of morality who are linked with each other through a social contract, shared norms, values, or law. The sphere of morality concerns the private matters of individuals – and,

this is the major reason why it was separated from such spheres as: social consciousness, customs, religion and the law.

One of these major transformations in the European thought could be seen in the reevaluation of the word "character". As Zapaśnik writes, in the 18th century, the term "character" started to denote not typical features, but that what was untypical, different, or not normal [Zapaśnik, 2016: 3]. With the development of the belief in human free will, there appeared the possibility to construct character with no regard for nature, or other external factors. The human individual, thus, is represented as an autonomous and creative subject, who has the independent right to define the goals of his life, and the means for achieving them [Zapaśnik, 2016: 6]. Feelings let the human act as a subject in the interaction with others and to constitute the important element of self-consciousness and identity. Thus, feelings[63] are the major direction, or intuition which links humans with the abstract ideas connected with morality. Sulamith Heins Potter and Jack Potter argue that social relationships in the Western culture are continuously created by individuals, and maintained by the individual feeling and individual enactment:

[63] In order to avoid further doubts, let me introduce the distinction I make between the feelings and emotions. The distinction is confusing and these two notions can easily interfere or mix. Generally, they are said to be different due to their duration, intensity and focus [Despeux, 2004: 74]. Another, more important distinction between the two is rooted deeply in the basic categories of the Western culture. The nature–culture dichotomy resulted in the division of emotions and feelings, as the phenomena of higher and lower levels. Emotions are perceived to be beyond the individual conscious control, thus, are qualified as a "natural" – psycho-physiological – trait. The innate, fundamental emotions are said to be: joy, sadness, surprise, fear, disgust, anger, etc. [Despeux, 2004: 80], which are closer to soma. Feelings which include emotions, on the contrary, are associated with the higher level of experience, connected with the social and moral development of a human. They include such states of mind as: love, empathy, altruism, patriotism, etc. [Kropkiewicz, 2007: 6], which differ from emotions because of their stable and social-oriented character. They are considered to be of a "higher" level because of their role in constructing the human attitude to the external world. In some aspects, feelings converge with the notion of human soul and mind, which make humans a distinct species from the animal world. Thus, animals in the common Western view are denied having feelings, though not emotions.

> […] the appropriate emotional prerequisite for marriage is love, and a marriage without love is regarded as an impoverished social form. When love no longer exists, it is legitimate to dissolve the marriage. So, emotional experience is taken as a legitimizing basis for social action […]. Relationships are derived from and affirmed by feeling, and feelings are direct expressions of the self [Potter, Potter, 1990: 180].

Potter and Potter made an important conclusion that feelings serve as basis of many social ties in the contemporary Western cultures. Other publications on the European communities also highlight the accelerating tendency of seeing the emotional preference as the key basis for constructing social relations or social "contract" [Woroniecka, 2014a: 50; Kłoskowska, 1969: 440]. Potter and Potter argue that in the culturally distant communities the significance of emotional life is quite different, because it is not applied in the service of the social order.

> Cultural definitions of the appropriate relationship between the emotions of the individual and the social order may vary greatly. The familiar cultural context that provides a frame of reference for anthropologists who are at home in the United States is unusual for its extreme level of emphasis on the importance of emotions as the legitimizing basis that establishes a relationship between a person and a social context [Potter, Potter, 1990: 180].

Unlike the high value of the sphere of inner experience in the Western culture as the "seat" of the self, the inner world (*dotor*[64]) in the Buryat culture more often is associated with smelly organs. The form and etymology of the word itself suggest this experience to be hidden and concealed in interaction with others. Words for character *ayag*, or *zang*,[65] bear negative connotations, thus, to have "character"

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[64] Though the Buryat-Russian dictionary proposes such equivalents, they cannot be called common. The equivalent to "emotions", referring etymologically in French to "movement", in the Buryat language refers to the combination – *set'khelei khudelgöön* (the movements of soul/mind). It never appeared in my fieldwork as a meaningful concept. More often I heard about general idea of inner sphere *dotor*, which is the lexicographical equivalent of the word "feeling".

[65] I have various difficulties in the precise nomination of the ideas of inner sphere for several reasons. The major one is that there are no distinctions, like: flesh/spirit, or spirit/mind, emotion/feeling, etc. The notion *set'khel* which seems to be close to the Chinese concept "heart-mind" *xin* 心 in the sense that it could

(*ayagtai, zangtai*) means being capricious, headstrong, or awkward. The worst thing is showing one's character *zangaa garagakha* (to take out one's own character); *zangaa kharuulakha* (to show one's own character) means to show one's bad features.

Another man's *dotor* (inner sphere) is something inconvenient that everybody should take into the account and cope with. It is seen as dangerous because of direct connections with vitality. One could evoke the emotions that could disturb one's vital balance. The feelings "torture" one's mind/soul (*set'khel/sanaa*) and decrease the vital forces. The feelings are not only connected with what is called *soma* through evoking diseases, but could negatively influence one's professional career, success and generally their social life (and vice versa). The emotional expressiveness is seen as one's weakness.

There are other reasons for hiding one's inner sphere, or not expressing it directly. The major reason is lack of their consistency and, thus, relevancy. The feelings are treated closely to the Western understanding of emotions as irregular, instable and changing. The one who pays excessive attention to his feelings is seen, in the Buryat society, as unreliable and "hypocritical". The Buryat proverb *adag ere arba khubilkha* (the worst of men will change ten times) describes the person who changes his feeling "joyful during one meeting and is unfriendly during another" [a fieldwork note, 2016].

However, the change of behaviour, according to the position of another person, is not seen as "hypocritical", but as a part of the order *yosun*. The order *yosun* designates the particular emotional behaviour depending on one's position. Many such roles are seen as external, or "etic", to the humans if they are determined, for instance, by one's hierarchical position [Potter, Potter, 1990: 187]. Thus, the feeling of rage is proper for the role of father, or a leader: if one behaved according to *yosun*, there is no need to be angry with him, or feel offended. These features should be simply tolerated, due to the functions they perform

be translated both as a soul and a mind, does not have the same weight as the Western mind, or rationality. Neither do the multiple Buryat souls indicate a sense of environmentally independent personhood. I want to begin with the fact that there is no such ethical range between emotions and feelings, and such a division could be hardly made in the language of the Buryat culture.

in the order. The feelings, the mind are seen as out of one's control, not seen to be a relevant part of one's identity and the self because they do not give access to the abstract ideas of morality. Social relations should be constructed first and foremost according to the order. This order decides which "feelings" should be exposed in relations and which of them should be hidden.

The noble way is to ignore them for the sake of fulfilling the obligations or, in the language of the Buryat culture, "to behave according to the way of being" (*yohoor*). This is the courage worth being recognized. The best way of expressing love and doing something good for another person is to fulfil all the rituals and obligations, which will prove one's commitment. Such deeds are not merely empty rituals, but the way of establishing contact for vital force flow and exchange. The more profoundly one fulfils the rituals regarding his parents, the elderly, the more profound are the relations of vital exchange, the more prominent is one's identity. This concerns not merely paying them deep respect, but also very elementary everyday acts as: pouring and spilling tea, using the wrong hand while giving or receiving things, walking ahead of a senior person, speaking loudly, gesticulating excessively. Performing these actions in a wrong way could be treated as not merely insulting for Buryats, but as dangerous for one's vitality.

On the other hand, this order does not require any special emotional engagement as long as the order *yosun* is observed. One could be hostile to another person, but according to the *yosun,* one has to receive him, for example, as a guest, pour tea in a proper way, treat him accordingly, etc. This separation of attitude from the performed order is often defined as formalism *yohosholkho* or *yoho tedui* "doing things just for the order", but it is not stigmatized as in the Western cultures and even often encouraged.

Human individual has to ignore (not repress) and adapt an emotional life. In the folk literature, one can find plenty of sympathetic attitudes towards human feelings, but they are always seen as inferior to the established order. A married girl cries and suffers because she is going to leave her parents' home – it is regretful, but there is no other way out since these are the rules of universe:

An arrow blasted to the heights
Will fall jingling – it is regretful.
You, whose *yosun* is in the strange land
Crying while leaving – it is regretful.
[…]

The water of a sloping place
Flows spilling over banks,
Live and do not disobey the instructions
Of your father and mother.
[Linkhovoin, 2012: 103–104]

One can see the parallelism with a natural order, widely used in the Buryat poetry. The human being is inevitably exposed to the social order as to the malice of winds and weather. This order is very harsh: one has to go through tears and sufferings in order to get through it.[66] One has to get used to it, but also develops affection for this order for this is the only proven way in the world full of uncertainty and chaos. The courage of ignoring emotions, feelings and "character" for the sake of a social/cosmic order is an important part of socialization. It resembles treating children in China, described in the book of Richard Solomon[67]:

> […] it was observed that "as a general rule, the child is left to cry himself out". Adults neither comfort, nor scold the raging youngster, with the result that after a number of ineffectual tries at influencing the offending elder, the child gives up the tactic as useless [Solomon, 1971: 62].

The emotions and feelings of a child are not suppressed – they are simply not taken seriously. They are treated as inferior, or secondary, to the existing order of relationships, which is *yosun*. It is hard to argue that social relationships absolutely lack emotional experience in the Buryat culture, but surely, they do not serve as the link between the self and social order. It represents a different logic than the idea that social ties should be appropriately based on personal feelings.

The human community is seen as the chaos of different characters (*ayag*) and only the proper order (*yosun*) can build agreement between them. The subject of moral act is not an individual, but the universal order. The proper way is to act "according the *yosun*" (*yohoor*). In this sense, the obligation in the Buryat version is referred to as "to

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[66] *Uila uilhaar khün bolodog* "after constant weeping one becomes a human" – a Buryat proverb.

[67] Similar statements can be found in the works by Potter and Potter (1990), Lee (2007).

act according to the order" (*yohotai*). If one is to trust the form of the idiom, the sense of obligation is not coming from inside of the subject, but from the external order *yosun*, existing as a social fact. The order *yosun* does not distinguish subjectivity and objectivity – all the orders are merged within some general transformation. An immoral act, thus, is named: *yoho busa yabadal* "behaviour according to other than *yosun* principle", *yoho buruu* "improperly to the order". Behaving according to *yosun* is judged positively and could serve synonymously to the "good" or "true": *yohoor khün* – a good man; *yostai* – "good", "the most proper". Curiously, the equivalent of mind and intelligence *oyuun/ukhaan* is connected with the knowledge of the order, but not with the individual rationality.

Tangad, in her articles *Nieuchwytna, relatywna wszechobecność – o kategoriach moralności w kulturze mongolskiej* (2016b), *Kategorie tradycyjnej moralności w życiu społecznym współczesnych Mongołów* (2016a), writes that the idea of morality was foreign to Mongolian culture, but it did not imply that the society was behaving immorally. According to Tangad, the source of morality in Mongolian culture is connected with the ideas of order and harmony [Tangad, 2016a: 1; Tangad, 2016b: 112]. The same way, Tangad introduces the idea of *yosun* as the basis for moral judgment and behaviour of Mongols. Indeed, the word *yosun* is very productive in creation of new terms, especially for translating those exported from European philosophy in the 20th century. Thus, morality was translated as *yos surtakhuun*, which, however, by its form refers to pattern and precedence [Humphrey, 1997: 33]. This is when there appears the problem of boundary between the individual and social in the Mongolian culture. It could be said that, in Mongolian culture, morality is understood not in the same way as in the West, because it lacks the idea of an autonomous human individual.

3.5.4. The human agency in the orders

The social sphere is an important part of the cosmic process, which is vividly seen in the role of a human individual in the universe. This social and, at the same time, "natural" order is the first thing which a newborn

Buryat human should interiorize (*hurakha*) in order not to suffer or become extinct: *yoho hurakha* "to learn the order/yosu", *khuugedie yoho zhuramda oruulkha* "to bring one's children to the order". Such training is called *hurgaal/surgaal*[68] "instructions", which is associated with parental directives (*aba ezhiin hurgaal*), Buddhist doctrines (*surgaal nomnol*) and even the political ideologies, like Lenin's teaching *Leninii surgaal* [Bawden, 1997: 310].

Despite its huge role in the socialization practices, the mysterious order is not common knowledge. It is believed that there are people who are renowned more than others. Thus, they acquire prestigious positions in the society. These could be leaders, lamas, psychics, shamans and also scientists. That is why disputing with them for regular people is not seen as proper because the latter are ignorant in understanding the order (*yoho medekhegui*), which is not so readily comprehensible. To my mind, the Buddhist idea of *avidyā* (or, *munkhag* in Buryat) is in a large measure colloquially understood as such ignorance in *yosun*. The same as in the folk imagination, the misfortunes are caused by *avidia* (ignorance, Bur. *munkhag*) [Schrempf, 2011; Dandaron, 1995: 9], the ignorance in *yosun* and its inobservance brings about a similar effect. The human being dependent on the astrology, vital forces and a generally defined cosmos is more transparent for those who know the rules of the universe. There is plenty of different stories among the Buryats, showing how people would doubt in their lamas, elders, or leaders and the time showed who was right – very often *ex post facto*. These are the kind of lectures teaching that one should trust those who know *yosun* (*yoho medekhe*).

Freakiness is often the feature of those who know what will be the order of change. This is a common feature of lamas in contrast to the idealized Christian saints. They could insult people, or do other eccentric deeds, to manipulate them and save them from various future disasters. However, their character is not seen as a matter of their "individuality", but the matter of the order they comprehend. The same way, people of "not typical" character are seen as unconsciously fulfilling some

[68] *Surgaal* could be compared with European notion of civility, thus, a bad mannered person is called *hurgaalgui* "the one without *hurgaal*".

universe program and the fruit of it becomes clear with time. One could be hostile to another man, unconsciously foreseeing some unpleasant events connected with him and his descendants in the remote future. In this sense, the future events paradoxically could influence the present time, the cause and effect elements are reversed: it would be more precisely understood within a net of changing relations than the linear consequences. The order itself is mysterious, not comprehensible for regular people. Only prominent personalities due to their previous incarnations, high ancestral vitality, or education can capture it.

Lama, shaman and scientist are different specialists of different aspects of *yosun* which could be complementary (*zokhis*) or non-complementary to the group. The Buryats seldom undertake any serious steps without consulting the astrologists (*zurkhaishin*), or making special rituals for good fortune. This regards decisions concerning the important days for events, like: weddings, funerals or moving to a new house, travelling, exams, asking for a proper direction for university studies. Fortune telling is an exact science in this culture because it is calculated with sophisticated systems of numerology and astrology [Jawłowski, 2016: 36]. They know the order (*yoho medekhe*) and, at the same time, become those who can control it.

In the same way, strong personalities are seen as creators of the order, or perceived as those who are able to change it. That is why they are often seen as moral authorities, as Humphrey defined it: *exemplar-focused morality*, according to which not abstract ideas, but examples serve as the moral authorities [Humphrey, 1997: 25]. In the order of transformation, there is no place for the absolute truth, nor do the assessments, like: good and evil have any clear meaning, that is why the figures, like: Stalin in the Buryat culture do not emody pure evil [Humphrey, 2003], but rather he is denoted as "harsh" (*sherüün*), which is acceptable behaviour for a leader or a father. Partly, they are justified based on their responsibilities because they moved together with the mysterious order of the universe, which could be thought of in the categories of accumulated vitality, or karma [Dandaron, 1995: 5–6]. During the fieldwork, this idea was numerously formulated even in comparison with the European thinking:

> Our system is significantly different from the Western tradition. There one speaks about different candidates, teachers, students. In our tradition, there is no such thing. Only the European culture invented such a system. Candidates for something, presidential candidate... In this tradition, there are no such roles. Here, according to our philosophy, everything happens according to the will of karma. In this life, we live through the karma that we produced in previous lives. Moreover, in the present existence, we create karma for our next existence, the next incarnation. Therefore, according to the law of karma if you are to become Khambo Lama, or Pandito Khambo, Lama, or Buddhist spiritual leader of Russia, regardless of the circumstances, it will happen. And all desires, intrigues associated with it, voting, corruption, etc., do not exist in this tradition, and will not [130712].

The point is that the motion of the universe is unpredictable, and the human community not only prognoses it but also could give the proper direction to the order. Thus, such a vision of the leaders' place is usually perceived *ex post facto*, or as a part of historical objectivity and necessity.

Those who know the *yosun* are also able to correct the equilibrium in the world full of tensions. This could be achieved through rituals, rites and ceremonies connected to the way of transformation. The knowledge of the order is the only way to survive in the world full of threats to vitality. Human community is to cope with this change and force movement through particular rules and rites, otherwise equilibrium is disturbed and has to find its balance in a new form.[69]

In this context, the social sphere is seen not as unique, or isolated from the cosmic processes. The human being is not merely an object in

[69] This idea was perfectly expressed by López Austin. Though he was referring to the Nahuas culture, I assume, it doubtlessly fits the Buryat case: "The most important rites were, of necessity, the collective rituals. The belief in the constant presence on the earth's surface of divine forces, both favorable and unfavorable (forces which created change, movement, and time, and which impregnated and animated everything in existence), compelled man to fight continually in order to take advantage of these forces or to protect himself against them. The struggle was carried on by the entire community. Thus, the Nahua individual, at the different levels of social organization, felt it impossible to separate his personal interests from those of the group, since such an act would immediately render him helpless to face the terrible, always dynamic, divine forces present on the face of the Earth. Men depended completely on collective activity in a continuous chain of religious festivals or their preparations" [López Austin, 1988: 66].

face of the universal processes, but has the potential ability to change the order of cosmos and, in this sense, is tasked with the responsibility of maintaining the order (*yoho sakhikha*), which is, at the same time, the moral order. Such vision of the moral order, however, should not be seen as attached to the transcendent sphere. Especially by acting together they can transform and shape the universe in the way they think is proper. In this sense, the idea of transcendence becomes irrelevant in the Buryat culture. The order of the supernatural and natural are seen as one – the order of the sky and the Earth are mutually interacting. There does not exist a trans-sphere that dictates what is proper or improper in human behaviour. The divine sphere is, in fact, seen as dependent on the relations with the human world and is at risk of losing power. The ideas of vitality accumulation, in turn, make the human beings "deities" to different degrees. The lack of individualism does not imply the lack of human agency regarding the social and cosmic orders.

The dualism of sacred and secular, material and spiritual are dissolved; divine sphere, natural law, or biology are deprived of their status of being a substantial grounding. Through those who know the way of transformation, the social and cosmic orders influence each other, unlike in the Western idea of transcendence that implies a one-way relation.

3.6. The relation of individual and society

The central emphasis of modernization was put on the autonomy of the human being, its emancipation from the traditional authorities and deconstruction of the imposed orders. This what Giddens calls "de-traditionalization", or what Ulrich Beck refers to as "disembedment" from external social constrains – cultural traditions, a family, kinship, community, a social class, institutions [Yan, 2009: 274]. The human capability started implying autonomous participation and construction of the social order. Thus, the development of modern individualism was accompanied by ideas like: equality, autonomy and identity, which were the background of the formation of modern social institutions [Eisenstadt, 2000: 2–3; Zapaśnik, 2016: 13–14; Lukes, 1990]. Such specific

understanding of an individual was conditioned, of course, by the line of previously existing ideas, such as a soul, God, mind, etc.

According to the conventional wisdom, humanity cannot be questioned, denied, or deprived, as it is grounded on certain objective principles, which could be the individual soul,[70] taken from God in Christianity, or human nature in the materialistic thought.

> Such terms as "individual", "human being", "personality", and "self" […] were termed the materialistic, formalist, organicist, and volitional models […]. The self is either a physiological mechanism swirling in a social space, or a mind or consciousness detachable from its bodily housing, or an organic, socially interactive, goal-achieving organism, or a willing, deciding, potentially self-creating agent whose meaning is determined by persuasive agency [Hall, Ames, 1998: 5–7].

The broadly understood "postmodernity" marked the departure from modernistic ideologies of rationality, objectivity and progress. It unmasked the power relations embedded in the modernist ideologies, systems and institutions. Quite often, this postmodern theoretical framework would see the non-Western cultures as theoretical and practical examples, by presenting relativity, pluralism as the part of their cultural program. This is the case of anthropology, which to a great extent used the research on non-European cultures as the critique of the Western modernist civilization.

Nevertheless, the same as modernity, the postmodernity put the central emphasis on the human, his emancipation, first, from the imposed traditions and, then, from institutions or grand narrations [Domańska, 2010b]. With the postmodern shift the human individual became free to choose his identity and the modernist dilemma we–others changed to the highly subjective me–others [Tangad, 2016a]. This postmodern indifference to the "outer" sphere resulted in the crisis of the new humanities [Domańska, 2010a, b]. The attempts to escape from

[70] Though the idea of a soul as a religious construct was somehow denied in philosophy, no alternative sphere of "inner" experience was introduced as the location of the "self" until Kant introduced the "subjectivity", and, along with the development of individualism, there was produced a series of related metaphors of inner experience [Zapaśnik, 2016: 4].

cognitive solipsism were made in various fields of Western intellectual thought. As George Berkeley noted, the Western philosophy was not able to prove the existence of the world outside of the thinking subject [Zapaśnik, 2016: 6]. In particular, one may state that the ideas of empathy [Zapaśnik, 2014], interaction, socialization were aimed at transgressing its borders, but the problem is still of current concern.

In the view of society as the sum of autonomous individuals, the search for the social glue and relations in the space "in-between" the individuals are the main concern: the question of how society holds together has been one of the central issues of Western sociology [Yan, 2009: 273; DeFleur, D'Antonio, DeFleur, 1976: 61; Luhman, 1992: 3]. Depending on the period and methodological orientation, this in-between space has been considered either as a universal sphere of reference, or a relativist sphere of symbolic interactions between subjects. More often, this sphere of inter-subjectivity is left conditionally undefined and lacks any philosophical legitimization [Dybel, 2012: 21].

In the search of the social glue, sociologists would reveal shared symbols, norms, values, a social "contract" or macro social processes. As I have shown in the previous chapter, it was initially embedded into the evolutionist thinking of moving from primordial to more constructivist view on inter-human relations. The Western individual was more and more aware of the arbitral character of social ties, putting stress on norms, shared values, or decisions, while the societies such as Buryats were seen as immersed into more natural (thus, more primitive) relations of kinship, or tradition.

The precedence of the Western modernity was applied as a pattern in the rest of the world. It brought deep, comprehensive and sudden transformations of the social order all over the globe [Sztompka, 2000]. In Buryatia, it was accompanied by the elimination of the existing ranking structure, religious institutions, introducing the "modern" techniques of nation building. However, nowhere in the world the scenario of modernity was the same, while previously existing cultural premises were still influential. Though the local Buryat epistemic culture to a great extent was replaced by the interpretative grids of European science, the ideas born within this cultural program are still of actual concern.

By the very definition of being "Asian", the Buryat society is not considered as "individualistic" and I could agree with it. I agree with it, although the Soviet version of modernization gave the individual more weight in society and recognized it as an independent actor. I also refuse to call it "collectivistic" if we assume the society to be the sum of its identical parts. It is necessary to mention that the collectivist ideologies, like: communism, fascism, nationalism were born in the West.[71] Collectivism has to be understood as the priority of a group over the individual and the relation of domination and submission is not a proper metaphor for understanding Buryat view on society. Similarly, the identification with common ideology, or symbols, in my opinion, could not serve as a sufficient mode for constructing the collective. It rests on a different vision of the human being and society.

The conceptions of humanity in the Buryat culture are usually investigated according to the model of substantial grounds and essences. The Buryat human is not closed in his subjectivity and he/she is tied with other individuals through the relatedness of vital forces. As we have already seen, the idea of the vital forces differs from the idea of a non-deprivable Christian soul. The classic categories of biology could not serve as substantial grounding for defining humanity. The social hierarchy is penetrated with the metaphor of nourishing and consuming the vital forces, which blur the strict distinction between the individual and the rest. The lack of relations means the lack of circulation of vitality, which causes a gradual decay of one's existence.

The expression "social glue", perhaps, is not that emphatic, because the accent is put on relation, not on the subject. The character of relations has the decisive role for identity. It is constructed due to these relations and cannot exist as such outside of them [Morokhoeva, 2011: 31–32; Morokhoeva, 2013: 14–15]. The human being is not the analytical category in this thought, but the relation that brings him into existence. The participation in the social order is the way humanity is formed. The individual exists thanks to his participation in the order and, at the same time, the order exists thanks to him. It cannot construct any sort of "collective", because it does not see the society as the sum

[71] As noted by Krzysztof Gawlikowski during lectures at SWPS, Warsaw.

of equivalent individuals, but a sum of non-interchangeable relations constructing the humanity.

I would like to avoid the dualism of considering Western "individual" and Eastern "dividual" personhood [Carsten, 2004: 83–108]. Despite the Western view according to which a human is seen as an individual autonomous subject, various sociological theories see him as bounded with social processes, functions, roles and situations. I am aware that the matter could be attributed to a particular sociological theory, not to the colloquial view. Nevertheless, these spheres are not polar and exist in a mutual reflexivity and, even in the Western theories, the human agency is more of an ideology than a found condition. In the Buryat case, it seems obvious that the human being is ontologically inseparable from the community. However, this lacks other ideas that could restrict his agency. The Buryat cosmology did not have the transcendental truth, substance that could underline one's identity – humanity was received not as a heavenly granted soul or a natural fact, but one received it through culture and rituals. Nor do they think in the categories of a pure "biology" or "nature" in their ties with the family members. The Buryats struggle to keep their humanity and vitality through proper relations in their community, numerous collective rites – thus, they need the group and form their identity and ontology as a part of it.

Sociology is culturally individualistic in the sense that it operates with the vision of a society as a sum of individuals [Ossowski, 1968: 85], regardless of whether we consider this sum as individualistic, or collectivistic. The category of social consensus was always the dilemma between freedom and conformism of autonomous individuals. It perceives the world as the scope of independent entities and their properties determined by the logic based on an "external relation" principle.[72] The Buryat social thought has a different theory because it does not apply the idea of an autonomous human individual [Tangad, 2016b]. It could not be defined in terms of modernity and postmodernity

[72] The concepts of an external and an internal relation I adopt from the works of my teachers: Morokhoeva [2011, 2013] and Zapaśnik [2006]. This principle was also used in the works by Tangad [2013], or Saidbek Goziev [2015] to describe the differences between social relations in various places.

because it creates a different kind of relation between the human and the environment. This led me to the thought that the Buryat ideas of social order could be embedded in a special theory, outside of the relations with the Western social sciences.

Summary

The Buryat idiom associated with one's ancestry and origin (*ug*) is not a tree, but a water spring (*bulag*) which flows and nurtures its environment.[73] In the same way, a newborn child receives the stream of vital forces (*amin, sünesün, sülde, zayaa*, etc.) from its parents to fulfil its potential. One's physical appearance, predisposition, confidence, wealth and life success are the result of either strong or weak ancestral vital forces and, to a lesser extent, that of the soul, DNA combination, law of consanguinity and individual merit. The tie bonding the child and its ancestry is not a biological fact, but relation, which should be renewed and maintained through proper rituals and order (*yosun*) to keep the vitality. Otherwise, the "spirit-matter", which could be called "vital force", stops circulating between the individuals, resulting in their gradual decay. The group of related people share the vital force accumulated by their ancestors and, in turn, strive to enlarge it.

The Buryat analogy of Charles Darwin's natural selection theory is different – here, not the strongest individuals survive, but the groups with the strongest vital forces. The descendants of immoral ancestors will degrade, the wealth received in an "improper way" will disappear and only those who have managed to accumulate the vital forces will succeed and deserve chance to continue their line. Those who are rich, or poor, now endure the results of their ancestry. The social inequality and power relations are often justified in this way. The point is that they should cope with the dynamics of vitality and the state of things could change in another moment. According to the Buryat proverb,

[73] "The water spring has its source, the human being has its origin" (*ug*) (Buryat proverb); *ug bulag* "the origin/water spring" and other idioms.

the spring could dry up and drive its locality to death, and the one who leaves their ancestors ceases to be a human. Thus, the significance of the ideas described in this chapter lies in understanding humanity as the product of a specific social order.

4

The social and cosmic orders

In the previous parts, I have described some features of sociology and its strong ties with the specific definition of human being. I tried to show that the individual in the Buryat culture is not closed in his subjectivity and how humanity is constructed within relatedness of communal vital forces and the special understanding of order. In this part, I would like to develop the topic by considering the range of the social sphere, its borders and relations with the external environment. I claim that the view on society is a part of cultural vision of the universe. The division between the social and cosmic orders is highly conditional and could be irrelevant in relation to many cultures and historical periods [Gurevich, 1984: 31]. The knowledge of "social" domain or pure social "ties" are products of the 19th-century European thought and should not necessarily exist as such in other traditions of knowledge. Should the ideas of Buryat social thought distinguish the "flat" social and non-social domains? Or, social as opposed to cosmic? In contrast to the division into natural and social sciences, the Buryat idea of *yosun* is a single regulation of these spheres. It is not "flat" social knowledge, but the method of harmonious existence in relation to different spheres.

That is why various social processes could not be interpreted as purely "social". The other way round, the natural processes are not always seen outside of their relation with society. Many sociological categories do not include, or consider, this background, which, as I argue, leads to the improper interpretation of many ideas. This entails important assumptions of how the heuristic context should be read. I will have to conduct a comparative analysis to show that the relations between these spheres are not evident, or identical, in some traditions of thought.

4.1. The relation between the social sphere and the non-social environment

The "Oriental" and "indigenous" knowledge was often seen as conceptual resource for environmental philosophy [Hargrove, 1989: xv]. Although many of these communities actively promote this myth even as a part of nationalist ideology, I would like to point out that the idea of "nature" did not appear in the same form as it did in the West. The Buryat case could prove that nature–culture discourse does not reflect the local attitude to "nature". I find it an important topic to discuss, or, at least, to pose questions about, because nature–culture division significantly influenced defining the human identity and the social order in general. In the text below, I am trying to prove it by moving on to a different understanding of nature in the European thought and its influence on the shaping of the social sphere. In doing this, it was difficult for me to avoid huge generalizations and using a great quantifier such as "European/Western culture" and I am aware of its clumsiness. I will refer to selected literature from the history of ideas to outline some sensitive issues in consideration of the social order.

The idea of "nature" is, perhaps, one of the most controversial topics in social sciences. The term could denote a line of various, sometimes quite distant, ideas, which cause much misunderstanding. To cope with such problems, I will organize my text around two antithetic conceptions, which gave birth to the ideas of nature and other related concepts.

According to Arthur O. Lovejoy, the most influential group of ideas of universe grows out of Plato's theory of forms. In various interpretations, it was the leading idea shaping the Western intellectual tradition through centuries. As Lovejoy writes, the influence of Platonism resulted in the existence of at least two ideas of "God" throughout the greater part of history of the Western religion. One was "the Absolute of otherworldliness" – self-sufficient, timeless, outside the categories of ordinary human thought and experience. The other was a God who was neither self-sufficient, nor "absolute" – "a God whose prime attribute was generativeness, whose manifestation was to be found in the diversity of creatures and therefore in the temporal order and the manifold spectacle of nature's processes" [Lovejoy, 1960: 315]. According to

Lovejoy, this theological dualism was manifested in otherworldly and this-worldly dualism of values:

> If the good man was the contemplation or imitation of God, this required, on the one hand, a transcendence and suppression of merely "natural" interests and desires, a withdrawal of the soul from the "world" the better to prepare it for the beatific vision of the divine perfection; and, it required, on the other hand, a piety towards the God of things as they are, an adoring delight in the sensible universe in all its variety, an endeavor on man's part to know and understand it ever more fully, and a conscious participation in the divine activity of creation [Lovejoy, 1960: 315].

These two conjoined and antithetic ideas of God appeared in different contexts throughout European religious and philosophical thought. However, as Zapaśnik writes, the medieval view of human superiority of the God-created world was not enough to separate "culture" from "nature". This could be shown using the example of anthropomorphism of the universe where the inner human and outer cosmic orders were seen as interrelated. The further split of these spheres became possible only with the changes in understanding of the human race and the human individual as agents of their own development [Zapaśnik, 1988: 27]. I am aware that this conception acquired different responses and interpretations in various periods and intellectual trends, nevertheless, one could certainly trace its logic in the vivid distinguishing of the social sphere:

> The universalist ideal of Enlightenment humanism is frequently debunked and revealed to be a fragile illusion barely masking the fault lines of gender, class, and race. Richard Rorty, for example, strongly objects to the notion of "human race" as the ultimate and most exalted basis for forging human solidarity. Still, he concedes that universalistic abstractions such as the Christian notion of "child of God," the Enlightenment notion of "humanity," and the Kantian notion of "rational being" have played a crucial role in history by keeping the way "open for political and cultural change by providing a fuzzy, but inspiring *locus imaginarius* (e.g., absolute truth, pure art, humanity as such)" [Lee, 2007: 224–225].

The separation of a human from the surrounding nature became possible with the 18th-century conviction that humanity constructs the essence of the human race: the human perceived himself/herself as the creator of their own historical development [Zapaśnik, 1988: 25]. The relative

position of the human being between the lower and higher orders shifted to the metaphor of centrality. The transformation of nature and the separation from it due to culture was part of this far-reaching project. The human society could be dependent on the natural law in different degrees, but it was not the product of nature anymore [Szacki, 2012: 63].

In the same way as Christianity denied the bodily desires as the inclination towards the lower animal order, the Enlightenment proclaimed the evolutionist ideology of progress and development implying distancing from nature. This opposition in the European thought resulted in the dispute of the good and evil human nature as a sum of some particular attributes standing for the acts or mind of a human being. Various social projects were based on this diversity of approaches and nature was suppressed to achieve and define the "culture" in human societies. The notions of civility and culture (*status socialis*) were comprehended in the opposition to the barbarity and nature (*status naturalis*). Bodily functions seen as "nature" through the centuries in the European culture acquired the meaning of a "contamination", causing the feelings of shame. These manifestations were "oppressed" with the development of social relations especially from the 18th century [Douglas, 2004: 35; Humphrey, 1992: 175]. It influenced greatly the views of social order, for example, the segregation of space for physiological needs in bourgeois dwellings and seeing the house as an intimate space; with the development of nuclear family as a "natural" form of co-living, it also influenced the ideas of property and privacy [Woroniecka, 2014a: 54]. The system of etiquette, civility and social norms was developing in close connection with the oppression of nature. The debates over the evil or good human nature even made an impact on considering the nature of the social order and state policy. The social history, thus, was embedded into the natural history with different stages of coming out of nature.

The Buryat-Mongolian social norms had nothing in common with European distancing from the nature and "shame" of bodily functions [Humphrey, 1992: 176]. The 19th-century visitors to Buryatia were surprised by the absence of shame in such acts, like urination, or they saw general "unhygienic" state as the confirmation of European cultural superiority. Of course, the ideology was indoctrinated during the

Soviet educational system and, now, it could be hardly imagined. The introduction of "hygiene" was one of the "civilizational" achievements of the system [Sinitsyn, 2013]. Still, it would be a mistake to see the Buryat social relations as evolving from the antagonism with nature.

Buddhism, perhaps, brought a similar meaning of considering the components of humanity, because, as one can see, the word *zerlig* "wild" used for non-domestic animals and predators is often used to denote the ideas close to the "evil human nature" [Tsyrendashiev, 2008: 12]. The other word, *adaguusan*, denoting the animal world as separate from the human incarnation is also often used in a similar context [Tsyrendashiev, 2008: 91]. However, this "nature" could be reeducated by the positive influence of Buddhism. This motif was widely discussed as the positive influence of Buddhism in the pre-revolutionary Buryat chronicles [Yumsunov, 1935: 141; Kollmar-Paulenz, 2014: 320].

However, it is very rare that the attributes of animal world are considered as negative parts of human identity. The animal world is not interpreted in terms of more primitive instinct, biological predisposition, or genetics. Animals can feel, have the "emphatic" abilities and perform virtuous deeds. There is a popular motif of how animals are offended or can sacrifice themselves for the well-being of their masters. As a reward for their deed, they are usually believed to be reborn in a human body.

The motif of the human reincarnating into animal blurs the hierarchical exclusiveness of a human being (though human is still considered to be higher due to his/her intellectual abilities to understand Buddhist teaching). The animal world, though not equal, is not in opposition to the human world. There is no Buryat habit of insulting using the animal terms as, for example, in the Russian, or Chinese culture [Shagdarova, 2012: 17]. The word for "animal" *amitan* includes the human being (*khümün türelkhiten*) without any problems – it is constructed from the word *ami-* the vital force and suffix *-tan* to denote grouping and is translated as "those who have *ami*". Curiously, the English "animal" has similar construction: it originates from Latin *animalis*: "having breath", "having soul", "living being" compound from *anima* "soul", "spirit", "breath" and the suffix *alis* to form adjective of relationship to the noun.[74]

[74] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animal#cite_note-2 (access date: 26.01.2016).

Despite this, it was problematic to see the human being as part of nature in the Western intellectual tradition. The work *Origin of Species* (1859) by Darwin was shattering in reconsidering the humanity not only in the categories of biological uniqueness, but also of philosophical one [Nisbet, 1969]. In the Buryat culture, seem to be foreign both the negation of animals' agency and appellations for animal rights to be equal to the human. The order here does not have such clear boundaries, or even a clear sense. There did not appear the view on nature as instinct, or certain evil inclination, which should be suppressed in humans.

Would it be a simplification to consider the Buryat thought in the categories which had been fermenting in the European intellectual tradition for centuries? One could even argue whether the domain of "nature" ever appeared in the Buryat culture, because, as we know, its term *baigaali* is created to denote "environment", close to the word *baidal* "the state of being" [Fijn, 2011: 42], or, as Humphrey translates, "what is" – the idea of nature which is not separated from the human [Humphrey, 1995: 136]. I do not negate that such idea exists among the Buryats, but the problem is how far social relations are defined within the context, how often it is excluded in interpretation of certain social processes. Perhaps, in a similar way as there appeared no idea of abstract social sphere, or "abstract" individual [Lukes, 1990: 62], there was no idea of "abstract" nature. The relations with landscape[75] are different regarding personal connection with it. One's ancestral land *nyutag* requires different attitude and produces a different impact on the individual than any other place:

> There is a traditional view that a specific land is possessed by ancestral spirits, and is, thus, confined to a particular people. Usually the main inhabited area and the boundary of the *nutag* is marked by *oboos* (ritual cairns), which embody the local spirits and are places of communal worship. The *oboo* were associated with obligations to make offerings to ancestral and local spirits (*gazariin ezen*[76]),

[75] The human relations with landscape are one of the most popular topics in Mongolian studies (for example, [Humphrey, 1995; Namsaraeva, 2012] and others), so I will just briefly describe some practices relevant for my analysis.

[76] According to the lamaist interpretation, these local spirits were conquered by Buddhist deities and thereon the spirits are in their service. Previous "cults of

> which are considered to have control of nature and living creatures. Offerings, either during the large collective ceremonies (once a year), or during individual visits to homeland *oboos* (*nutagee oboo takhikh*), were aimed at obtaining the protection of spirits and thus legitimising people's rights to use the *nutag*. It is believed that favourably inclined local spirits (or "masters of the land") would sustain the fertility and vitality of the places with rich pastures and clean water sources, enabling people to increase their herds and have numerous children [Namsaraeva, 2012].

The objects of a landscape are referred to with social terms and included into the social sphere. During such *oboo* ceremony a woman told me that she worships the seniors (*übged khügshed*) of the locality, master spirits (*ezed*) for them to look after people and prevent disasters. Another person told me that we (Buryats) pray to the mountains (*khada uula*), locality (*gazar nyutag*) and other elements of the landscape. The landscape names and social terms are used interchangeably. Most commonly, these relations resemble those of junior and senior kin members:

> An old lady saw when the War [WWII – A. Zh.] ended our *Buural Baabai* returned home on his horse looking very exhausted and sweaty. He was accompanying his boys/sons and returning home. […] They [*Buural Baabai*s] are the masters of our native land *nyutag* [151028_0137, a woman, 80 years old, Ulan-Ude, Autumn 2015, translation from Buryat].

Buural baabai, the "grey haired father/grandfather" who embodies a mountain in Kizhinga district is one of the numerous examples. Paying regular respect (*khündelkhe*) to him guarantees his protection in various situations, both for those living in its vicinity and for those who travel far from homeland. These master spirits have individual character and temperament, just like regular people, that is why lamas held ceremonies for them to be kind to people, assist in their work and life. The practices of paying respect, visits, or offering food – these are relations not only of human with another human, but of the human and the landscape. Owen Lattimore denoted these relations in terms of *yosun* as a "code of

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ancestor spirits were replaced by the lamaist cult of protective deities – *srunma* – *dharmapalas* – to which autochthonic deities became *vassals* of different ranks" [Vanchikova, 2006: 272].

the laws of nature and the harmony of man with nature" [Lattimore, 1942: 211 after Humphrey, 1995: 141], which contributes to my claim of the unity of social and cosmic orders.

The landscape is the same way included in the "social" sphere. It is not the passive and external scenery one has sentimental attitude towards due to the nostalgic memories, personal thoughts, or associations with particular historic events. Not contemplation of it, but interaction is important as something with great energies [Humphrey, 1995: 136]. Indeed, these emotional connotations do exist, but the relation of vital forces determines the relation of human and landscape to a greater extent. These relations are somehow "thicker" and imply not one-way, but mutual agency. In the same way that the social relations are mediated through the flow of vital forces, similar ties are bounding the human with the natural environment. These relations are grounded in the metaphor of feeding with vitality. The kowtows people make in these places do not imply merely deference against deities, but the nurture of vital forces. Routes and clock-wise direction of moving, touching the objects, uttering words there – they all are the ways of receiving vitality.

Any other landscape does not require the same kind of relations. I witnessed a curious case when I was crossing the border of Republic of Buryatia and Zabaikalski krai by car with a Buryat family. The driver explained to me that he does not make offers to the land because there are no Buryats living there who would make this land *mürgeltei gazar* (the place of worship) and this land does not have spirits (*ezen*). The quality of space is relative and exists in strong connection with human community [Głowacka-Grajper, 2013: 166].

There is no idea of humankind without its relations with the environment. Vice versa, human behavioural norms, or culture, could not be narrowed down merely to the social sphere because they are immersed in the way this culture sees the environment. The Buryat view on society is not Luhmann's system that constantly defines its boundaries from the generalized natural environment. However, the absence of the nature-culture opposition does not prevent acts that could be seen as "harmful" for the environment from the "ecological" point of view. I want to avoid the popular view of seeing non-European societies in contrast to the modern occidental cultures as ecological, living close to

nature, in harmony with environment. It is not the "ecological" view of abstract "nature" and despite its partial ecological effect it hardly implies the same content.

4.2. *Yosun* as the order of a non-transcendental universe

I have already mentioned that the "this-worldly" division of nature and culture cannot be applied to the Buryat social thought. However, there is another important division that I find even more necessary to consider. Writing about Lovejoy's second "God" I would like to embed a line of ideas such as: absolute, transcendence, essence, or truth within a single metaphor. This metaphor is "substance" in the philosophical (not physical) sense, which I borrow from the works of Morokhoeva (1994; 2011; 2013) and Zapaśnik (2006). The idea of substance as the fundament underlying the universe, but which is external to it, is one of the most influential ideas in the Western thought. It could be traced back to the Greek and Roman antiquity, and it is also richly evident in the medieval theology and in the modern thought. The essential metaphor of "substance" as underlying reality was the same:

> […] the human will, as conceived by the otherworldly philosophers, not only seeks but is capable of finding some final, fixed, immutable, intrinsic, perfectly satisfying good, as the human reason seeks, and can find some stable, definitive, coherent, self-contained, and self-explanatory object or object of contemplation [Lovejoy, 1960: 26].

The ancient Greek philosophical tradition referred in various ways to this metaphor [Hall, Ames, 1998: 191]. The already mentioned Platonic "ideas" could have appeared much earlier as a result of contact with the intellectual culture of India and the Middle East. However, it was in the 18th-century Christian Europe that the conception of the universe as a great chain of being with the chief object of God attained the widest diffusion and acceptance [Lovejoy, 1960: 183]. The sense of God's transcendence did not begin in Judeo-Christian theology – the Christian idea of transcendent God was the continuation of this tradition. Nevertheless, it, in turn, gave way to other secular analogies in the

Western intellectual thought, such as: Absoluteness, Reason, or Natural Law. With the development of the secular thought, the position of God, as of higher order, was questioned, but the conception of transcendence was transferred to the sphere of Nature. The idea of God was gradually becoming this-worldly and tended to fuse with the concept of Nature [Lovejoy, 1960: 316]. This also gave rise to the idea of "Laws of Nature" as unchanging rules of the natural world, which are transcendent to it. Such laws were often thought to "be logically necessary" [Hall, Ames, 1998: 192] due to unchanging laws or essences, which serve as models of the world, and are external to it.

Within the frames of the text I prefer using the following formula to define transcendence: "A is transcendent with respect to B if the existence, meaning, or import of B cannot be fully accounted for without resource to A, but the reverse is not true" [Hall, Ames, 1998: 190]. Such simplified notion of strict transcendence affected theological, philosophical, aesthetic, scientific and sociological discourses. Both theistic and philosophical understanding of transcendence strives to find a common underlying grounding of the universe. It manifests itself in searching for truths undergirding the universe through reason. This reality is perceived in the logic based on the "external relation" principle. It is the relation that is taken to be objective. In turn, the belief that this relation (and its terms) exists objectively resulted in the need to adopt the idea of substance as the ground of their emergence. In this regard the world is seen as a scope of separate entities and their intrinsic properties. The relation between these entities does not necessarily modify the nature of each and lets words and other referential tokens distinguish particular objects.

How this idea could be traced in the social thought? It is the belief in the non-social/non-human agency that has objective influence on it. This influence is mostly perceived as one-directional, whether it is the world of ideas, God, or law of nature in the contact with which the human being is seen as external, subdued and dependent. This results in the ultimate separation of the social order from the natural one and introduces a distinct set of laws in each sphere. As it follows, the problem of the social order lies in the way culture defines what natural order is, i.e. what it does not consider as a part of culture.

Thus, according to the authors I cite [Morokhoeva, 1994, 2011; Hall, 1989; Zapaśnik, 2006, 2016], the category of "substance" which in different views and periods relied on the ideas of nature, God, or transcendence was a specific idea of the Western culture. It is expressed in searching for the certain ontological background – a kind of the absolute initial standing point of the universe. However, according to other authors, this logic of thinking was alien to the intellectual tradition of many Eastern cultures [Morokhoeva, 1994, 2011; Hansen, 1992; Granet, 2008]. Instead of the category of substance, scholars introduce notions like "continuum" to describe the logics of the world organization in Asian traditions of knowledge [Hall, Ames, 1998; Hall, 1989]. Instead of a logic, relying on external relation with environmentally-independent phenomenal objects, many Oriental cultures are characterized with presence of the so-called "internal relation".[77]

Things in internal relation are determined by relations in which they appear. At the same time, these relations do not exist independently of them. Such a world model does not need the category of substance, because reality is perceived as the entirety of all possible relations. There was no sphere of omnipresent transcendent reality neither in religious, nor in philosophical thought. "Nirvana", "Tao", "Dharma" and even "sky/heaven" – are all the states of emptiness in the continuum of transformation of one state into another [Morokhoeva, 2011: 11–37]. The logic based on the internal relation principle implies that the essence of things is not a sum of its intrinsic properties, but properties which could be distinguished only in relation with all other possible properties. Accordingly, the subject deals not with separate things, but the set of experienced properties distinguished newly in any other spatiotemporal context. This eliminates dualism between discourse and the objective world, merging these levels into a single indivisible wholeness. The problem of reference in this regard is irrelevant since the world is understood as a direct, consistent experience.

The world in Buryat cosmology is conceptualized not as a substance, but rather as movement, as a constant succession of transformations

[77] On the external and internal relations see more in: [Zapaśnik, 2006; Morokhoeva, 1994, 2011].

verbalized with the words: *orsholon*, *sansar*, *üngete yurtemse*, *khorboo* and others. The word *orsholon* commonly translated as "world" or "universe" needs to be understood not as a substantial object, but as a cyclical motion: *orsholo-* "rotate", "spin", "revolve". The other notion, *sansar* of Sanskrit origin, as well as *üngete yurtemse* (a motley world), means the sequence of reincarnations, circulation of existence. The flow of universe transformations is not random, but functions according to particular regularities, which are called in Buryat: *yoho/ yosun*. The *yosun* principle cannot be clearly described, as it does not possess any substantial characteristics. This concept is translated usually as "tradition", "rule", "procedure", or "culture", and it is similar to the Chinese *Li* or *Dao*, if we agree with Granet that "every interpretation of Dao includes the concepts of order, universality, responsibility and efficacy" [Granet, 2008: 209]. Unlike *Dao*, the Buryat concept of *yosun* was less formalized and rarely considered by scholars, though it seems to shed light on many important ideas. It could be understood as "the mysterious Way[78]" which regulates both social and natural order seen as single continuum of transformation. *Yosun* is not knowledge in itself, but a kind of multiple rationality of the way of creating the universe. It implicates the sequence of actions and is less concerned with abstract ideas. The continuum of transformations required a method instead of ontology, a pattern instead of meaning. *Yosun* serves as such technique of the universe transformation and maintaining.

These mysterious rules of universe were understood by generations of ancestors and this knowledge was passed on to the descendants, so that the latter do not have to explore the world. The concept of universe differs from the Aristotelian substantial model, as it is based not on that what moves, but on the movement itself [Morokhoeva, 1994: 108]. In this light, there could not appear the problem of reference, since the world is not a static substantial wholeness, but dynamics, which was not distinct to the human mind. There could not have appeared the division between "nature" and "culture", nor

[78] This explanation I heard from a Polish sinologist, Krzysztof Gawlikowski, during one of his lectures on various aspects of Chinese culture, which I attended in 2011–2012 at the SWPS (the University of Social Sciences and Humanities).

could the sphere of human activity stand in opposition to the rest of the environment. There is no borderline between the objective world and subjectivity in this cosmology. The self is nothing but a crossing point of relations in which the individual is functioning. There hardly could be imagined any form of abstract regularity, or an objective law, since meaning is nothing else but the moment in which the relation is established. As can be seen from the above, *yosun* does not concern exclusively the macro-level processes, but equally regulates and interacts with everyday human activity. Thus, the role of tradition and a ritual, which are both denoted with the same word *yosun* (*yoho, yoho zanshal*) is organizing the individual life in correspondence with universal processes. The statement of Granet referring to the Chinese thought can be equally applied to the Buryat way of thinking:

> […] they conceptualize the universe as if it was regulated by a protocol and want to fine-tune it on the order of a ceremony – this was the main goal of their activity as they argue. Their morality, physics, logic are only different aspects of the efficient knowledge that is etiquette [Granet, 2008: 335].

To some extent, unlike the ideas of external transcendence, the social order *yosun* is seen as determining the cosmic equilibrium. The order of *yosun*, thus, is understood not merely as organization of things in space, but the sequences of ordering. It distributes actions in time and sequence to introduce proper harmony, and through this harmony things receive their identity. The world is a dynamic wholeness, which does not contain any gaps, or empty spaces, so every single action, gesture, or word has the power to transform it. A perfect illustration here is the mechanism of prayer wheels, which contain holy mantras inside: the turn of the wheel causes further changes of the universe, when spun in the positive direction.

The example of a prayer wheel is an important one. The way in which society is organized and functions directly influences the keeping of the universe in the proper order. To prevent the improper changes of reality, one should keep up the "tradition of forbiddance" (*seerlekhe yoho/seer*), which regulates the everyday behaviour. It includes taboos on different sorts of actions, which contradict the universe order because any improper human activity could initiate changes even in the natural

environment. An interesting example is the landslide that happened in the locality Arshaan of Tunka valley in June 2014. People tend to think of the disaster cause not as a "natural" process usual for mountainous regions, but rather look for the reasons in the way the local society functions. In the article published on the popular news portal ARD (www.asiarussia.ru), one can find an article which considers the disaster to be the consequence of multiple confrontations between municipal leaders and local population, which "brings people to nothing but negative emotions and divides them into opposing camps". "When tens or hundreds, or thousands of people at the same time experience some kind of emotional stress – it can disrupt the balance of nature. And, then, cause a similar disaster to the one which struck recently Arshaan". Further on, the author gives another example of how human community influences the nature: "In particular, there was a major earthquake during the unrest with hundreds of thousands of people in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China". This was an example of how the concept of social order can start to be interpreted as a very important factor of the natural balance.

4.3. Heuristic context of understanding the order: Selected aspects of Buryat-Mongolian social thought

Though I called the Buryat epistemic culture "local", it is not a good notion to be used when talking about it. The term "local" is rather a relic of the imperialist-indigenous perspective, meanwhile, the Buryat-Mongolian social thought developed on a vast geographical territory. The ideas of social order were a huge topic in Buryat and, generally, Mongolian intellectual thought. These reflections regarded the regulation of the social order, matters of hierarchy, cultural differences and resulted in a line of peculiar ideas in perceiving the social thought. In the present part, let me introduce a brief history of some terms and ideas by defining them through the history that I gathered from the existing literature.

The idea of the "universal" order seems to be a very old idea in the Mongolian culture. According to Skrynnikova, previously the Turkic word *törö*, which in the modern Mongolic languages denotes "government",

"rule" and "state", referred in the early texts to the idea of the universal cosmic law that forms the rules of the cosmic, natural and social order. The negative social disruptions reduced *törö* and caused natural disasters and the disturbance of harmony. At the same time, the universal rule was mediated and embodied in the person in power. Important was the flow of the vital force exchanged between the social and cosmic orders through the leader. The image of Genghis Khan is a "classic" example of such a relation – *törö* was sacral legitimization of political power [Skrynnikova, 2013]. The unity of the sacrality/charisma of the leader (*sülde*) and of the universal law (*törö*) is comparable to the Chinese concepts of *De* of the emperor and its relation with Dao. The *törö* (*Degedü/yirtincü-yin törö/törö yosun*) in this sense as universal order is comparable also to the idea of *ŕta* (*rita*) or *dharma* in Hindu culture [Skrynnikova, 2013: 59].

Gradually, the word *törö* was accompanied by the word *yosun* in a synonymous meaning. The word *yosun* is considered to be borrowed from Manchu-Tungus languages *joso*, where it referred to similar notions as: a custom, law, ritual, ceremony, faith, etc. In the earlier Mongolian contexts, the word *yosun* (together with *jarliγ*) denoted a more specific kind of law – the decree, sanction, etc. According to some historians, the word *yosun* in fact was the component known as the Great Yasa of Genghis Khan – *Yekhe joso/Yekhe jasag* [Nagaanbuu, 2011: 383; Gantulga, 2011: 61; after: Tangad, 2016b: 9; Skrynnikova, 2013], which, in turn, continued existing in Mongolian-Oirat regulations (1640), Kalka Jirum (1709) and the Buryat regulations [Tumurova, 2005]. Mongolian historian, Lkhamsuren Munkh-Erdene, in his article *The 1640 Great Code: An Inner Asian Parallel to the Treaty of Westphalia* devotes much attention to the cultural meaning of the word *törö,* which commonly was translated as "state". He writes that the early-18th-century Mongolian dictionary directs *törö* to the entry *yosun* which is interpreted as a "norm measure" (*keb kemjiyesu*), a "rule and law" (*yosulal qauli*). Both the "norm" (*yosun*) and the "rule" (*yosulal*) are identified with *törö yosun* "that which is established according to an occasion, which people conscientiously follow" (*Qorin nigetu¨ tayilburi toli* 1979: 675, 849) [Munkh-Erdene, 2010: 274]. This analysis let him interpret the political relations between the rising Manchu dynasty and different Mongolian political enclaves:

> […]'joining to¨ru¨" did not mean joining someone else's to¨ru¨ in this case, that is, joining a larger state formation. Instead, it meant that the parties involved join or adapt their rules or laws to accord, to agree, or to harmonize their relations and conducts […] [Munkh-Erdene, 2010: 274].

Thus, if we are to believe both authors, the word *törö* from the meaning of the universal law gradually came to denote more specific political order. In the modern Mongolic languages, the word *törö* refers to a "state", "secular" law, etc., "ulas türe" "state", or to a particular ritual (*törö* – a wedding ritual of the bride's side of the family in Buryat), while the word *yosun* is applied in numerous contexts, including the abstract cosmic order.[79]

The word *törö* (and *yosun*) was used in the Buddhist ideas of embodiment of sacred (religious) and secular rules (*qoyar yosun* – "two rules") in the person of a leader. This social system was described at length in the *Čaγan teüke*. This is, in a way, the starting point of a sociology of society – it is, of course, a Buddhist society, but, in the same way, the starting point of sociology in Europe was a Christian model of society.[80] *Arban buyan-tu nom-un čaγan teüke neretü oršiba* (The White History of the doctrine which possesses ten virtues) or simply *Čaγan teüke* is a not-voluminous chronicle dating from the end of the 13th-century, compiled possibly by Qubilai and his ministers [Zhamtsarano, 1955: 1, 4]. It differs significantly from other Mongolian chronicles, because it contains mainly the instructions for the state organization and it served as a guidebook for Mongolian emperors [*Shara Tudzhi*, 1957: 5; Zhamtsarano, 1955: 55]. What is important for me in my work are the reflections about the order that, according to the text of *Čaγan teüke,* creates the universe (*yirtinčü-yi bayiγuluγsan qoyar yosun*) through the emperor. This implies perceiving the social order as part of the cosmic one (*yirtinčü, yerüngkei*), which is seen in instructions to adjust the feasts, architecture to the seasonal periods.

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[79] The linguistic productivity of the word is huge – merging with words denoting other ideas, it serves for translating many Western abstract notions, like morality, etc. What is interesting, it rearranges these notions according to the order of dynamics and continuum.

[80] Kollmar-Paulenz pointed this issue out to me in private correspondence.

The *Čayan teüke* contains references to other, unknown today, chronicles such as *Ulayan teüke* (The Red History) *and Sang-un soyorqal šara bičig* (The Yellow Charter/Document) which are supposed to have contained laws, customs, regulations of the state government (*törü yosun*) [Zhamtsarano, 1955: 5]. The edited version of this chronicle by Qutuɣtai sečen tayiǰi (1540–1586) was considerably abridged. For instance, the regulations of the *Činggis* cult have been omitted. The chronicle consists of three or four parts (*debter*) and describes the content related to the cult of *Činggis*, offices of state, statutes and political program of emperor Qubilai. The second part expresses the major principle of the state organization:

> For introduction of quiet and peace in the whole empire/people of five colors, including four foreign ones (*tabun öngge dörben qari yerüngki-yin ulus*[81]), Qubilai Čakravartin, the wise emperor, beginning with the laws of the three, the Čakravartin of Tibet put into practice infallibly two principles (*qoyar yosu*), establishing anew as an example: that the lama is the root of high religion and the lord of doctrine (*degedü šasin-u ündüsün nom-un eǯen blama*); the emperor – the head of the empire and the master of *great rule* (*yeke töru-yin erkim yirtinčü-yin erketü qaɣan*). The laws (*jasaɣ*) of the true doctrine, like sacred silk cord, cannot be weakened; the laws (*jasaɣ*) of the great emperor, like golden yoke, are indestructible. And, the White History of the teaching which possesses ten virtues, serves as a brief explanation of how to apply the two laws (*qoyar yosu*) equally and correctly [Zhamtsarano, 1955: 51; the additions in brackets are mine – A. Zh.].

Thus, it describes two principles (*qoyar yosun*) embodied by the lama who is the root of high religion and the lord of doctrine (*degedü šasin-u ündüsün nom-un eǯen blama*) and the emperor who is the

[81] Another aspect in the text was reflected in considering the "ethnic" division. The division of people of five colours, including four foreign ones (*tabun öngge dörben qari yerüngki-yin ulus*) is also the cosmic division of the people of the empire. This division is considered to appear in the period of Qubilai qan's reign, in the 18th-century chronicle *Ganga-ijn uruskal* by Gombojab that explains people of five colours as: blue Mongols, red Chinese (*kitad*), black Tibetans (*tybten*?), yellow Turkestanians (*sartaɣul*), white Koreans (*solonɣos*); and the four foreign ones in the same way as in medieval Christian geographical texts, which included: people called Tsod with one leg, people constituted of virgins, people with an eye between the breast and people with dogs' heads [*Shara Tudzhi*, 1957: 178].

head of the empire and the master of great rule (*yeke töru-yin erkim yirtinčü-yin erketü qayan*). Though usually it is translated as a union between the spiritual and secular power, the union between church and the state, the term secular and the idea of a secular state are still not the proper way of understanding this concept. Skrynnikova argues that the popular term "secular" is not the appropriate way to translate the idea of *törö* because it was just a different kind of sacrum, which tied the leader with the universal law [Skrynnikova, 2013: 205]. Though the "secular" leader was separated from the Buddhist religious sphere, he did not cease embodying the "spiritual" power [Skrynnikova, 2013]. In the spheres of the two orders (*yosu*), each determined its own code of laws, celebrations, structures and hierarchies. It has quite a lot in common with the European processes of secularization and separation of the church from the government. There are described the highest, the middle and the lowest ranks of ecclesiastical and governmental employees [Zhamtsarano, 1955: 51]. Actually, this division of the dual government was exported from the Tibetan and Indian traditions [Zhamtsarano, 1955: 55].

These ideas of social organization in fact were widespread in Mongolian regions. The notion of the political (secular) order was central in the Buddhist view on the social order. The existence and expansion of Buddhism required its strong connection with the state institutions: the centralized monarchic state was perceived as a sacred order, and the Buddhists would work on its stability, often even recognizing their inferior position [Tsyrempilov, 2015: 32, 76]. The leader became the guardian of Buddhist world order and acquired the titles, like: *Bogdo* (holy, saint), *Čakravartin* (the one moving the wheel, universal ruler) [Tsyrempilov, 2015: 44; Sziregetü, 2006: 180]; *Dharmaradzha* (the king of the order) which also legitimated the sacral power. On the other hand, the patronage of Buddhism served to legitimize the state power. The Mongolian khans were widely using these possibilities also through the alliances with various schools of Tibetan Buddhism in different periods of history. After their loss of political agency, the Emperors of the Manchu Qing dynasty were also following this principle. The state patronage of the Gelugpa school of the Tibetan Buddhism was considered as the reinforcement of political power

through symbolic power, control over the Buddhist institutions and their ranking system.

As the profound research by Nikolai Tsyrempilov shows, the *qoyar yosun* was the decisive logic of relation that the Buryat Buddhist society projected on the role of Russian Empire and Emperors [Tsyrempilov, 2013]. A part of this process was the introduction of the Russian monarchs into the realm of sacred Buddhist symbols, empowering them with the attributes of dharmic rulers of the Indo-Buddhist cultural paradigm. Kollmar-Paulenz in her article *Systematically Ordering the World…* (2014), analyzing the Buryat historical chronicles, comes to the same conclusion:

> The author evokes the Indian homeland of Buddhism and the snow-covered peaks of Buddhist Tibet, placing the origin of the Mongolian khans in the lineage of the Buddha, the Śākya-clan, describes in detail the establishment of numerous monasteries and temples in the Buriyad regions, and, finally, includes the Russian emperor and his laws in the evolving Buddhist society, appropriating the Non-Buddhist Russian state by evoking the two orders (mo. *qoyar yosun*), the religious (= Buddhist) order and the worldly order of Tibetan political philosophy […] [Kollmar-Paulenz, 2014: 133].

The Russian emperors were recognized as the incarnation of White Tara and their empire was included in the sacred geography of the Buddhist world. The *qoyar yosun*, besides its implication of order, was also perceived as the method of extending the Buddhist influence. The religious knowledge and political theory were equally important in the strategy called *upaya* (Mong. *biligtü arγa*), the "wise methods" [Tsyrempilov, 2013]. Political legitimization was always reinforced by the idea of a universal and cosmic control proposed by the Buddhist knowledge. The social order is the merge of the principles which are bringing harmony into the universe, and, at the same time, are understood as methods of the political organization.

Besides its connections with the universal, religious and political orders, the principle of *qoyar yosun* is the rule that should accompany the human being in his regular activities. It regards the single regulation of the universe at all its levels – macro level is the mirror of the micro level and vice versa. To conduct the further study, one needs to refer to a special Buddhist literary genre *surgaal*, which was spread widely

among Mongolian people from the medieval period.[82] These were didactic pieces composed in forms of stanzas under strong influence of Indo-Tibetan literary tradition and folk motives. They are usually referred to by the Buryat scholars as "secular" [Makhatov, Tsydenova, 2009: 15], in the sense that they were aimed at guiding the life outside the religious institutions. They were more instructing the behavioural models of the everyday life, social and political relations, than introducing the religious dogma. Nevertheless, they were the major route of the transmission and indoctrination of the Buddhist ideas. The high level of their intertextuality and strong influence and connection with the folk culture make them quite a representative material for the research. They clearly show the succession and interconnection of "folk" and "high" cultures.

These didactic texts were often denoted as *shastras* (rules, manual, treatise) *of two orders* "qoyar yosunu shastir" [Galshiev, 2012: 210], or simply the *shastra of the order* "yosun-u shastir" [Makhatov, Tsydenova, 2009: 49]. The human being, according to this teaching, should balance between the two orders in his everyday life – the order of religion and the non-religion order. This principle is seen as single for different layers of social strata: both the kings and the commoners are recommended to follow the two orders to reach the universal harmony. In one of the most recent pieces, *Bilig-un toli* (The Mirror of Wisdom that Explains Accepting and Rejecting According to the Two Orders) by Buryat lama Erdeni-Khaibzun Galshiev (1855–1915), one could see the metaphors of *the two orders*. In the 1,000 verses divided in eight parts, the author shows clear continuity of the earlier ideas expressed, for example, in *Čaγan teüke* (13th century):

nom	*türe*
Book/Buddhist teaching	and the political power
ogtorgui	*gazar*
Sky	Earth
deede nomoi yoho	*yurtemsyn yoho*
The order of precious book/ Buddhist teaching	Worldly order

[82] *Oyun Tulkhiur* (13th century), *Erdeni san subshid* (13th century), *Rashian-u dusal* (19th century), *Bilig-un toli* (20th century), etc.

Burkhanai nom	*khamag türelkhiten khümüünei nom*
Buddhist teaching	Teaching of all human beings.

The human life guided by these two orders was considered to be harmonious and close to the Buddhist idea of the middle way. It is not similar to the Christian idea of good and evil. As Tangad notes, the Mongolian culture, instead of this division, was ruled by the dualism of *dzöv-buruu*, "proper" and "improper", which was highly contextual. One and the same action could be ranked as proper or improper, depending on the circumstances, such as: age, sex, time and place. Another important detail is that according to Tangad, this dualism is rather the way of behaviour, the ritual rather than the sphere of dogma [Tangad, 2013: 82]. The guidance does not reflect the relation of a transcendental dimension, but the interaction between the orders and their mutual dependence.

4.4. The harmony of duality

The principle of *qoyar yosun* seems also to be connected with the other notions of duality and complementarity, such as *arga-bilig, yin-yang*, etc. I am aware that these ideas could have different sources, not necessarily be connected with Buddhist cosmology. The concept of complementary duality appears to be an ancient symbol, which found its expression in China as early as in the Shang and early Chou dynasties in the second millennium before Christ [Cammann, 1987: 115]. It is impossible to trace its history and origin in the Buryat-Mongolian culture – it could be both native and a product of cultural diffusion. According to Schuyler Cammann, the Yin-Yang symbolism also developed its meaning throughout history. The recent change gradually emerged in the Yuan and Ming dynasty, stressing more explicitly sexual elements and considering Yin as inferior, or even "bad". Cammann argues for it to be the influence of strong sexual symbolism of Tantric forms of Buddhism (*Vajrayana*), whose patrons were the Mongolian emperors. The Tibetan Buddhism involved Hindu representations of sexual union to symbolize the interaction of male and female principles (method and wisdom) [Cammann, 1987: 113]. Perhaps, the Buryat expression *arga-bilig*,

which literally is translated as method and wisdom, was the direct result of translating the Buddhist ideas. *Arga-bilig* is the central part of the Buddhist astrology *Zurkhai*, where it found its essential appliance, as well as of the traditional Buddhist medicine and folk healthcare practices. Both the history and the practices connected with the conception should be the object of a more profound research, thus, here, we are interested merely in its common characteristics, which could serve as the cultural context to discuss other conceptions in their proper cultural setting. Thus, the universe is seen as a cooperation of different sorts of forces and qualities, which should not be considered as antagonistic, as in the Zoroastrian, or Judeo-Christian traditions. Let us present them in the following two columns:

ARGA	BILIG
Male	Female
Fire	Water
Sun	Moon
Sky	Earth
Day	Night
Summer	Winter
Heat	Cold
Clarity	Mystique
Up	Down
Five parenchymatous organs (lungs, heart, liver, kidneys, spleen)	Six viscera (bile, stomach, colon, small intestine, bladder, gastrointestinal tract)

[Belokurova, 2011: 116].

The integrity of the universe is based on the harmonious duality of the two kinds of forces that are in constant change and movement. Cammann indicates a peculiar way of differentiating the figures of a chess set, which was a popular game among Mongolian people: "the figures with dynamic features were set against static figures, standing personages against lying ones, animals with visibly marked male features against animals with marked female features, people wearing national costumes against people in 'foreign' costumes. Generally, personages, who in beliefs are associated with good, heaven, man, are set against personages associated with evil, woman and the Earth" [Cammann, 1946: 408–411; after: Kabzińska-Stawarz, 1991: 31]. Though, according

to Cammann, one side represented a spirit, power and good, the other – material things, weakness and evil, I am inclined to see the reflection of the complementary dichotomy *arga-bilig* in this set.

The idea of inseparability and complementariness finds its common expression in the folk Buryat culture, apart from its definite association with Buddhist practices. Thus, the *arga* represented by sky (*tengeri*) with stable, bright, dry qualities and *bilig* – by earth (*gazar*) with changing, dark, humid qualities. From the relation of these two elements (*aba-iin mungen serge – ekhe-iin nangin uimai*) other elements of the universe were born. The sky *tengeri*[83] is perceived as father (*Ataa Tengri* "Father Tengeri", *Esege Maalan Tengeri* "Father Maalan Tengeri"), possessing phallic symbols (*müngen serge* – "horse standing silver pole"); and earth as mother (*etügen*, *ekhe delkhei* – "Etügen Earth Mother-goddess", "Mother Earth"). The *Etügen Ekhe* (Mother Etügen) was said to have given birth to everything after an affair with the Tengeri.

Curiously, Robert A. Nisbet writes that the Greek idea of *physis* did not resemble the idea of *nature*. The Greek *physis* as a "way of growth" was mistranslated by Romans as nature. Actually, it resembled more the Buryat ideas of *vital forces* and *yosun*, if we accept Nisbet's claim that "physis referred to the principle of generation, or, more precisely, the generative power in the world, which was conceived in the manner of sexual generation" of "Father Heaven and Mother Earth and the genealogical scheme of cosmogony" [Nisbet, 1969: 22]. The Roman idea of nature was not the direct and lineal continuation of the Greek idea of *physis*, though was used as its translation and a counterpart. Though nature included physical aspects of man and society, it gave rise to the dualism between the physical (natural) and social that became one of the most far-reaching metaphors in the Western thought. As one can see, this distinction was not relevant in the Buryat

[83] Some researches argue *tengeri* (Classical Mong. script: *tngri*) to be of the same root as the Chinese "Tien" [Dondokova, 2004; Tulisow, 2007: 48]. The tradition of the sky cult goes as far back as to the Hunnu period (3rd–2nd century before Christ). The Hunnu Shanyu (king) would be called the Son of the Sky, which aligned him with the position of the Chinese emperor. Though, as Jerzy Tulisow notes, these mono-deities turned into numerous separate *tengeris* and *etügens* with the passing of the time [Tulisow, 2007: 50].

thought, because neither of the spheres had relation of this or other worldliness, or denoted distinct cosmic and social spheres.

In fact, the metaphor of *arga-bilig* could be used in interpretation of various aspects of human activity. The traditional medicine, art, architecture, outfit or interior are designed in accordance with these cosmic principles. What is more, I think this heuristic context could be useful in considering the social order in the Buryat thought in its various aspects. Though this metaphor was eliminated from the legitimate reflexive procedures, it does not mean that it disappeared without traces. In the fieldwork, I tried to find such manifestation. Particularly, I paid much attention to the view of political order where the Russian state is thought of in the "paternal" categories. It is denoted by traditional Mongolian state terms, like: *toro, guren*, or *ulas*. The metaphor of impartiality, authority and rage is the integral "paternal" identity of the state image that does not imply emotional affection. The state provides law *khuuli* that could be strict and harsh (*khatuu*, *sheruun*) for the sake of the orderliness. This is an *esege oron* "fatherland"[84] that is providing order and security, and to which the ancestors of the Buryats were once obliged and they fulfilled obligations well. Our informant in Aga Okrug expressed this thought in the following way:

> 300 years ago our ancestors found themselves between the choice of following the Yellow khan, that is China, or going to the White tsar… thus, the historical loss is connected with Russia… because Russians are open, good-natured, sincere people – more than Chinese or Mongols, they are a different peoples. This civilizational choice made by our ancestors […] perhaps the life of my nation… will always be connected with them. The other issue is how it [Buryat nation] will preserve… this is a hard question…[DS750635].

The ritual loyalty to the state is an integral part of most of the public events in Buryatia, which is treated not merely as flashiness. It should not be considered as lacking sincerity, since the ritual is an important action in maintaining the order. The army service, state institutions are not seen as external, but as a part of the order they dwell in. This

[84] The newly appearing male images of the Earth seem to be created by the analogy with Russian *otyechestvo* "fatherland" (*esege oron*), *Velikaya Otyechestvennaya Voyna* "Great Fatherland War" (*Esege Oronoo Khamagaalakha Dain*).

obligation towards the fatherland is also a part of Buryat *yosun* that is seen as a necessary duty.

The Buryat republic which is denoted most often as *ekhe oron*,[85] *ekhe niutag* (motherland) is thought of in maternal categories and is mostly depicted as a woman. In the national anthem, it is called *Ekhe oron* "Motherland", the images depicting Buryatia are as a rule women welcoming a guest in a traditional robe. During the festivals and concerts, Buryatia is represented as a woman in the Buryat dress (and Russia as a Cossack man). I could even argue that the Buryat nationalism is tightly connected with the maternal functions of its culture – bringing vitality, nurturing with the forces. It is the symbol of feeding mother Earth, it is beloved and loving, it is more close to one's heart, but it is always weaker in the face of the paternal authority and duty.

The national identity combines both these components of a parental universe order. And, none of them resemble the European romanticism and romantic love of one's country. The nationalist ideology which was born in this thought represents the modern nation as a "transparent community united in its affections and its commitment to abstract, universal values" [Lee, 2007]. Here, I would partly agree with the words of a Polish exile, Agaton Giller, whom I have already criticized in chapter 1. In the 19th century, during his journey in Transbaikalia, he came to the conclusion that the Buryats are not a nation in the strict sense of this word:

> […] alien to them is even lofty love for kinsmen renowned among Buryats; they know how and can live only with them; and finally the great love of God between them is only fear and awe. […] The love they feel towards their own things, their home is far from the love of country. They like their steppe because it feeds them, because they want to live just there, because elsewhere the climate would kill them; but it does not mean that they love the spirit of their own, they do not love their country as a moral unit, so they are not a nation in the true sense [Giller, 1867].

I would agree with it because despite the nation-building processes in the 20th century, the unmediated romantic love of a human towards

[85] However, the main Buryat newspaper *Buryaad ünen* in 2016 established the version: *Buryaad ulas*, instead of the popular *Buryaad oron* (https://www.baikal-daily.ru/news/16/183487/ [access date: 25.12.2016]).

the country and its nation seems to be rather a marginal component of identity and relations. This "love" is rather a kind of "natural" relation with the universe, and the state, or the political, social order is the part of the cosmic organization. The free choice of identity is a still strange phenomenon and, what is more, harmful to one's vitality.

Though this metaphor could be considered a classic pattern of the paternalism and colonial imagination, I connect it also with a certain cultural program. This is the model of harmony *arga-bilig, yin-yang*. In contact with the Russians, the Buryat define themselves in the categories of *bilig* and the Russians as *arga*. Thus, according to the characteristics, the Buryats are attributed with certain passiveness, indirectness, evil, fluidness, mystique and flexibility, while Russians with directness, honesty, clarity, activity, goodness, as well as with naivety and simplicity. None of these characteristics are thought of in the categories of good and evil, they are highly relative. This also opens the major metaphor of relations of the minority with state – the order (*yosun*) of state is a direct obligation and the Buryat order is changing and adopting to it. The harmony *eb eye* and the power of state certainly carry more valuable connotations than the claim of parity, protest, or assertiveness. As Melissa Chakars noted: "the Buryats have generally acted as a minority of Russia rather than a colony seeking independence" [Chakars, 2014: 258]. It could be referred to both as harmony and as assimilation, but both of these narratives are the parts of this cultural program.

I am not attributing overall representativeness to this metaphor, but this is generally my impression from the fieldwork research. Let us remember that many ideas of social order in the Western tradition are essentially metaphoric [Nisbet, 1969: 6]. In Buryatia, there are extremely multiple ways of interpretation of their position in the state. However, this metaphor certainly exists along with other narrations, because it has close connections with the local ideas of order. Thus, I guess that even the dilemma and, at the same time, the Buryat tragedy of assimilation to the culture of majority was triggered both by the practices of the Russian state and the deep Buryat desire to be accepted in terms of the cosmic order. The vision of this order and relation with power centres, as I have shown, has a rich and deep heuristic context.

4.5. On the way to defining the social sphere

The previous part described some selected literary testimonies of the Buryat-Mongols connected with social thought. I am aware that the sources I have cited here definitely do not exhaust the list of literature that could be analyzed. Though it is more of a draft than a complete analysis, it introduces certain important logics into the general structure of my argumentation. The major conclusion is the claim that reflections on the social order did appear. It could be surely called a kind of sociological thought, which had ancient roots and was widespread on the Asian continent. This is, in a way, the starting point of a "sociology" – it is of course a Buddhist society, but – in the same way – the starting point of sociology in Europe was a Christian model of society.

This view on the society, however, is significantly different from the European models, which influenced both the scope of ideas and their functioning. The division of state and religion does not imply the division of sacred and secular spheres. Both of these parts are equally important parts of the universe. They are mutually interacting and transforming parts. There is lack of division between other-worldly and this-worldly spheres. There is no vision of the force outside this world. No idea of materialistic nature, religious God. Everything is here and all the parts are equally influential. The social world is not isolated neither by the transcendent loneliness, exclusive nature of the human being, nor by his/her superior special role. The political order was not imposed by the transcendent power but the dynamism of vital forces. Moreover, this thought aimed at constructing not only the society, but also the universe.

Kollmar-Paulenz in private correspondence informed me that the contemporary Buryat-Mongolian word for society "nejiɣem" is absent at least from such important texts of Mongolian history as: *Secret History of Mongols* (~1237), *Erdeni Tunumal* (1607), *Erdeni-jin tobči* (1662) and *Subud erike* (1835). As far as I can judge, the term is also absent from the Buryat historical chronicles that I have reviewed. The term *nejɣem* understood as "society" appears in the early Soviet period (1920–1930) as the neologism for translating the socio-political

terminology: *öber-e erketü nejiɣem jirumtu jasaɣ-un ɣajar* "autonomous government of a socialist society, the government of socialist society", *nejiɣem jirumtu* "socialist society, socialism" [Sanzhanov, 2013: 7]. The root of the term derives from the verb *nejilku* "to unite", and it is etymologically connected with word *nejite* "total", "mass". In turn, one could doubt whether in this thought ever appeared the notion of pure social sphere. Perhaps, distinguishing the society as such is an operation performed from the viewpoint of already established sociology. Such doubt was expressed by Kollmar-Paulenz in her article dedicated to the Buryat-Mongolian culture of knowledge, which serves for me as a major methodological inspiration:

> […] I feel uncomfortable with one particular aspect of postorientalist scholarship, the strong focus on non-European knowledge forms solely in their relation to European knowledge forms [Kollmar-Paulenz, 2014: 126].

Indeed, one should be aware of the purely methodological character of this operation and could blame me for still considering it from the position of science. However, for me, it is seen as necessity of the more general project of extended translation of one culture into the terms of another. The main goal is discovering and incorporating the local social ideas into the contemporary view of social sciences. The reflections on the social sphere could be attributed to the tradition of social thought. I argue, however, that these ideas are still vivid in the contemporary Buryat culture.

In order to continue the reflections on the Buryat ideas of social order, let us return to the very basic knowledge of what we understand to be the social sphere. It is known that the social science, as such, is a product of the 19th-century demarcation projects between natural sciences and humanities [Callicott, Ames, 1989a: ix]. Though the social sciences always aspired to achieve the status of "natural" science and, indeed, were highly influenced and inspired by it, the underlying assumption was distinction of "human" as something unique from "nature" and different from the world he functions in [Morowitz, 1989: 39].

Recent scholarly works challenged this separation of the social sphere from the rest of environment and distinguishing the society as such. One of the most pivotal works was written by the French scholar

Bruno Latour, who explored the arbitral modernist distinction between nature and society [Latour, 1993]. According to Latour, indeed, the social sciences are relying on the existence of a pure "social" sphere and "social" facts, as opposed to the other domains of non-social reality. Simultaneously, the "social" science constructed the idea of "society" and restricted it to the limited range of "assemblages" and the meaning of social. Social science worked on distinguishing this sphere from the pure "linguistic", "economical", and from a particular moment from the "biological" and other forms knowledge:

> What they meant by "society" has undergone a transformation no less radical, which is thanks in large part to the very expansion of the products of science and technology. It is no longer clear whether there exist relations that are specific enough to be called "social" and that could be grouped together in making up a special domain that could function as "a society" [Latour, 2005: 2].

The content and categories of sociology, thus, are not neutral in their applicability. The separation of nature and society was produced through constant efforts of "purification" of these domains. As he argued, "culture is an artefact created by bracketing nature off" [Latour, 1993: 104] and nature is constructed in the laboratories by scientists who are immersed in the particular social and political *milieu* [Cartsen, 2004: 189]. Back at the beginning of the last century, Ludwik Fleck also wrote about the construction of scientific discovery as attributed to a certain cultural vision (thought-collectives) rather than to a natural fact. I propose to consider the nature–culture division as a sort of cultural convention, or ideology. As a result, I want to put the West in the same analytical frames with non-Western cultures [cf. Carsten, 2004: 189] in the sense that the nature–culture dichotomy is a cultural idea that could not serve as the universal or more perfect interpretational category. In order to answer the stated question, one should reconsider a range of other concepts and ideas, which underlie this logic of thought, because there could exist other distinctions than nature and culture. The reliance on the local epistemic categories could give us more senses and ideas for more profound interpretations of various social phenomena. It should not be necessarily connected with the change on the way to modernity, which initiated such division.

4.6. Multiple orders of the universe

4.6.1. Ritual and dogma versus order and method

Though I use the term universal law to denote the idea of *yosun*, following the authors I cited, modern Buryats do not think about it in absolutist categories. The universe is not homogenous – it has areas which are ruled according to their own unique regularities – *yosuns*. In the view of Buryats, the world is seen as collection of different traditions/cultures of *yosuns* and each of them had been worked out by generations of ancestors of a particular community – there is Buryat *yosun*, Russian *yosun*, but also the *yosun* of Buddhism, *yosun* of shamanism, and the *yosun* of Christianity. This vision could help to understand many connotations of religion in the Buryat colloquial way of thinking. For instance, the Buryats declaring themselves as Buddhists do not negate the shamanic or Christian representations of world order and its content, and very often turn to them themselves. These orders are not competing in terms of "objectivity", or "truthfulness" – they are all considered as effective methods of the universe transformation. The only points they could compete on are the terms of "compliance" and "effectiveness".

The *yosun* understood as *ritual* in this sense could have much higher importance than the content. I want to emphasize this information because I think it is important for understanding the concept of religion in this culture. Zapaśnik after his extensive fieldworks in Central Asia concluded that religion functioned there not as a theological dogma experienced by individuals, but as the community of ritual:

> For Muslims of Central Asia the content of religion is ritual. They do not pay attention to the dogmatic aspect of belief as the Christians do; I would even meet people who had no idea about it. Nevertheless, it is evident for me that the one who converts to another religion, stops participating in collective rituals that integrate the community. Converting to Christianity means leaving the community. This is the reason why he is punished, but not for the disavowal [Zapaśnik, 2010: 55].

According to him, this difference was the major blockade in understanding religiosity outside the European context. Zapaśnik describes particularly the roots of fundamentalism, criticizes the view on

incompatibility and hostility of the Muslim "values" with those of the West. Various religious conflicts were rooted not in the disagreement of certain truths, values, or beliefs, but in the conflicts of ritual traditions along with various political and economic circumstances [Zapaśnik, 2014: 17]. The ritual was neglected in the Western thought, where it is not the content of religion – the content is the individual experience of contact with the sacrum. Mary Douglas sees such prejudice against ritual as inherited from the Judeo-Christian conflict between the interior religious life and the exterior religious observance, which had different solutions in different Christian traditions [Douglas, 1966]. The Protestant anti-ritualism was one of the most significant steps in this conflict. The word *ritual* turned into an ugly word associated with empty conformism in the general revolt against formalism and the form itself [Douglas, 2004: 41]. The idea of content as a philosophical substance became the leading motif of European prejudice towards rituals as its arbitral external expression. Meanwhile, the Buryat dynamic vision of the universe does not require its substantial fundament, thus, ritual with its content has a different kind of relation.

Unlike in the West, the theological knowledge did not tend to be extended to the masses, but was rather hidden. There was no institution of confession and mass Messianism. Lamas, especially in Tibetan Buddhism, were considered as the only ones who could use it because of their special training lasting many years. Commoners as a rule have an access only to selected Buddhist texts and some adapted didactic literature.[86] Even now it is not typical for the Buryats, or it is even seen as a sin to reflect or dispute over Buddhist ideas and, especially, its pantheon. It is also not rare for the elderly to scold the youth that tries to express their speculations and commentaries on Buddhist philosophy. What struck me in Poland was almost the opposite behaviour. Despite the criticism of Catholic ritualism, discussions and disputes on personal understanding of God are common. I participated as an observer in a Catholic pilgrimage to Częstochowa, where

[86] However, Andrey Bazarov in his research states that the Buddhist literature functioned not merely for reading: its physical presence would affect family well-being, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DpXrAJYdvA&t=940s (access date: 26.12.2016).

I came into contact with regular believers. I had certain difficulties when Poles asked me who in Buddhism created the universe, what I believe in, where I read the truths from, or what the Buddhist equivalent of Christian Bible is, etc.

If one asks the Buryats about Buddhist theory, deities, or legends, they can hardly find a person who would be able to talk about it (for various reasons). It is highly emphasized by so-called *neophytes* – the ones who converted to Buddhism from other religious traditions (mostly ex-Orthodox Christians from the western part of Russia). Following their deeply Western understanding of the religion as the dogma, they study Buddhist theories and canonic texts very carefully [Dondukov, 2016: 48]. One of my neophyte acquaintances from St Petersburg came to Buryatia after he was inspired by the works of Buryat lamas because he thought of this place as the cradle of Russian Buddhism. Following his individual desire of contact with sacrum, he arrived there and was totally disappointed with the "Buryat" Buddhism. He told me that regular people do not even distinguish one divine being from another. I saw him testing the knowledge of some people, and they were deeply embarrassed not to be able to pass his tests. The commoners reading theological literature and familiar with the dogmatic sphere is rather a new phenomenon in Buryatia.

Though the Buryats attribute this state of things to the harsh anti-religious policy of the Soviet period, which is also definitely true, the other reason is the uneven distribution of religious knowledge among the masses. The sense of dogmas and theories concerns only a particular group represented by educated elites and monks [Morokhoeva, 1994: 59]. Common people are not seen as capable of coping with them and they could bring harm to their life by wrongly using the secret knowledge. This can be clearly seen in Buryat culture, where the strict requirements of Buddhist theory for lamas contrast drastically with the interpretation of Buddhism by regular people who see it rather as practices used for satisfying their particular needs.[87] Buddhist datsans are the important economical, educational, cultural and medical centres, but the Buddhist

[87] This was also noted in pre-Soviet criticisms of the Buryat and, generally, Mongolian Buddhism.

doctrinal knowledge, arts, meditational techniques and practices were available only to lamas, while regular people could only participate in public services and rituals, enjoy medical service and astrology [Tangad, 2013: 39]. They require religion mainly for capabilities of its rituals and their efficiency is of a great cultural value. In the Buryat view, ritual is understood in the categories of efficient activity *uile uiled-* "to do a deed, produce a work, or bring about a result" [Baumann, 2008: 219]. The dynamic and transforming universe requires special methods of coping with it. Any religion in this sense could offer its services without introducing its dogmatic sphere.

Further, let me offer an example from my fieldwork, which is a very typical example of how people use religion in everyday practices. I talked to two women from Aga Okrug. The sisters declared themselves to be Buddhists and our conversation was conducted in Ulan-Ude, in their house full of the Buddhist books, tankas, and other attributes. They told me the story of how they saved the life of their grandson who was born with congenital heart disorder. Desperate about their misfortune, they turned to various sources – hospitalization of the child in Moscow, the rites in the Buddhist monasteries, and the visits to shamans:

> **Woman 1**: When he [the grandson – A. Zh.] was going to be operated, we would go here and there [here and there means that they visited lamas and shamans to bless the operation – A. Zh.] and did various rites. After the operation there appeared complications from surgeries and he was alive only due to the breathing equipment. We again went here and there and finally we were told to investigate our ancestry (*ug*)… when we visited a *böö* [shaman – A. Zh.]. "Where that person is, where this person is, in this or that generation there lived that or this person" said he to us. Thus, we checked our genealogical trees to find out who was that. Also, he asked us to look at the father's side. When he [shaman – A. Zh.] researched my ancestry, he said, "In your ancestry there is a Russian man, Russian blood. Where is he?" He was from my mother's side; I knew nothing about that. He scolded us [the shaman – A. Zh.]. "If you don't even know about that why did you come here! Go and research it!" So, we tried to find out… [151006_0131, translation from Buryat].

The women tried all sorts of methods to help their grandson. Among others, they searched for the name of the ancestor who required an offering for the life of the child, honoured them, brought offerings and made other rituals. The child was in-between life and death. Accidentally,

one of their sympathizing acquaintances had a vision and made an offer to an ancestor they did not know:

> **Woman 1**: A totally alien [alien in the sense: not kin-related – A. Zh.] person, Balma abgai ["elder sister" is respectful term for any woman – A. Zh.] honoured this ancestor.
> **Woman 2**: Yes, absolutely alien. She had a vision that a small senior woman was requiring to be honoured. And she did it while the child was dying.
> **Woman 1**: Suddenly, she thought "Hue-hue [a Buryat exclamation – A. Zh.], there should be something done for the boy, an offering should be done" said she. She made these offerings to that ancestor and then told me… We even were not there; we were making useless offerings to those who did not require it. And that very evening, that senior woman in the vision of Balma was saying, "The son of Damar is ill, I am going to take him with me unless you bring me an offering". Then Balma said, "A senior woman with such an outfit, with a blue dress of not our local Buryats required to be honoured, I honoured her" and let her go and your boy received *ami*. Two matters coincided in one evening… We even did not know that from our mother's side we had Russian blood. We were told [by the shaman – A. Zh.] to go to the Russian Church, donate silver. We made offering of some jewelry. We knew nothing about that; back in some generation there was a Russian person in our ancestry [151006_0131, translation from Buryat].

The women did not take it for granted, but they saw an evident relation between the ritual made by Balma and the sudden recovery of their child. By no means did they deny the huge role of the Moscow doctors.[88] All these methods were efficient and conjoined in saving the life of their child, except that some of them were more efficient and others – less. Nevertheless, all together, they gave a very strong effect. Science, especially medicine, also could have a different effect on the Buryats who believe that there are illnesses that could not be treated by the conventional or "Russian medicine" – in that case, people say "he got the Buryat thing" (*Buryaad yumenin' khurebe*), which could be only treated by the *yosun* of a lama, or a shaman. Buryat doctors themselves often advise to resort to this kind of treatment because they often turn out to be more appropriate. Most often, however, these *yosuns* are used in combination to achieve the most effective result.

[88] See more in: [Chudakova, 2013].

I think I managed to record a perfect and quite typical example of how the concept of religion is functioning. Almost all the topics I have introduced earlier appear here. One could see how the vital forces (*ami*) of a child did not reach him because of the failing to maintain the order of relations with its source. Especially in the face of adversity, despite the Buddhist skepticism about shamans, they used their rituals to transform the reality for their advantage. In no way did I want to present this thinking as cosmological chaos. The Buryats distinguish clearly the traditions of the rituals and rarely mix them. However, why are they not free in making a choice? The matter is that the efficiency of ritual depends much on one's ancestry. There is a certain ritual pattern determined by ancestors and which should be repeated by descendants. The example shows how Buddhists employed the services of a shaman not only because it was more effective in their case, but also because of their ancestry. This reason, again, made them visit a Christian church and make offerings for their Russian ancestor (or, to the God of the Russian ancestor). For the "offering" they made in the church they used the same word *ürgel* as in Buddhism and shamanism. Christianity, here, was interpreted according to the categories of their culture – the exchange of vitality, constructing the mutual relation with the source of vitality. A Polish anthropologist was treated in a similar way during his fieldwork when he met a shaman woman:

> Initially she perceived us as regular clients who came to resolve their private problems. She told fortunes for every member of our team, which was a difficult task, because we poorly knew our ancestors (not many generations back). In this regard, she referred us to our own church and the rituals it provides [Połeć, 2013: 195].

I tried to discuss the relation of the efficiency of ritual with one's tradition, and a Buryat woman found it reasonable. Being from a Buddhist family, she also visits her trusted shaman when she has problems:

> When we are visiting our shaman, it is like almost visiting a Buddhist temple with all the pictures and sculptures of Buddhist deities: portraits of Itigelov [a Buryat lama from the beginning of the 20th century – A. Zh.], Khambo Lama, Dalai Lama, photos of all of them. When he talks about necessary rituals,

> he directs us to the Buddhist temple, to participate in the [Buddhist – A. Zh.] ritual *Taban khan,* it is very curious [151028_0137, a woman, 50 years old, Ulan-Ude, Autumn 2015, translation from Buryat].

Nevertheless, there could be different relations with the source of vitality in the Buryat society. I had an occasion to talk with a man called Damba, who told me a very similar story. His grand nephew was also born with congenital heart disorder. This boy was transported to Moscow, too, for an operation and, the same as in the first example, the family did not stop at this. In parallel, they turned to lamas and shamans. Apart from the work of doctors in Moscow, lamas enacted particular rites and a shaman conducted a huge rite in their familial house and recommended to perform it every four years. Due to all these reasons, the surgery was a success and the life of the boy was saved. However, when I talked to Damba, he expressed his dissatisfaction with what his brother did. Their family was Buddhist and the source of their vitality was received according to the Buddhist order (*yosun*) from the bodhisattvas, while his brother referred to the vitality of their ancestors (*ug*). According to him, the following in parallel of the two *yosuns* could have negative consequences – the *yosun* should be strictly defined. Who knows what ancestors the shaman awoke? Who knows what they are going to demand in the future? Awakening them once will bind them with multiple ritual obligations through other generations, which, perhaps, would be difficult for them. Therefore, he did not engage much with the rituals, though, generally, did not doubt in their effectiveness.

In both cases, we deal with the use of the ritual of "another" religion. However, despite that, they still consider themselves Buddhist because in the case of the major rituals, like a funeral ceremony, there is no other possibility for them than to conduct it according to the order of Buddhism *lamyn yohoor*. The word "method" is more proper here than only "belief". Thus, the difference of the clan background plays a secondary role to the vital force heredity, which could be transformed, fixed and matched. What is most important for me in this part is the way the clan ancestry and the tradition of the ancestral cult is seen as a source of the vital forces. These rituals of ancestral contact could be

performed through different methods but with the similar goal. The major category of this thinking is the metaphor of feeding and consumption, which is projected onto different religious orders:

> I am afraid of going to a shaman… I am afraid that he will tell me to pay respect to the clan ancestors. The rituals of paying respect to the ancestors… sometimes I doubt it is worth doing this. Of course, if one encounters this or that misfortune, he has to go there and here to find the best way out. […] The ceremony *ugaa khündelkhe* is a shaman thing. The shamans also are different – some of them can do this, some are charlatans. Of course, there are real shamans, who know how to do everything, but some just do it for money, so I do not go to them. I always say – you have your own ancestral *oboo* [seen Buddhist ritual – A. Zh.], you have your own *burkhans* (Buddhist deities) you worship… you should worship them, worship your *burkhan*, visit your *oboo* and live a proper life – this is enough to live a good life [150919_0102, translation from Buryat].

The woman expressed a very similar opinion as the man earlier that the source of vitality should be strictly defined, because these sources of vitality are not always compatible. While doing my fieldwork, this was a very popular topic in our conversations:

> In fact, one should not attach much importance to shamanism. If you adhere to many traditions, for example, if you perform shamanic rituals, your *sakhiusan* (Buddhist deity protector) will look away from you: "You don't pay attention to me, you can go to your shaman". In turn, the shaman will say – you are Buddhist, go to your lama. That's why one should not attach much importance to shamanism. Once you are a Buddhist, you should adhere to Buddhist religion. One should watch only one line, one should not fluctuate back and forth. […] If you will stick to both, there will be no success […] you will be for nothing, just fall between the two. Some Buddhists converted to Christianity and suffer much, I know some women who died because of it. […] They joined an incompatible tradition: their own *sakhiusans* [Buddhist protectors – A. Zh.] turn away from them and those [Christian protectors – A. Zh.] do not accept [151028_0137, a woman, 80 years old, Ulan-Ude, Autumn 2015, translation from Buryat].

As the woman told me, it is not always that those "traditions" and "rituals" could not be merged. Such a case is seen as dangerous and very often the contesting characteristics of the sources could take human life (and, thus, his potential descendants):

> Zhamyan had a Khudari [a regional group of Buryats – A. Zh.], Buryat wife. His Khudari wife had shaman (*böö*) *ug* and Zhamyan had a strong Khan *sakhyusan* [Buddhist bodhisattva – A. Zh.]. The Khan overpowered the shaman religion protector, so his wife became bedridden. She couldn't even lift a kettle… she could not even lift such a large kettle and was just lying in bed [fieldwork note, 2013, translation from Buryat].

These orders are not merged, or mixed up with each other, and they are not mutually interchangeable in all the spheres of human activity, as the "conventional" primitive mentality would perceive. They are not unified, but thoroughly compartmentalized, thus, in this vision of a dynamic circulation the Buryats are not naive, but very selective. They do not embody the postmodern freedom of choosing the truth, or identity. They are in the same way skeptical about the broadly defined New Age movement, where in search of individual emancipation there are attracted several eclectic spiritual and religious practices. They are skeptical not because of their "disbelief", but because they think that these unknown practices could be incompatible to their sort of vitality. The authority of certain practices is determined by their tradition in the human community, but not by the individual discovery (except for the cases of great authorities in history, like Genghis Khan). The proper tradition gives the proper quality vital forces for the community and this tradition remains the central point of distinguishing their identity from the others. What is central in the understanding of the *yosun* is that the proper way of behaviour guarantees the proper flow and nurturing of the vital forces of a human being. The human being is an integral part of the universe transformation and can exist only as a product of a special order *yosun*.

To conclude this part of the text, let me just once again formulate its main claims. The example seems to show that the dynamic vision of the universe does not require the philosophical concept of substance. "Ritual" in this sense is more efficient than "dogma" due to its power to control and determine the dynamics of the world. Different religions, at least in the folk view, are seen as effective methods of the universe transformation due to their set of rituals proven by the time and generations of people. The human being is a product of a particular ritualistic order – thus, to save his integrity one has to reproduce it. Order other than the traditional order could be either effective,

neutral, or, unfortunately, harmful. Nevertheless, none of these orders are judged as less or more truthful due to, again, lack of the absolute truth to disagree with.

4.6.2. *Yosun* and the political order

It would be insufficient to consider this order as a part of a merely religious sphere. Science and various secular ideologies, the same as religions, are also offering particular projects of world visions. Perhaps, it would be enough to mention that European secular knowledge developed in large measure either in accordance, or in antagonism to religious knowledge and shares its various aspects:

> […] Modern science stands for strict determinism or logical positivism and as such allows no possibility of chaos, irrationality, chance, infinity or free will. It allows no tradition, or arbitrary convention and is predicated upon an optimistic notion that the universe is logical; that everything can be predicted; and the end of the knowledge is a utopian bliss. This view does not reflect true, or apparent reality, but faith – the ultimate leap of faith [Baumann, 2008: 48].

The view of political ideologies is rooted deeply in European thought, both religious and philosophical [Humphrey, 2010: 335]. In this light, I posed a question of how secular could a political order be considered if placed in the Buryat traditional categories of thought. In searching for answers to this question I came across a few interesting ideas, which could be helpful at least in the approach to this matter.

The replacement of Buddhism with the communist ideology seems to be interpreted not as the clash of religion with policy, but as the succession of two *yosuns*. The communist ideology and politics were often called the *communist yosun*, or *bolşoviig yosun* [*Erdem ba shazhan* 5, 1931: 3]. It replaced the previous *yosun* of Buddhism, in the same way as Buddhism once replaced the legitimacy of shamanism. One could even see very similar logics in these narrations.

> There was a hill where ships were sacrificed. According to the legend he [a lama – A. Zh.] climbed this hill, destroyed and threw around the pyramid of animal skulls and shouted: "You, mountain, who demands so many heads, take my one instead of those thousands!" [160826_0283].

Similar cases of the Buddhist order demolishing (*buta sokhikho*) the shamanist cult are widely described in ethnographic literature [Zhamtsarano, 2011]. Despite the pacifist stereotype of Buddhism, the metaphors of war, conquest and demolition of the shamanic places and deities are widespread. It was the implementation of the new order that from then on was determining the *yosun* of the Buryats. Let us compare it with a description of the elimination of Buddhism in Transbaikalia written by ethnographer Genin-Darma Natsov in the 1930s. It is quite similar to the previous example in the metaphorical frame:

> Banzaraktsaev [a local activist – A. Zh.] climbed on the third floor of the temple and took out from a far cabinet the sculpture of the *burkhan sakhyusan* (the temple's deity protector), and then standing on the roof of the third floor in front of everybody broke its hands and legs and then threw them on the ground, saying: "Your captain now is deprived of his paws, I have killed him". These words of his now spread among the masses as the illustration of demolition of the datsan by Banzaraktsaev.
>
> Then he went downstairs and proceeded to demolish other sculptures of burkhans [deities – A. Zh.]. In doing so, they dragged them outside, split their bodies and heads with an axe, put their eyes out with iron bars, threw out their insides, etc. Not a single burkhan of Günei datsan was left intact [Sinitsyn, 2013: 272–273].

The deities were conquered, the holy places were demolished, or incorporated as premises into the state system. These mass demolitions of Buddhism often are accompanied in the Buryat narrations with the fire of karma, or the beginning of the new historic period. According to the village genealogy of Mogsokhon, during the October Revolution, the locals would say: "A new order/law (*khuuli*) is coming and will bring both bad and good, high and low times". There was proclaimed a "new order" (*shine yosun*) instead of the "old order" (*khuuchin yosun*).

Just as Buddhism was appropriating the shamanic rituals, communism was striving to conquer the ritual accompanying the human life. The most important events of human life, like: birth, wedding, death had to be enacted through the new atheistic rituals competing with those previous ones. This could be seen in academic publications from the Soviet period, which saw the ritualistic content of the Buryat religion as one of the most resistant to changes on the way to the secular

society [Gerasimova, 2006: 71–79]. Below, I cite an illustrative quote from one of these publications:

> "Our main goal is providing humidity, rain, good harvest and plant stands. On it depends our wealth and happiness. Let our leaders, agronomists, engineers plow, sow, irrigate and fertilize, and we will act according to our tradition, no harm in that," argue often the participants of collective rites in the Buryat uluses [Mikhailov, 1986: 37].

Other authors recommended strengthening the Soviet secular rituals to compete with the traditional versions. Zapaśnik wrote that nowhere in the Soviet Union the anti-religious and anti-traditionalist ideology ended with success [Zapaśnik, 1999; cf. Wasilewski, 2015: 67]. The religion was destroyed as an institution, the dogmatic narrations were contested, however, the religion as the ritualistic value failed to be overpowered. The major rituals, such as: annual summer rites *oboo*, celebration of the lunar new year *Sagaan Hara*, wedding and funeral rituals were more or less openly held during the whole Soviet period. The former lamas and shamans in official status of civilians continued receiving clients and performing rituals.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, the content and the form of the Soviet ideology did not strike the roots. It would not be a mistake to argue that they were quite successfully incorporated into the everyday life of the Buryats. As a result, the Buryats had to organize double versions of rituals. This also regards the major events and celebrations: the annual summer ceremony *oboo* competed with its secular version, known as: *Surkharbaan*, or *Naadan*, which eliminated its religious component and retained the entertainment part as a traditional folk holiday. The wedding ceremony at the registry and the traditional ceremony *khadag* of asking the parents for the bride and the deities of her natal family. Despite the older generations, Buryats did not approve much of some of those new versions of rituals, both of them were seen as important and necessary. The Soviet rituals are usually called *orod yoho* (the Russian *yosun*) in line with the Buryat *yosun*. This *yosun* is different, but in no way is it seen as external, or improper. This is not only a symbolic act of confirmation of their identity – they perceive it as the necessary order of actions for the proper way of the universe transformation.

As I have shown in the previous parts, the *yosun* used to have real legislative power in the past and was consciously codified in various Mongolian regulations, which controlled the marriage issues, financial transactions, inheritance, etc. Perhaps, with the coming of Soviet-state legislative system, it was forced to denote merely the tradition, or ritual. The revival of endangered traditional culture in the post-Soviet period was often referred to as the revival of *yosun* (or *yoho zanshal*). Though most of the researchers consider the post-Soviet transformations as the search of identity, I would like to present these times in a different perspective because it was not the major metaphor in the Buryat society. The 1990s are associated more with the overall crisis on various levels of human activity – both economic and existential [Wielecki, 2014: 11; 2015]. The communist *yosun* stopped being effective in maintaining the order, thus, the traditional practices (*yosun*), which still existed and were followed during the Soviet time, were once again to serve as approved methods in harmonizing the chaos. It has less to do with national identity, or identification, but rather with the attempts to fix the disturbed cosmic order. The image of the universe as a sequence of transformations should not be understood as a religious construct. It is equally incorporated into the secular worldview, and it does not necessarily imply ideas of sacrum in the order. To my mind, it is the basic vision of the universe, which determines the operational possibilities of both religion and the secular ideology. Such vision of the universe comes before any ideas of order, being a fundamental category of this culture.

This vision of the dynamic universe implies the incorporation of different orders and not necessarily the replacement of one order with another. In fact, the possibility of many world orders instead of the one order with relatively stable laws is one of the central points and problems in the Western philosophy[89] [Hall, 1989: 105]. The leading idea was the Cartesian assumption of uniformity of nature, its laws and the progress of knowledge through addition and accumulation [Nisbet, 1969: 110]. However, the world seen as the dynamic continuum does not allow one to insist on some stable rules. Its transformation

[89] On the other hand, it is not that easy with the natural sciences, which, in turn, discover very special parts of universe as stated by the distinction of biology and physics with their own logics and laws.

depends on the methods one applies. These methods could be worked out by different cultures and could be equally effective in the universe transformation. As we have seen, *yosun*, thus, serves as a more general term for the order than a particular one, born in the Buryat culture.

Though everything I wrote previously could be referred to as the Buryat order, it is also the way the Buryats interpret the orders of the other cultures. They see the variety of human cultures in the same way as they see features of their own: (1) constructing the social and cosmic order for receiving the vital forces; (2) the metaphor of feeding and consuming in the social thought; (3) the sources of vitality spring from both one's broadly understood ancestral origin and the human relations with other humans; (4) human culture is one of the engines of the cosmic changes: one's culture is one's nature. These features of the social and cosmic orders could be considered in their view the core of local sociological thought. Nevertheless, the "methodology" one's culture applies to it could be fundamentally different. No one knows how the order is achieved by the cultures of other people, but the fact that a culture exists and functions is the best evidence for the Buryats of the capability and effectiveness of their order. The multiple orders of human cultures could be various and even opposing in some fundamental traditions, but all of them are effective for those who were born in them. The dogma one culture proclaims is not significant in this view.

In some sense, one could say that Buryats have an anthropological approach to many cultural differences and constantly analyze differences and similarities of the groups they dwell with. However, these reflections are not limited to merely the social or cultural sphere – they also allow the possibility that "laws of nature" are working differently, or even exist in different ways depending on the tradition of human communities. These traditions determine the quality and the way of social change.

Summary

As the historians of ideas show, the roots of the nature–culture division run deep in the European thought. The elements of Platonism in Christianity are reflected in the dualistic theory of human nature,

which served as one of the ruling conceptions of the Western thought. The human being in the Christian theological thought was considered as the "middle link" between the merely sentient and intellectual forms of being. This transitional position of the humanity determined the hierarchy of the order in the chain of being, and, at the same time, brought duality of its composition. Man was gravitating towards both orders – with his soul, mind and reason to the celestial order and with his bodily desires to the lower order of the animal world [Lovejoy, 1960: 79]. With the changes that appeared in the 18th century, the separation of the human race from the rest of the natural environment followed, while the other-worldly sphere gave birth among others to the notion of the natural law. The triumph of Western society over nature through realizing its separateness was contrasted with the communities which are still not able to comprehend this distinction. To a large extent, they were considered to be in the state of nature. The separate development of sociology and anthropology was determined by this division and their focus on this or that type of society. This separation of methodology, theory and vocabulary of describing the Western societies and the "others" was, of course, discredited a long time ago. We cannot use these ideas in description of a distant culture because the spheres called cosmic, non-social or non-human, in turn, could exist only in opposition to the established vision of the social one.

What I have done in this part was to present some categories of culture, literary sources, which should serve as a heuristic context of understanding the Buryat ideas of a social thought. Besides, I also came to the conclusion that it would be wrong to call it "purely" social because it implies the vision of the cosmic order as its integral part. This is how I justify the phrase I used in the title of this book "social and cosmic orders" to denote, if not unity, at least a thin line between the two spheres. I am aware that the problem is much more complex than I have presented, but I want to use this metaphor to show schematically the differences in considering the social world in the context of the Buryat culture. It is important to pay attention to this feature while interpreting both the heuristic context and actual practices of meaning production, to which I devote the rest of the text.

5

The disturbed order: Categories of traditional culture and challenges of assimilative processes

If the previous chapter emphasized the heuristic context of the social thought, the present part will be more concentrated on the actual one. I will begin with the description of how the view of the "universal" order coexists with other cultural projects of order, both contemporary and in recent past. Besides, I am interested in how the social change and "acculturation" are defined within these categories of culture. Finally, I will describe how the Buryat life is losing its orderliness due to assimilation, which disturbs the vitality, and how the Buryats are trying to restore the order.

The chapter attempts to discuss the assimilation and acculturation phenomena that are relatively understudied in the interactionist perspective. I am not going to deliberate on the distinctions between the terms such as assimilation, acculturation, enculturation, or integration. I am interested more in the ways these processes are defined in this culture, what metaphors are used for conceptualization of these phenomena in the field I worked in. I am aware that these views do not necessarily have to be organized in a single consistent narration, but I will try to represent some of its fragmental aspects. This part is more about posing questions and depicting the prospects of the future research than trying to provide the exact answers.

5.1. The Buryat order and the problem of its continuity

The overall Buryat panic over the loss of their "tradition" and accelerating assimilative processes has almost become a part of their self-image –

people with a "disappearing" culture [cf. Nowicka, 2013: 116]. As it was shown in the previous parts, Buryat society indeed underwent transformations. The changes were deep, comprehensive and rapid, concerning such core components of the culture as language, economy and even geography. Therefore, contemporary Buryat society could not be considered a "lonely island" [Barth, 2004b: 350] with idealized traditional culture, since the processes of acculturation affected deeply its contemporary state. Some researchers apply such terms as "creole" [Dugarova, 2012: 167], or "hybrid" [Szmyt, 2013: 26], and even "metis" to describe the state and the change of the Buryat culture. Certainly, it could not be considered independently from the influences of Russian culture and Russian people. This complicates the topic of the research and makes it necessary to reflect on the ideas formed as a result of intercultural contact. The colloquial and academic discourses apply mostly the term *assimilyatsia* "assimilation". In the common Buryat discourse, the major element of assimilation is certainly the language shift. However, the publications on the language shift and the loss of traditional practices fail to reveal culture as the category of thinking which can exist beyond the discourse and still be a decisive factor in attitudes and behaviours.

The changes of ideas, perhaps, are the most fascinating issue, which goes far beyond the scope of this research. Throughout the whole book, I attempt to consider in what degree the categories of traditional culture have an impact on shaping the identity of contemporary Buryats and whether they still serve as the referential background of social ties. The provinces of meaning I tried to present in the previous chapters could serve as the evidence that the social changes, dramatic language shift, introduction of the Western-style education do not necessarily imply the assimilation on the levels of the categories of thought, or ideas. These problems, in particular, challenge the popular category of "world vision", or "cosmology" which – according to anticipations – should contain an internally consistent logic and unity. I sympathize with Schütz's idea of "multiple realities", as a more appropriate term [Schütz, 1945]. It becomes an even more challenging task to resolve if we confront the "native" Buryat worldview and the way it reacts to the content of the modern science. One could point to the Buryat scientists brought up in the Soviet modernist tradition who are also sure of the effectiveness

of traditional *yosun*. Politicians, businessmen, scientists are said overall to use the methods of attracting the circulating vitality, success and luck through the traditional methods. This information is thoroughly hidden because, for decades, it was the stigma of their backwardness, thus, was concealed from the official discourse.

Nevertheless, it would be trivialization to say that the Buryats are not able to understand, operate with, or trust the contemporary scientific demarcations of biology, physics, or sociology basing on the Western notions of order and nature, but it seems the shift was in substantive scientific belief, not in common thinking. Similarly, the comprehensive scientific explanation of some aspects of nature did not change entirely the traditional attitude toward the sky, Earth, or other elements of the environment and universe in general. Indeed, it influenced enormously the conceptual cosmology of the Buryats, but the exported "scientific" knowledge is reorganized and even used as a fuel for reproducing traditional categories of culture. Besides, the general tendency of the "Asian turn" in the natural sciences [Hargrove, 1989: xvi] proves, in eyes of Buryats, the truthfulness of their "traditional" knowledge: the "neuronal" function of Buddhist mantras, the healthy "genetic" effect of Buryat social structures, the "ecological" meaning of the old customs, "economic" efficiency of traditional occupations. These reconsiderations are presented as the evidence that the Buryats of the past "knew" what science discovers only now, and who knows what kind of other knowledge existed back then. The new "modern" secular knowledge transported into Buryatia in the 20th century does not always replace, or is in conflict with, the previously existing ideas. It is incorporated as a separate *yosun* – as a separate technique of impact on the universal processes in the complicated and stratified order. Thus, such circulation of ideas should not always be considered in terms of a cultural difference or a cultural assimilation, but as an attempt to comprehend and interiorize it within multiple models of interpretation.

Gradually, we came closer to the cultural view on uniqueness of the Buryat order in the context of other orders. This vision includes all the features I described earlier. Moreover, for the Buryats even within the Buryat culture there could be found numerous orders with different ranges of influence. Further in the text, let me describe what

procedures are constituting the Buryat order and how the functional parts of this order are being negotiated.

5.2. The procedures of negotiating the *yosun* order

According to the interactionist approach, the world of daily life is the scene of our actions and interactions. Despite the dynamic character, it is never culturally neutral because interpretations of reality (realities) are based upon a stock of previous interpretational experience (or "knowledge at hand" [Schütz, 1945]) functioning as a scheme of reference. In the intersubjective space, daily "actions" and the procedures of their interpretations are confirming and constructing the natural attitude to reality. Actions like speaking, or body movement bear a wide-range, unarticulated, meaningful context of identity.

Unlike in the interactionist approach, where these procedures are seen rather as a part of unconscious order (*milieu*), the Buryats treat them in a much more articulated and restricted way. During my fieldwork, I gathered various examples of the everyday behaviour guided by what is called the "Buryat order" (*Buryaad yoho*). This practical knowledge [Giddens, 1993] is the object of profound reflections and could be found in various publications, leaflets and posters. My attention was especially attracted by dictionaries containing the order *yosun* which were published in Mongolia, such as: *Mongol yos zanshlyn tol'* (1990) "The Dictionary of Mongolian Traditions" by Ch. Aryasuren, Khandyn Nyambuu, G. Chingel; or: *Mongolchuudyn tseerlekh yosny khuraangui tol'* (1993) "A Brief Dictionary of Mongolian Taboo Traditions" by Nyambuu, Ts. Natsagdorzh. These dictionaries include various instructions of the order of Mongolian people I saw in some Buryat houses. Besides, in schools, or other public places, one could see brief instructions of the *yosun* published on a piece of paper. Many of them are accessible on the Internet, such as: *Etiket mongolskogo mira* by Natalia Zhukovskaya. In the text, apart from my field notes, I will refer particularly to the list of *yosun* collected by Buda-Khanda Tsyrendorzhieva and recently (2015) published on a popular Buryat website www.soyol.ru. The publication is entitled: *Ugsaatanai hurgaal*

"The Peoples' teaching/instructions" and, thus, could be associated with the traditional literary genre *surgaal* containing instructions of norms and propriety. The content is highly intertextual – it includes fragments of other literary pieces, sayings and idioms; and, consequently, it is commonly known among the Buryats, applied and articulated in the everyday life. This order is often seen as an important factor of national well-being:

> One should say to children and youth that it is important to have the order (*gurim*). […] The one who follows and maintains the order (*yoho gurim*) of the past generations, will not be ill or meet a sudden tragedy. There is a saying that a steel dagger can be broken by a trifle. That is why in contemporary times it is important to teach and encourage children to ask the elders what is forbidden or not proper [Tsyrendorzhieva, 2015].

The order of behaviour in the list proposed by Tsyrendorzhieva begins typically with the words "Respect your parents, leave the first part of the meal (*deezhe*) to your father". This content of this statement conveys two important aspects of the order: the hierarchical recognition and the ritual order. While the hierarchy is a chance of birth, the ritualistic order is the thing that should be constantly explained and maintained. The most common is the succession of having a meal, restrictions of movements and speech near the elderly people, like "do not go ahead of the elderly taking their sun". As I have mentioned in the preceding parts, this was a significant component of what Buryats would call "their order". The cases when the Buryat youth does not perform some ritual actions of paying respect are considered non-Buryat behaviour, such as addressing parents/elders using the informal *ty* (you, thee) instead of respectful *vy* (you). I witnessed many cases when young Buryats would discuss between themselves how they should address their parents and other elderly people. It even evolved into numerous discussions and publications on the Internet. One of the users of the local social media wrote the following:

> Concerning addressing parents. As a child, my mother demanded that we refer to them (to parents) per *Vy*, but my father was totally against that because it was terrifying that his children would treat him as a stranger… We found a way out: if we address them in Russian, we use *ty*, if in Buryat – *Vy* (Ta) [vk.com].

Even an online opinion poll (vk.com) was organized with 11,680 participants, where 6,500 claimed that they address per *ty* their parents.[90] It is surprising how such a simple case could provoke such different reactions. One can meet people who are struck hearing children addressing per *ty* their parents and, at the same time, there are those who feel uncomfortable the other way round. When I discussed this matter with my acquaintances, they would associate it with the assimilation processes and losing the "Buryat" character in their relations. I consider it to be an example of how difficult interpersonal relationships within a nation like the Buryat one are, a huge part of which is adopting "Russian" norms of behaviour, thus, becoming strange for the "traditional" part.

However, as I have already mentioned, the Buryat idea of order does not focus merely on the social sphere. The relation with the environment is also considered to be important for the sense of orderliness. Let me consider once again the rules compiled by Tsyrendorzhieva. Many of those had been forgotten with the calendar change and the changes in economic traditions like "one should not give anything to other people on the day of mouse", or "one should not give sour milk/kefir on a cloudy or rainy day". Other rules instruct about one's behaviour in a yurt, or the etiquette connected with parts of traditional costume, which have long disappeared from everyday reality:

- Those who did not reach the 18th year could not go further than the *toono* (smoke hole) of another family's *ger* (yurt).
- A guest cannot enter one's house with a whip.
- After entering one's house, one should take off the hat and put down the collar. In the past, one also was obliged to have one's knife hanging down from the belt.
- If a guest arrived on horse, the host should take the horse, hitch it up, unsaddle it; at the time of the guest's departure, the host should put the saddle on and prepare the horse.
- The guest should not mount the horse right by the doors of the host yurt. [Tsyrendorzhieva, 2015].

However, these rules are well known to many Buryats because they are often instructed in the classes of Buryat language at schools as a part

[90] http://asiarussia.ru/news/14578/ (access date: 13.05.2016).

of cultural heritage. They also could serve as the examples of how the overall changes in lifestyle made various restrictions and regulations disappear. Despite these allusions to the departed past, the majority of these prescriptions constitute the routine of contemporary Buryats, especially those living in the rural areas.

These behaviours are associated not only with the ideas of hierarchy, or with some abstract values. To a greater extent, they regard actions performed in everyday life. Tsyrendorzhieva underlines that everything had its proper (*züb*) and improper (*buruu*) aspects, thus, even the games and entertainment had numerous rules [Tsyrendorzhieva, 2015]. Everyday behaviour is not performed at random but can trigger particular events. This means that the way of living is framed in multiple sets of rituals according to *yosun* in order to guarantee the proper "positive" effect. It follows that one may think of sin (*nügel*) not only as an obvious wrongdoing, such as murder, adultery, or theft, but also, in an extended way, one may include acts that could be treated as disrespectful to the universe and as bringing undesired effects: stepping over objects, sitting in the wrong position, giving, or receiving with the wrong hand, etc.

- It is a sin to step over the objects and instruments lying on the ground, such as pitchfork, rake, ax, as well as wood, or stone.
- It is forbidden to muddy spring water, point with fingers at the rainbow and eat while standing.
- One should not take the things without pair from the ground; there is no greater virtue than cleaning the road.
- Women are not allowed to step over the objects, like: cord, rope, cable. They say that it will cause the strangling of the child with the umbilical cord at birth.
- Also, women are not allowed to eat the meat of rabbits and hares because these animals give birth in terrible sufferings.
- Sleep with your head in the direction of the altar.
- It is not allowed to give objects by throwing them. Knives, awls, scissors, forks, spoons and other objects should not be given with their pointed part directed at another man, pass them the handle.
- The objects of respect, such as *khadag* or the best/first part of meal *deezhe* one should give with both hands. However, the *khadag* of condolence should be given in a folded or rolled way [Tsyrendorzhieva, 2015].

The prescribed rules of behaviour do not only regard the way one should treat his human surrounding, but the environment in general. The categories of animate and inanimate nature are not relevant in this cultural reality since inanimate objects equally participate in the universe transformation. The ability to change (or to move) is inherent to things and not realized through participation of an "animate" subject. Therefore, objects here possess the same status as any other "living" creature, which gives an insight into the way Buryats understand the relations of persons with material objects. These examples show that the relation between material things and humans could not be explained with subject–object opposition – they both could be described in social terms.

Some of them regard the organization of actions in time, like: "It is sin to split firewood, bring water, shout, and for children to cry in the twilight", or: "Make the offer, bow to Buddha, make the tea offering to the hearth. Go outside, make the offering (*serzhem*) with the tea to the environment you live in, to your native land. Wish for good things, but do not focus on your own success, or the success of your children; wish for good things for all living beings" [Tsyrendorzhieva, 2015]. The biggest part of those rules is concerned with the "Buryat" body movements:

- It is not proper to take and receive things by putting them between fingers and to take or receive things from the back.
- When somebody gives you something, take it from beneath, you cannot take it from the top.
- When one gives something to another man and if he cannot use both hands, one should give it to him using the right hand.
- It is a sin to lean your chin on hands or stroke liver if you are not ill.
- It is not proper to stay on or step over the threshold.
- It is a sin to stay peeping out from the door and not walking out.
- Do not lock arms behind the neck.
- Do not stretch and yawn.
- Do not take off your clothes, pronounce shameful words, laugh and express joy loudly in the presence of other people [Tsyrendorzhieva, 2015].

Many of these rules could not be interpreted without understanding the idea of humanity in this culture, which I have already described in chapter 3. I have already described how Western individuals gradually

gained more rights over their "self" and identity and in the 20th century, started to appropriate the environment, objects creating the idea of individualized privacy both in ideological and legal spheres [Woroniecka, 2014a: 54–55]. The Buryat self, the same as the European one, also extends onto the environment. However, this appropriation has nothing in common with the instrumental and symbolic ideas of privacy. One could not understand it without ideas of vital forces radiating from individuals and constructing the bonds with both human and non-human environment. This concerns especially the objects surrounding a human in his/her everyday activity and through constant use gradually they become part of his/her own "identity". This brings us to a series of restrictions of treating another man's space:

- Touching another man's hands or legs without reason is considered to bring bad luck. When one is a guest, it is not proper to touch their children.
- Throw out the rubbish and slops before someone leaves the house for a journey. Do not throw them out after someone leaves.
- Do not mention the children of another man; do not mention the features of body of another man.
- One should not put loudly his hands on another man's shoulders, embrace another man's neck and behave compulsively.
- One should not wipe things with sheets of a book or newspaper where the national symbols, order, medals, or human image is printed.
- There is an interesting rule that when returning bowls, cups, kettles, etc., one should put some food inside (sweets, millet, rice, etc.), the so-called "bottom".
- If you have an empty vessel, do not cross the path ahead of others. If one takes a vessel from someone and brings it back empty, he will become poorer.
- It is important to explain rules to children, for example not to put your hat on your feet [Tsyrendorzhieva, 2015].

The Buryats often pay attention when such procedures are being broken. Handling things with two fingers, or with the left hand, is irritating and I could see when people would refuse to take those things with comments like: "What kind of Buryat are you to give things with the left hand!", or "Do the Buryats behave like you do now?". Disrespect of the things associated with a person could have tragic consequences. I was told about an artist who once disrespected her working place. It was when she was repairing her ceiling, standing on the table she used

for her work. The table was contaminated (*buzar*) and took revenge on her, so she became handicapped and could not move her limbs. Things of human environment were not the considered as objects for manipulation, but active subjects in their relation with the environment. Thus, the majority of those rules, or *yosuns*, which are considered to be the essence of the Buryat way of behaviour, do not regard the pure social sphere. This is not the association with the symbolic sphere but the action – the "Buryat" way of interacting with and influencing the universe that brings "real" consequences for them.

5.3. Language in the order[91]

Though I have declared that I would carry out my work in the constructivist and interpretive methodology, while doing my fieldwork, I became more and more aware of its cultural roots. The worldview I am describing implied a different relation of a symbol and the world. It is not the referential relation – the theory on which Western constructivism is resting on. In the following part, let me develop this idea because it will show the human relation with the world and the heuristic context of the social thought.

The relation between a symbol and the world could be a convenient point to interpret the order *yosun*. I was especially inspired by the works of Polish philosophers, like: Ewa Bińczyk, Michał Buchowski, Andrzej Kowalski, Jerzy Kmita, who paid attention to the pre-referential state of a language and commonly assumed it to be inherent to the archaic cultures [Bińczyk, 2007; Buchowski, Burszta, 1986: 89; Kmita, 1998; Kowalski, 2001; Malinowski, 1948: 259]. However, many aspects of the non-referential language use can still be observed in contemporary languages. This is the case with the Buryat language, the "pre-referential" characteristics of which, though for the most part ignored by scholars, exert a profound influence on the way the language is used.

[91] Fragments of this part were published by me as an article in 2015: *Symbol and World Relation: The Study of Some Cultural Contexts of Buryat Language Use*, in *Etnografia Polska*, Vol. 59, No. 1–2, pp. 195–204.

The referential function of the language implies that a speaker uses nouns and pronouns for naming objects. In this respect, words mean something external and distinct from what they are. This external reality – the other side of the discourse – guarantees the sustainable relation between referential tokens generated by the mind and the things existing in the objective world [Bińczyk, 2007: 11]. Hence, the reference would not be possible without the category of substance located underneath the apparent world perceived by the subject. Indeed, the idea of independent existence of language from the external world is not fully relevant to the Buryat way of thinking. The fundamental principle of the world order is its dynamics and metamorphosis, where objects change their identity depending on the relation they are engaged in.

Nevertheless, I am not saying that the referential theory did not exist. The dictionaries and the linguistic works prove it. Under the Tibetan influence, Mongolian grammarians devised proper rules of orthography and grammar following Tibetan (and, ultimately, Sanskrit) models. The best known work is the *žirüken-ü tolta-yin tayilburi*, or *Commentary on the Artery of the Heart* ('heart' here being synonymous with the 'mind'), which was attributed to the early-14th-century Tibetan translator called Čoski Odzer, but which was actually compiled in the 18th century [Rachewiltz, Rybatzki, 2010: 143]. Apart from the Tibetan-inspired grammatical works of the 18th century, there is a number of lexicographical works and dictionaries [Tsyrenov, 2011]. The cultural and scientific changes of the early 20th century spread the Western theoretical linguistic and referential theory in the region. Thus, I argue that, despite the long traditions of the literary language and book printing (which are considered as the major factors of development of referential relation [Gellner, 1988: after Bińczyk, 2007: 108]), Buryat language is an exception to the general expectations that linguists have of modern languages that they drop their pre-referential aspects. During an excursion after a conference in Ivolga Datsan, the Buryat Buddhologist Oyuna Dorzhigushaeva said that:

> Mantras are considered… all these mantras assemble the universe, bring harmony, and if not to do this… Why do people bring money to lamas? To occupy themselves with assembling our universe without distracting themselves,

> for example, by earning money, etc. It is considered that they carry out an important work of harmonizing the universe… Otherwise, this world would just come apart [160826_0276].

If we assume that language is an action with immediate or (in John Austin's terminology) – performative effects, one cannot separate it from the rest of the physical world. It has the same status as ritual behaviour practised in everyday life. At the same time, other symbols or images are not separated from their objects and have the same ability to act on and influence the development of the universe. The Buryat word *udkha*,[92] *udkha ushar* conventionally used in language theory for denoting the terms "meaning" or "sense", in fact could be translated as "cause", "reason", "root", or even "initial power". The *udkha* of a man lies in his genealogy, which determines character and predispositions, so the clans were "qualitatively unlike one another, in that each possesses a different supernatural ability" (*udkha*) [Humphrey, 1983: 53]. Thus, "meaning" is not mental reflection of static *designatum*, but an active reason, cause of things, which is forming as a momentous event in the transformation of the universe. This implies that the symbol is the result of processes and that it can have further impact on reality. Although some of the non-referential aspects of the language seem Buddhist in character, they cannot be attributed purely to Buddhism, which is the main religion of the Buryats, because the same principles of the word–world relation could be found beyond it in the shamanistic practices and even in the local views on Christianity. The cultural ideas of universe in this sense precede and assimilate the ideas offered by the religious beliefs and even seemingly objective truths of science. The world around them, though moving, yet is stable and reasonable. Neither do they feel the need to understand the meaning of things, nor try to distinguish the deeper semantics of symbols. Symbols and objects can exist on the same level of reality and do not have the relation of denotation between each other.

This concerns any kind of production of "active" symbols. For example, in rural areas bringing an only piece of firewood is considered to cause abandonment, as it resembles a lonely man, also, bad luck as

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[92] In the grammar *Jurhen-u tolt-a* "udkha" is not marked as a separate word, but as a phrase [Radnaev, 2012: 43].

the one having a piece of firewood looks like a vagabond with a stick. Out of fear of loneliness, it is prohibited to sing songs, especially the mournful ones, as it is the way that orphans behave: "a poor man is a storyteller, an orphan is a singer". Many traditional songs have a mournful character called *urtiin duu*, some of which sound very close to the howling of a wolf. I met some people who used to sing any kinds of songs only outside, in the absence of adults, because they were prohibited to "mourn" inside the house. It is necessary to note that usually these kinds of restrictions were especially addressed to children, because, due to their young age, they had the power to "see the things" (*yume kharadag*) which are hidden from adults and "to foresee" or "to make things come" (*zügenekhe*) very often in the negative way:

- Do not sing a song, chant or moan under your breath, it is a sin. You will moan off all your happiness.
- Do not cry in pretense. Your mother and father will die [Tsyrendorzhieva, 2015].

There exists a special category of "negative" words and phrases usually called "words of bad luck" (*yoro uge*). For instance, Buryats avoid verbalizing the figure "one" (*nege*) or other related words, such as: "single" or "only" (*gansa*) as it can directly influence the life flow. For instance, when somebody is asked how many children he has (and he has an only child), the answer should not contain any word mentioned above as the phrase can immediately react and change one's destiny, so the person will live with only one child for the rest of their life. In this case, the proper answer is just "boy/girl". In the same way, he/she can be criticized for saying, for example, "my child" because this expression was believed to cause the death of one's spouse. Thus, the proper way is to use the pronoun "our" all the time: "our father", "our mother", "our sister", and even sometimes "our husband" (*manai nükher*). This concerns not only the verbalization, but also any form of expressing the symbols causing loneliness. Similarly, any expressions of laments and complaints were generally disapproved of, since they are believed to bring further complications. Hence, the one who complains about health will always be ill; the one who complains about people will never be well with them.

The power of words is also revealed in the name one bears. There exist so-called "heavy" names (*khünde nere*) which could be unfit for some people. I experienced such a situation when a boy called Sayan[93] had serious health problems because of his name "oppressing" (*darakha*) him, so he had to change it. Similarly, names such as *Chingis*, *Baigal*[94] can also be heavy, since they are the symbols of great power.

- It is forbidden to pronounce the names of father and mother, thus, in some regions if a person met someone with the same name as his parent, then he/she was recommended to address them with the phrase "the one with a difficult/heavy name".
- Do not address the seniors with their names but use the name of their children and add the words like: *akhai* (elder brother), *abgai* (elder sister), the mother or father of somebody [Tsyrendorzhieva, 2015].

Symbols have the power to construct the environment, that is why they should be accessible only for a limited number of people. In this context, the precise date and the place of birth, names, dreams and plans were the information one should keep in relative secret, not because of its "private" character but because the one who can read these symbols and knows how to use them has the power to influence a man's life flow. Language is not separated from other kinds of activities and, for that reason, is similarly regulated by cultural practices. A huge section of the rules is dedicated to this topic:

- There was nothing without the order (*yoho gurim*), rules and norms. There was a particular order even in communication, speech and conversation between people.
- Do not speak idle words, it is a sin.
- People do not like those who are repeating one thing many times, chat about common and uncommon, necessary and unnecessary things.
- Those people who chat without being sure about the truthfulness of the facts lose respect.
- They say that those who speak less are respected and their words are precious.
- Buryat people always knew that "many words bring no fruits, a single word brings no harm" and taught others to be quiet and wordless.

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[93] *Sayan* is the name of the mountain range in South Siberia and Northern Mongolia.

[94] *Baigal* (Bur.) – lake Baikal.

- The gentle movement of body and even the glance of eyes during conversation was important to be counted as one of the best men.
- If mistakenly, or by accident, one has stepped on someone's foot, there is a rule that one should hold this man's hand. This interesting rule meant apologizing: "I did it without bad intentions, let's be in peace"; or in the language of contemporary times it could be equated to the words: "I am sorry, I stepped on your foot by accident".
- Buryats prohibit (*seer*) one from talking while moving arms and fingers. That is why they talk without moving the arms.
- One should talk in a quiet and smooth way. It is important to talk in a quiet manner without opening one's mouth too wide. It is not proper to talk and laugh too loudly, wrinkling one's face and screaming loudly.
- Those who are laughing loudly and almost screaming while talking are called light-minded and frivolous [Tsyrendorzhieva, 2015].

Though the described Buryat ideas of language match the anti-essentialist views of language developed by such scholars as Josef Mitterer, John Austin or Richard Rorty, they do not quite agree in the basic points of departure. Contemporary non-dualistic theories in linguistics and language philosophy attribute the ideas of reference either to socialization practices or to institutional formations but do not include culture as the basic factor. Though I am using Austin's terminology to refer to the Buryat symbol as "performative", the range of its performativity is incomparably broader than in Austin's theory. The symbol has the power to construct the environment, not simply to be a medium. In this sense, even the term "symbol" seems to be an inadequate match for those cultural ideas. The environment of the Buryat symbol is not only the interpretational community, or the space of shared meaning – it is a cultural idea of the dynamic world order.

The general auto-stereotype of the reserved verbal behaviour of Buryats is also connected with the maintenance of the universe order. It is generally believed that speaking could become an insecure act, as it can change the state of things in a less desired way. Words of bad luck, along with the category of words "having great power" (*shanga ugenüüd*), such as: curses, swear words, were tabooed in culture. However, these taboo words are connected with degradation of the human dignity less than in European cultures. Swearing was a kind of ritual, which was a part of shaman's ceremonial, dangerous for a regular man

to perform.[95] Using swear words (Russ. *matershina*, Bur. *beling*) is also generally assumed to be a characteristic of Russians (though many Buryats use them as well). Russian swear words (*mangad kharaal*) are considered to be especially "poisonous" (*khorotoi*) because they could easily contain the wishing of death, or mutilation.[96] A Buryat poet, Georgiy Dashabylov (1938–1993), wrote the article *Let us Keep Far from Hard Words* in the early 1990s in which he was reflecting on the loss of the Buryat verbal culture.

> Recently, the son of my Russian neighbour with another little Buryat boy were knocking loudly and kicking the door of the flat. I was worried about them and asked: "Is there nobody at home? Are you going to break the door?" At this phrase, the Buryat boy without even respecting my age "spat out" swear words with his pipy little voice in my direction. I felt like fainting after hearing such rude words from a 6–7-year-old child. I guess that this little boy, who is a Buryat, would not understand even if one said to him: "I am going to kill you" in Buryat language, but was using the terrible Russian swear words. Where did he learn that? Of course, from adults. Upon leaving them, barely conscious from the swear words, I was captivated with bitter thought of desperation: Buryats, what poor people we are, where are we going, where did we lose our way? It is true that we, Buryats, are weak, and quickly come under the other's influence [Dashabylov, ~1991].

The stress is not put on the fact that the boy does not speak Buryat, but on that how he uses the language and disrespects his age. The poet defined the boy's behaviour as "non-Buryat", alien to the Buryat *yosun*, dangerous to the vitality of people. The loss of the traditional verbal etiquette is a very common lamentation among the Buryats:

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[95] Moreover, it is believed that misfortunes could be brought on either by evil-tongues (*khara khele ama* – "black tongue and mouth"), or praising (*sagaan khele ama* – "white tongue and mouth") of other people [Tangad, 2013: 118]. The constant appreciation of something even without any bad intentions still has the power to corrupt it. The opposite effect could be achieved by telling *uryel* "best wishes", traditionally spoken during festivities. As in the case of swearing, it is a shamanic skill. The wishful thinking is a matter of a man (*yuröölshe*) who had the permission (often ancestral) to perform them.

[96] It should be added that while Russians use such kinds of phrases, their reaction is very different. They seem to be much more reluctant and unconcerned about such phrases, both while saying and hearing them.

> They [the Buryats – A. Zh.] were very careful while attributing characteristics to people: if something was black, they would call it white, and the white would be called black. Such was our language… such respect for the other person, a very symbolic language, steppe and nomadic language. It never was… in Russian one could say "You are a fool" – in the Buryat it could never happen. Now we have become Russians and express our emotions openly at once. But it was not acceptable, it was the sign of a low culture [DS750635].

In both cases, one can see that the most significant element of Buryatness is not speaking the native language, but the way of speaking any language, including Russian. Linguistic competence, understood as a mastery of language (*langue*), seems not to be as relevant in the Buryat culture as cultural practices of the language use. This can be partly interpreted through the non-referential elements of the Buryat language, which implies that the discourse is not simply a mirroring, but the integrated part of the reality. Thus, there should be marked the boundary of the Buryat way and the non-Buryat way of using the language, which is currently shifting.

5.4. Inside and outside the order

Western social sciences have long seen the everyday routine as trivial in respect to the macro-social processes [Woroniecka, 2014b: 5], while the Buryat social thought saw it as the engine of the universal transformation. As I have written, they see the direct relation between micro- and macro-scale processes, thus, the *yosun* is a category that could be applied both to thinking about political issues and to the way of pouring the tea. These rules, of course, do not have any final character and implication. The Buryats between themselves are always negotiating their *yosun* in their contact. It regards the issues during weddings and funerals, during everyday behaviour and communication.

Most of them are aware of multiple versions of the local traditions, but they all stop being significant in the face of the border between those who are "assimilated" and "non-assimilated". The situation of multicultural environment with distinct patterns of this orderliness, perhaps, makes the social reflexivity even more alert. The discussions

on what is Buryat culture, or what is the Buryat way of behaviour, are constant in the field and colloquial life.

Curiously, the behaviour attributed to the "Russian" culture is seen as less complex in comparison to that of "Buryat". There is less distinction of hierarchy, fewer rules on speech, body movement, or emotional expression. Unlike Western European considerations of Russian "collectivism", the Buryats consider the Russian culture to be highly "individualistic". Nevertheless, it is seen as a component of the Russian order that it is in the same way effective in constructing the universe as the Buryat one. The same way Buryats distinguish their "own" Russians (*manai oroduud*) from those living in the "West" (*baruuntaikhi oroduud*) because the former got to know the Buryat *yosun* and many of them are even suspected of knowing the Buryat language.

One's "own" circle is nothing that could have regular boundaries and a membership list, but something which is defined, or confirmed in any other situation. The attitude is different when the "intimate" adopts the "foreign" patterns. In these cases, I heard people saying that someone "does not have a clue of order" (*yoho gehze medekhegui*). The reaction to the disturbance of the order could be various – from indifference to hostility, however, it never goes unnoticed. Let me offer some examples of such "identification" procedures, based on the mentioned literature, gathered from my personal experience and fieldwork.

In the introduction of the book, I have described the matter of being an inside and outside researcher. Let me return to this topic once again here. The matter is much more complicated in the field where, though being a "local" Buryat, I could be classified as an outsider due to my ignorance of the order. In the field, perhaps, one of the most complicated things for me was the observance of the *yosun* with people with whom I interacted. The majority of them would watch whether I was behaving properly: do I receive things in a proper way, do I speak Buryat well enough, etc. Very often I felt nervous when I did not know how I should move, how I should speak. The circumstances of the fieldwork were also specific: the informants were – as a rule – much older than me. I met most of those people for the first time. I was the guest – quite an untypical guest – in their homes. Each of these conditions required a specific way of behaviour, both from me and

from my hosts. In most cases, it looked like a ceremonial procedure of confirming my affirmation and awareness of the order: entering the house, receiving a meal, the mode of conversation, the gradual coming to the main goal of my visit, the departure. My personality for the hosts was also not transparent – very often they knew members of my family, my grandparents and were restricted by their order as well. This is how I followed and learned on myself the Buryat *yosun*. When I managed to meet the expectations, they would treat me with a special warmness, constructing the parent–child relations – I would often receive sweets, money gifts from them. If not, they instructed me as a young man who is losing his Buryatness and should be helped; or, what is also frequent, they would be reserved towards me. Such mode of treatment is typical, not only in the case of an inside researcher and his field.

The cultural changes/constructing various boundaries among the Buryats are taking place in a geographically and generationally non-synchronous way that results in frequent disruptions of usual orderliness. In order to substantiate this statement, let me describe another situation that I participated in Ulan-Ude. A woman on a bus asked a young Buryat girl to give up her seat for her. The girl took it as an insult because, indeed, the request sounded like a command to her, so she refused to do that. From what I have understood, the woman was asking her in the way she would ask her child, or junior family member to do this, but the girl evidently did not speak Buryat and failed to understand the character of her message. The woman, in turn, was insulted by the reaction and scolded the girl, saying: "You are a *Buryat* girl! You cannot behave that way!". The girl was embarrassed much and she stood up to get off at the next stop. I have cited this example to show that Buryatness is associated with a certain way of behaviour. The argumentation: "You are a *Buryat* girl! You cannot behave that way!" is very common. I even see Barth's idea of construction and maintaining ethnic boundaries in such procedures [Barth, 2004b: 350]. Thus, focusing on this aspect, I will shift my attention from "morphology" [Smyrski, 2015: 15] of the group to the way it negotiates and constructs its borders on various levels.

The processes of assimilation and acculturation of the Buryats led to a curious situation. To simplify, the "Russified" Buryats are

considered to "lose" many of the shared meanings and ideas, which are still significant to the more "traditional" Buryats. As a result, the community identified as Buryats often sees itself as almost two different "ethnic groups". The scales of this problem are frightfully huge with accelerating processes of acculturation. It is a common situation in Buryat families that grandparents do not speak Russian and their grandchildren do not know Buryat. I even heard people joking that their family consists of foreigners dwelling under one roof. I am not going to consider this difference in terms of "ethnicity" but I want to introduce *yosun* as the component relevant for constructing identity along with such classificatory elements as language, religion, or culture (whatever they mean).

The border between insiders and outsiders splits the seemingly single Buryat community. The sense of being "inside" is defined by these procedures, which confirm membership in their community. Let us remember that these everyday procedures are not trivial in this culture – they could negatively influence the social and the cosmic order. Identity understood as an integral selfhood, or a constructivist national identity attributed to the symbolic spheres (culture, language, outfit, canons, etc.), is not the only way Buryats perceive "their" order, or "their" identification. The sense of the *yosun* is "action", a certain mode of relations with a human and environment, which, as I have said, is the central issue for Buryat identity. In this sense, understanding identity as a process, process of identification is perceived by Buryats colloquially.

5.5. The loss of the order and the decline of vitality

Humphrey, in her article *Khozyain i gost': 100 pravil…* (1992), criticizes the conception of Norbert Elias who wrote that primitive societies do not have many rules, which corresponds to the childhood development stage with a low threshold of shame. With the advance of civilization in European societies, the increasing repression of shame and repugnance implies multiplication and sophistication of rules, which culminate in the court etiquette. Humphrey does not find this logic applicable for the

Mongolian culture where the rules of courtesy did not depend on the class affinity and the bodily functions were never repressed, or seen as impure as in Europe. In the past, an even more complicated courtesy sytem existed in Mongolian culture, thus, this movement of the civilizing process could not be compared to the early European evolution. In the case of the Buryat-Mongols, it seems to be quite the opposite. If the past Buryat generations were restricted with a huge number of different rules (*yosun*) and restrictions (*seer*), the life of the contemporary Buryats is impoverishing in them.[97]

The Buryats lament much about the loss of the Buryat language and material culture, but the loss of *yosun* (*yoho aldakha*) is considered to be the most pessimistic scenario that could ever happen. They already see the process of the advanced loss of *yosun*: first, observing Buryat children appearing in the care homes, which, few years earlier, was unimaginable for them. In such cases, they say: "Oh, we, Buryats, are losing our *yosun*!". When they see old Buryat people walking alone without attendants in the streets or when they see young people arguing with seniors, they say: "Oh, we, Buryats, are losing our *yosun*". When they hear about yet another case of suicide among the Buryat youth, they, again, associate it with the loss of the proper Buryat order.

The link of the order (*yosun*) loss with the ideas of "morality" determines the logic of also moral impoverishment. Generally, the Buryats perceive their ancestors as wiser and of higher "morality" than they are now. One could very often hear how harmonious and well-organized the social order of their ancestors was even in the recent past, despite all the inconveniences people had at that time. For example, a Buryat teacher, Lodon Linkhovoin (1901–1979) from Aga writes in his letters:

> Among Khori Buryats, very few people committed crime. From what I remember from childhood, people would get frightened, children could not sleep and wept through the night once there appeared a rumour that someone was killed somewhere far in Chita or Manchuria [Linkhovoin, 2012: 124].

Later he writes that Buryats in the past were of high morality because they "knew the order" (*gurim eho medekhe*) and had a "good

[97] Humphrey in a short, private conversation pointed this matter out to me.

sense of order" (*gurim haintai*). This is a very typical narration of the past order in the Buryat community. With the flow of generations, this sense of morality is degrading with the loss of *yosun*, which is not a very revolutionary way of thinking. The same educator, Linkhovoin, in another letter about the problems of the Soviet society in 1966 writes:

> Concerning the Buryats, in the past times there were almost no cases of murder, very seldom they committed crimes. What a paradox is following from this? Does it mean that the Buryats from the past were on a higher level of cultural development? [Linkhovoin, 2012: 334].

The ideas of traditional culture are often dismissed as "traditional", "native", or "local", but as one can see this is an efficient and living culture of knowledge and in the same way "modern". Such questions surely existed among the Buryats and after almost 30 years, the poet Dashabylov wrote very similar lines in one of his articles:

> And today, after more than 70 years from the October Revolution, did the Buryat nation really find its way to the great development and success? It is hard to answer clearly. Would the Buryats survive if left under the *Gubernia* [Tsar rule – A. Zh.]? It is also very hard to answer! Various thoughts could come to one's mind. Do the swear words we use now confirm the loss of native language, coming under bad influence, the emergence of thieves, drunkards and liars among us? [Dashabylov, ~1991].

One could see also an overall disappointment with the projects of the Soviet modernization – or, at least, ambivalence in its assessment. The Buryats spent all their potential on the economy, which was not effective. They do not possess any significant cattle, which in the past would number in many thousands. In the villages, I talked to people who were saying that they are not connected with agriculture, but they are not city dwellers either – they are somewhere in-between. The education, in which they invest a significant part of their budget, has not proved useful, both in terms of the economic opportunities and the moral properties it propagates. The general sense of impoverishing both materially and spiritually (which are closely connected in this thought) and being "cheated" by the modernization project is the overall atmosphere of the culture. This sense of the reversed evolution

is very common among the contemporary Buryats and, perhaps, it was a common trait of this culture in the past [cf. Zhamtsarano, 2011]. Apart from that, there is quite a popular opinion that all the disorders came to the Buryat culture from the external world – through exiles, criminals, railway, etc.

Such fear of disturbed order was one of the most popular themes I could hear in the field. As a young Buryat man, I was instructed that the Buryats of the past were not dark and uncivil as it is written in the books.[98] The Buryats of the past are described as emotionally and physically strong due to reliance on the order. They could live in harsh conditions but not be ill. They could survive all their life tragedies and remain virtuous. They are said to have had great wit and memory in comparison to the contemporary Buryats, who, perhaps are better read, but have a weaker spirit. Even physical characteristics are said to be changing – instead of the sturdy and solid body constitution, the modern Buryat youth is growing skinny, tall, pale and lanky. The wise and wholehearted ancestors are contrasted with the childish and mercantile descendants. The general sense of the impoverishment of *yosun* affects the moral and physical traits of people, usually negatively. The matter is closely connected with the vital forces that were able to circulate due to this order, and now that this order is declining, the vitality is not able to feed the community properly.

Concerning these symptoms, I often heard Buryats saying "we became weak" (*tulyur bolobo*), or "we are coming to the end" (*halazha bainabdi*). It regards not only the economical or physical power, but also the degradation of moral traits. The Buryats as a nation formed within a particular tradition of order (Buryat *yosun*), they are considered to possess common vitality, vital forces – or, in the language of the Western worldview – a common soul. This is another confirmation that soul is not an individual feature, but a moving force, maintained and shared in a community. The soul could be called in different contexts *sülde* or *khii morin*. When the *yosun* is not maintained, the circulation of this vitality is degrading. This causes nation-wide depression and melancholy.

[98] This was one of the most widespread themes in the newspapers and literature in the Soviet Union [Chakars, 2014: 225].

This conception of moral chaos is different from Durkheimian *anomie*, in the sense that it primarily refers to the crisis of vitality through cosmic disorder and not of the abstract social values or norms. The hierarchy of vitality, perhaps, is the last idea of order prevailing in the face of complete destruction. Though it is still far from a large-scale phenomenon, there are the signals for them that the degradation of the *yosun* order could result in overall change and even the end of the Buryats as such.

5.6. The restoration of vital forces – reconsidering the minority position

The definitions like: a "colonized nation", a "dominated nation", a "small nation", the "weak"[99] one are deeply insulting for the Buryats. They would rather choose the narration of joining the Russian state voluntarily than admit the "conquest", or "colonization". Thinking of themselves in such categories is not merely the colonial fear, or effective propaganda, but also the fear of a depressing effect on the national vital forces. The appellation of the Buryats to their all-Mongolian ancestors, the participation in the history of the Mongolian Empire and firm membership in the Mongolian world is one of the narrations that increases the vital forces (*sülde*) and allows them to avoid the discourse of being "small" or "weak". Various publications are being produced to prove that the project of "Buryat" nation as a "minority" was an arbitral decision of the top-down Soviet policy and had little in common with their historical and "genealogical" heritage:

> The main line of books and articles dedicated to the Buryat national revival beginning from the 1980s was the thought that the Buryats should remember that they are an inseparable part of the Mongolian world, not Buryats – one of the people of Siberia, but the Buryat-Mongols, the dwellers of Ara Mongol – Northern Mongolia [Dugarova, 2012: 156].

The revival of the traditional names "Buryat-Mongols" and "Buryat-Mongolia", officially removed in 1958, is one of the procedures of

[99] Nowicka wrote that it is the typical perspective with which the Western (in her case, Polish) researcher approaches the Buryat community [Nowicka, 2016: 8].

reconnecting with the all-Mongolian discourse. The "name" (*nere*) is not only a symbolic appellation to the imagined referent, but it also directly influences its user. Bearing, or "rising", the name *nereye urgekhe* is a ritual act, connecting with the ancestral vital forces and increasing the material/spiritual wealth. The cultural revival in these categories of thought is inseparable from the "revival of vital forces", which have been substantially damaged during the Soviet era.

This is especially connected with the mass migrations to Mongolia and China at the beginning of the 20th century.[100] In the opinion of my informants, many of those who migrated to Mongolia and China were the Buryat elites and possessed strong vital forces (*shadaltai*). They possessed huge stocks of various cattle, took all their material wealth and crossed the border, and the large part of the Buryat vital forces migrated outside Buryatia with people containing them. The vitality of the Buryats is reduced, which is proved by decreasing statistical data and census. This still occupies the thoughts of many people: what is the "real" number of the Buryats in Mongolia? Journalists and scholars both in Mongolia and Buryatia are striving to figure it out by manipulating the number of those who had emigrated or had been exterminated. A popular Buryat TV show *Müngen Serge* touches upon the topic several times:

> If we compare the figures from 2010 [40,600 people in Mongolia – A. Zh.] with those from 1935, it looks as if the Buryats did not increase in number at all. To date, the population increased by only 5,000 people[101]

– says the onscreen moderator, Dashi-Dorzhi Bolotov. In the further episodes of the TV show a Buryat scholar was invited, Sedenzhab Damdinai from Dornod aimag of Mongolia, who said that the real number of Buryats in Mongolia could be even more than 100,000:

> In 1925–1926, 35,517 Buryats became citizens of Mongolia. Then, even if in 1937 there were purged 7,000 people, it could not be that the Buryat population

[100] The Buryats in Mongolia and China are the descendants of the migrants from Russia from the period lasting from 1918–1920 until the end of the 1930s when the borders were completely closed (for more details see: chapter 2).

[101] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQG6PCizW0o (access date: 23.03.2016).

> increased in 70 years so little – only by 5–6,000 people. This is the first matter. Meanwhile, Mongol population grew by 2.9–3 times from that time, and it cannot be that the Buryats have not multiplied and have stagnated. Secondly, many Buryats that live alone or with families among Mongols… let's say, Khalkhas, call themselves Mongols, using this general name, not Khalkha Mongols, but just saying we are Mongols. It is more convenient for them to live this way, I think. Thus, that is why I spoke to many people, and after reflections on this topic we concluded the approximate number is about 100,000.[102]

The interest in the number of the Buryats in Mongolia and China seems to be of a special symbolic meaning for the relatively small Buryat nation. In different sources, one can find exaggerated (in comparison to the official census) figures of Buryats in Mongolia declaring 80,000 or 100,000 people. The same concerns the number of the Buryats in China, who "officially" number from 8,000 to 10,000 people, but are said to count from 25,000 to 45,000 – the number, perhaps, included the Barga Mongols (or, Barga-Buryats) of Inner Mongolia. Apart from this, one can hear the howls of despair for the Buryats who, at the beginning of the 20th century, used to count almost 300,000, which was comparable to the population of the outer Mongolia of that time – 540,000 (according to the census of 1918[103]); and why the Mongols in Mongolia entered the 21st century as a "full-scaled" nation numbering 3,000,000 people, while the Buryats in Russia almost "did not increase" in number, and count only 461,389 people today. I had the chance to hear similar comparisons with other people of Central Asia. The interest in figures bears pure symbolical meaning, and no, or few, political, cultural projects are undertaken to restore the unity of the Buryats.

I am writing this to show a different interpretation of historic events which are connected with the view on the disturbed vitality. While speaking about the population, Buryats often use the word *üdekhe*, which is the same as the word for multiplying the cattle. The number of cattle is closely linked to the group vitality, or fertility, with the forces, like: *khesheg* (the vital force of wealth), *buyan* (the vital force of virtue). The high

[102] The episode is no longer available online.

[103] http://new.chronologia.org/volume10/turin_burjaty.php (access date: 10.12.2015).

level of these forces brings multiplicity of stock and descendants. This is also the most typical content of traditional wishful genre *urieel/yurools*.

The increasing of the national vitality through various ways is an urgent necessity of "development" and "progress". I heard a Buryat scholar say that, by frequent visits, Mongols bring "energy" to our Buryat land. The high "vitality" (*khushe shadal*) is one of the markers of nations that are following their *yosun*. The Buryats not always characterized themselves this way. In Buryatia one can hear about the overall decline of the Buryat *sülde*. This was, for example, mentioned in the interview with the Buryat filmmaker Solbon Lygdenov who said that, through his films, he wants to cure the Buryat soul, because he thinks that it is ill. In his film *Bulag* (*Water Spring*, 2013), he connects the degradation of the Buryat nation with the popular Buryat view of the disturbed order of their ancestors. I have already mentioned that the *bulag*, a water spring, was a metaphor of the feeding and circulating dynamic genealogy. The spring of vitality was disturbed and the Buryat soul sank into depression. That is why the festivals, musical and filming projects aim to not only work out cultural symbols and canons but also to restore them. The Buryat activist, Bato Ochirov, in his article with an illustrative title: *How to Bring Back the Buryat hünehen?*, alluding to the Buryat ritual of calling back the escaped vitality, wrote:

> And today Buryats lose their spirit [he uses the Russian word *dukh* – A. Zh.]. This is sad. To restore all of this, in fact, we do not need much. We need to revitalize language, to invest in the national culture represented by theaters, poets, composers and directors [Ochirov, 2014].

A nice piece of music or performance is traditionally perceived as increasing vitality of particular individuals [Tangad, 2013: 63], and it is expected to do the same at the level of the whole nation. I have noticed that the ability to sing, the strength of one's voice is strongly connected with the notion of vitality.[104] The great talent of Buryats,

[104] The position of an especially good singer was very prestigious, and, even now, a good singer is very welcomed. Such person was treated as the one who inherited vitality and talent from his ancestors. Families (groups of relatives) boast about such people who represent them during the wedding ceremonies and other celebrations. Families are considered weak if they do not possess such a talented

singing (according to the auto-stereotype), is declining with the decline of vitality. The landscape of the recent past was said to be filled with songs and music. The Buryats had very strong voices and they could compose improvised songs about everything that they could see, or feel. Contemporary Buryats have lost this ability, they feel ashamed and less confident, which are the symptoms of the depressed vitality.

I watched all these attempts to restore vitality in my fieldwork during the ethnic festivals, like: Altargana (2012, 2014 and, online, in 2016[105]), Khamag Mongol (2013), Night of Yokhor (2012, 2013, 2014). Unfortunately, I started paying attention to this aspect of the mass events quite late and did not record necessary fragments during them, except for some general notes. Thus, for citations I use the records from Altargana, 2016 and Khamag Mongol that are accessible on the Internet. Nevertheless, my presence at those festivals, the analysis of my notes and watching the video records let me grasp the typical elements of those events and to portray them in the meaningful context of this culture.

My first reflections occurred to me when I was translating for Polish anthropologists during all these festivals. They all were held predominantly in the Buryat language. The Russian language is also simultaneously present; however, it is hard to call it translation. It is very typical to omit certain senses in the Russian translation during the festival, due to both the difficulties of the translation task and the time restrictions. During the attempts to translate what actors are announcing on the scene, I became perfectly aware of how many various meanings are left without translation and could not be articulated, neither in Russian, nor in the Polish language. The main difficulty was the interpretation of vital forces in the language of a different culture. I remember myself thinking about the limited Polish or Russian words for denoting multiple vitalities distinguished in the Buryat culture.

Such festivals attract thousands of viewers and look more like a grand ceremony than a secular, entertaining event. One could see a similar scenario in all the programs, which is the recollection of an ancestral

member. This thinking, perhaps, influenced the high development of musical industry in Buryatia.

[105] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xkXtrhjpMts (access date: 03.06.2016).

line. The metaphor of parent–child relations and reception of vitality is the main line of the narration. Paternal and maternal symbols are constantly present on the scene: men with horse-tail banners as the symbols of the khan; women with high hats symbolizing queens sprinkling the ritual milk (a symbolic depiction of the hearth). The song about parents, especially about mothers, is a significant part of the program, accompanied sometimes with the words, like: "Let the Buryat mothers be well!". During the festival Khamag Mongol (2013), the traditional gender hierarchy was implemented in a scene where the singers and actors representing various Mongolian people calling each other *akha düüner* (brothers) were all male. At the end of the festival, they ignited the hearth and pronounced ritual exclamations: *khurai, khurai, khurai!*

The important component is the Buryat ancestry. As the moderator announced: "If one will take care of the ancestry (*ug bulag*), the roots will have the quiet thoughts/soul (*set'khel*)". Among the various ancestors, one could see eleven Khori Buryat fathers, a mythical swan mother, the queen Alan-goa, queen Barguzhin-goa, Khorilardai mergen, Genghis Khan. There appears an ancestral land *nyutag*, such as: Barguuzhin tükhem, Nayan Navaa that brings vitality. Alan-goa the great ancestress of Genghis Khan, who – according to chronicles – was of the Khori Buryats, is one of the central images of the festivals. She is the symbol of unanimity of Buryat and all Mongolian people. All these names are taken from the Buryat and, generally, Mongolian historical chronicles, which are variously interpreted in the post-Soviet context. At the same time, this history is not mere narrations of the past, but the past which is able to interact with and influence the present state of things – the past delivering the vital force:

> The Buryats from the different sides of the border, let's live in unanimity according to the precious teaching of our queen mother Alan-goa; let's make our native culture prosper (*soyol*), let's increase our *hür hülde* ("soul", vital force) [Altargana, 2016].

This was the aim of the all-Buryat festival Altargana that is uniting the Buryats of three countries – Russia, Mongolia and China. Remarkable was the all-Buryat Altargana 2014 in Mongolia that took place at the birthplace of Genghis Khan in Khentii aimag. During and after the

festival, one could see great pilgrimage to the presumable place of the birth of the khan where people would come into contact with his power and "be infected" by it. It is worth mentioning that, on the Russian side of the border, in Aga Okrug, the local historians had their own version of the Great khan's birthplace. As Tangad wrote, the post-Soviet revival of Genghis Khan in Mongolia was connected with the ideas of strong vitality of this leader [Tangad, 2013: 104]. The same process, it seems to me, is taking place in Buryatia. It should not be considered merely as "symbolic" fuel for nationalist ideology, but it has roots in the view of the decreasing vitality on the national level.[106] Thus, during Altargana 2014, we could see the actor representing Genghis Khan with the symbols of the Mongolian state.

Apart from the mythical and historical ancestors, there appears another Buryat source of vital forces, that is, the Buddhist bodhisattvas. In 2012, 2014 and 2016, Altargana editions showed fragments of Buddhist ceremonial mask dance *Tsam*. The actors in the masks and dresses of Buddhist deities walked on the stage while the monitor announces:

> Let that for those who are sitting here the blessing (*ülzy khutag*) would be transmitted through generations […] we kindly ask you [Buddhist bodhisattvas – A. Zh.] to come to the feast of the Buryat-Mongols, we kindly ask you to increase our eternal fame (*münkhe solo*) and *hür hülde* ("soul", vital force) [Altargana, 2016].

Buddhist bodhisattvas from different Buddhist sacral places are invited to the festival just like to temple ceremonies – as the alternative source of vitality, to bring blessings to people and purify the aura. The White Old Man, the symbol of fertility and prosperity in the Buddhist pantheon, is also invited to the event. He usually walks with a child on the stage, symbolizing the generational continuity. In 2016, an old man on the stage explained to his grandchildren the sense of the ritual *serzhem*, which they are performing:

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[106] At some conferences, I often heard scholars saying that it is "funny" to see efforts to "privatize" and otherwise manipulate the mythical ancestors by various "steppe" people. Indeed, it could sound strange for those who are not acquainted with the categories of culture and ideas of the circulating vitality, radiating from such symbols.

> […] for the *hür hülde* ("soul", vital force) of the Buryat-Mongols and the peace of all living beings (*amitan*); we are making the nectar offering with the great reverence, *um maa khum* [a Buddhist mantra – A. Zh.]! [Altargana, 2016].

The harangue in the Buryat language was full of the allusions to the depressed vitality and the need to exalt it. The large blue flags *khii morins* are brought onto the stage. Children run with smaller versions of the flags and make them flutter in the breeze to increase the nation-wide vitality. The moderator of the festival announces:

> Eternal is the *khii morin*, the *hülde*/*symbol* of the Buryat-Mongolian state (*Buryaad-Mongol ulasai guren türe*) that waves in the air! It brings the freedom, rises the courage spirit (*erelkheg zorig*), the happy source (*ülzy*) of the hope and reliance, may you wave in eternity, *khii morin*! […] Let the *khii morin* that is one of the eight precious symbols and the *hür hülde* of all Buryats wave in the breeze over us! *Khurai! Khurai!* [Altargana, 2016].

The stage is full of the actors with flags of different colours with the *canto recitativo* in the background "*khii morin hülde* of Buryaad-Mongolian state (*ulas*)". The scene is succeeded by the representation of the Soviet repressions, and the mass Buryat migration to Mongolia and China, and their reconciliation during the festival Altargana.

Thus, apart from the important function of transmitting and forming the cultural canon [Nowicka, 2016], the festival has the function of strenghtening the all-Buryat vital forces. This is because the content of these events is full of the ancestral motives and allusions to the parental love that feeds and exalts them. Thus, even a "secular" entertainment event could be treated as a sort of ritual. Here, the sense of the cultural canon intertwines with the views of vitality and very often the cultural symbols do not serve the identity, but they are seen as methods of transforming the universe to their advantage.

5.7. Problems of contemporary Buryat identity

Having described the continuity and change of the order, let me finally outline the problems of the contemporary Buryat identity. I am not going to elaborate on theoretical considerations and definitions of

identity, but I will broadly trace how the Buryat identity is defined in the field. In my reflections, I came up with two competitive projects of constructing the Buryat identity.

On the one hand, it would not be a mistake to say that Buryats are striving to become a "modern nation" with developed "national identity". Even in a colloquial discourse, this problem is widely articulated because the Buryat nation-building was on the political agenda of both: the Soviet period and contemporary times. It includes the construction of various cultural "canons", symbols. (During the Soviet period, this also involved a territorial demarcation, rise of national Buryat culture: literature, theater, museums, folklore, construction of the modern literary, Buryat language, etc.) The post-Soviet projects of national identity continued these attempts and, currently, they are reconstructing some elements of culture that were banned or misarticulated during the previous epoch. This regards the contemporary religious revival, language policy, discontent with academic standardization of art, like: folk songs, dances, national instruments and fine art. As Nowicka traced it, the new cultural canon is now consciously produced and transmitted mainly through the ethno-festivals and other mass cultural events [Nowicka, 2016]. Many of those whom we talked to in the fieldwork were aware of the constructivist character of these processes. The expectation (and demand) of becoming a nation is connected with the Marxist view of nation as the highest stage of social development. The Buryats frequently see themselves as "underdeveloped" in the national sense, torn by "divisions" and disintegration, and the construction of the unified national identity is seen almost as panaceum to the social and economic problems. It is an example of how the academic categories become colloquial ideas.

On the other hand, there is the understanding of identity constructed in participation in the Buryat order. It is constructing the ethnic boundaries and even national identity through the particular behavioural and ritual order (*yosun*). Nevertheless, this identification procedure seems to me to contradict the nation-building projects. It is not connected with the national identity in the constructivist sense. I have mentioned that the *yosun* does not necessarily include the national symbolic canons, like: an outfit, oral culture, or even language.

A certain sacrifice and loss of a "traditional culture" is also a part of the Buryat tradition *yosun*, which brings harmony to the order of the universe. The identification with symbols is seen as incomplete without following the certain order of relations with people and environment. For example, according to a Buryat linguist, Polina Dashinimaeva, the loss of the Buryat language apart from assimilative state policy was also the result of high value of "maintaining silence" that contrasted with Russian/Western communicative culture [Dashinimaeva, 2005[107]]. Symbols are not always seen as objects of manipulations and restrict the constructivist possibilities of the nation-building program. Elements of the "national culture" are often seen as improper for the order: the circle dance *yokhor*, introduced in the Soviet century as the all-Buryat folk dance, could negatively influence the locality; the books of Buryat epos *Geser*, kept in homes, could be in a conflict with the family protecting deities; theatrical and other mass performances could transmit the negative "energy" to the public. The list could be elaborated and continued, but I wish only to point out these features.

The elements of this second project of identity have deep roots in the Mongolian history, while the accelerating influence of the first one could be traced back to the end of the 19th century. The modernity program marginalized the traditional views on social order through attributing it to the sphere of magic, beliefs that were going to disappear through contacts with science. However, both projects of identity were existing and functioning. The "traditional" categories of thought are still alive, despite the processes typical for "assimilation": the loss of language or cultural competence does not always imply the loss of the *yosun*. The situation of a "colonized" position cannot be an explanation for these processes because, in some aspects, the Buryat culture incorporates such subordination into the vision of a universe order. The emancipation of local forms of knowledge should not be limited to the victimized "imperialist–indigenous" relation. To me, it is a necessity of the more general project of extended translation of one culture into the terms of another.

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[107] This matter was also discussed during seminars held by Dashinimaeva in 2010 at the Buryat State University.

Summary

Assimilation or harmony? In my opinion, it is the main dilemma of the contemporary Buryat identity. The choice between the two definitions is the choice between two identity projects: the universe order on the one hand, and the issue of cultural preservation, on the other. The universe order, which is *yosun*, is crucial but seems to be an almost self-destructing project in the contacts with a different culture. The projects of constructivist national identity are often seen as "shallow" without their relation to the universe order. The arbitrariness is even more vivid because many of those cultural symbols were constructed in external centres, like Moscow, or St Petersburg. For many with whom I talked, it seems catastrophic to see their culture merely as the set of folklore performances, or cultural attributes, without the Buryat *yosun* – "Buryat" relations and order.

There are various opinions on this dilemma and the Buryats often denote themselves as being "swept with seven winds" (*na semi vetrakh*). I could conclude that the degree of assimilation is not possible to be measured in the constructivist terms, which is of secondary importance in this culture. It plays a bigger role in the sense of orderliness that brings vitality. Nevertheless, processes of "acculturation" and language shift challenge this order. This disturbed order is affecting negatively the national vitality. The order is being reproduced, promoted between the Buryats in various way to increase the level of vitality and the projects of modern nation-building are very often seen as the fuel for it. This is the point where both projects meet and, during sociological analysis, both of them should be taken into account. Nevertheless, I would like to end this chapter and the whole book with an open view on the problem.

Conclusion

The problem of constructing and perceiving the social order has been a central issue for social sciences. It was mainly considered within macro sociological theories, such as Marxism, or functionalism. I used the definition of social order proposed by the interpretive social sciences as shared sense-making practices. Within this framework, the goal of my research was to explore the ideas regarding social order in Buryat culture and their implications in constructing the contemporary Buryat identity.

I tried to show the ideas of a human being, social and cosmic orders in the Buryat culture, confronting them with the theories present in the European sociology. In my work, I employed Giddens's theory of "double hermeneutics" of social sciences, claiming that everyday "lay" concepts and those from the social sciences have a two-way relationship. There is no universal/neutral folk knowledge because it is based on a specific theory and its heuristic context. Therefore, I let myself juxtapose these two conventional cultures of knowledge: instead of imposing the conceptual framework provided by social sciences, I try to treat the Buryat social thought autonomously. I considered various sources to reconstruct the Buryat social thought: observation, in-depth interviews, archival materials, fiction and academic literature. I am fully aware that, to some extent, I was essentializing the "Buryat social thought" as something constant and internally coherent. Certainly, it was not possible to avoid generalizations because I attempted to tease out some internally consistent logic from all these various sources. I tried to avoid the excessive emphasis on the particular cases and events to avoid creating a data dump. I want to trace the metaphor, which could be read from the narrations of social and cosmic orderliness. Let us

remember that many ideas of the social order in the Western tradition are fundamentally metaphoric. For instance, the view of society as a living organism was one of the most far-reaching metaphors in Western thought that generated features like: "sickness" and "health", "birth" and "decay", "growth" and "development", etc. One should not dismiss metaphor as "unscientific" in favour of a "hard" and rigorous analysis – any act of thought is inseparable from a metaphor. In social thought, metaphor was a leading instrument not merely for description, but also for social action [Nisbet, 1969: 6]. I intended to introduce a certain metaphor that could help the reader grasp not only the idea of orderliness, but also the mood of the contemporary Buryat society.

The reflections on how society holds together so far have been one of the main issues in social sciences. In the view of society as the sum of autonomous individuals [Ossowski, 1968: 85], the search for the social glue and relations in the space "in-between" individuals is of central concern. In the search of social glue, sociologists attempt to reveal shared symbols, norms, values, social "contract", or macro social processes. It was initially embedded in the evolutionist thought of moving from primordial to a more constructivist view on inter-human relations. Whilst societies like the Buryats were seen as immersed in more "natural" (thus, more primitive) relations of kinship or tradition, the Western individual was more and more aware of the arbitrariness of social ties, putting an accent on norms, shared values, or decisions. Primarily, it is based on the stereotypical division into individualistic and collectivistic societies. The separate development of sociology and anthropology was determined by this division and their focus on this or that type of society. This separation of methodology, theory and vocabulary of described Western societies and the "others" was of course long discredited, but not fully exhausted.

It would not be a mistake to say that sociology is culturally individualistic in the sense that it operates with the vision of society as a sum of individuals, regardless of whether we consider this sum as individualistic or collectivistic. Thus, the problem of order is directly associated not only with the character of relatedness between human individuals, but also a specific definition of the human being. According to conventional wisdom, humanity cannot be questioned, denied,

or deprived, as it is grounded in certain objective principles, which could be the individual soul, granted from God in Christianity, or a human nature in materialistic thought. However, this is not a proper metaphor of understanding this idea in the Buryat culture. The Buryat idiom associated with one's origin (*ug*) is not a tree but a spring, or fountain (*bulag*), which flows and nurtures its environment. Just like from a spring of water, a newborn child receives the stream of vital forces (*amin, sünesün, sülde, khii morin, zayaa, sür, süü, zali, sog/tsog*, etc.) from its parents to fulfil its potential. The tie bonding the child and its ancestry is not a biological fact, but a relation which should be renewed and maintained through proper rituals and order to keep this vitality. The physical appearance, predisposition, self-confidence, wealth and life success are the results of strong or weak vital forces and, to a lesser extent, that of soul, laws of kinship, genes and individual merits. This is the way inequalities, power relations, or social changes are often rationalized.

This grand metaphor results in considering various ideas of the social order. The idea of order and hierarchy in the Buryat culture is embedded in the order of circulating vital forces – the one who is closer to the source grants them to those who succeed. Through a proper relationship with society, individuals join the stream of vitality. Let me cite a verse by lama Erdeni-Khaibzun Galshiev, living at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries:

> Treat the elderly
> As if they were your parents.
> In old times, it was believed
> That it will extend your life and multiply wealth.

Such a belief is widespread among the contemporary Buryats. A community (a local group, or a nation) shares the vital force gathered by its ancestors. Otherwise, the vital forces cease to circulate between individuals, leading to their gradual extinction. The spring could dry up and drive its locality to die, and the one who leaves the order stops being a human. The human being acquires vitality – and thus, humanity – through proper relations within his immediate group and through participation and maintenance of the proper social order.

Such a concept of humanity requires a different metaphor/theory for considering not only the social, but also the cosmic order. The world seen as circulation of vital as well as harmful forces, is perceived in the categories of a dynamic continuum that changes according to a specific order. The world is conceptualized not as a substance, but rather as movement, as a constant succession of transformations. The flow of universe transformations is not random, but changes according to particular regularities, which are called *yosun*. This concept is translated usually as a "tradition", "rule", "procedure", or "culture" and it is similar to the Chinese *Li*, or *Dao.* The ideas of this order were a vast topic of Buryat and, generally, Mongolian intellectual thought. These reflections regarded the regulation of social order, matters of hierarchy, power, cultural differences, which resulted in a line of peculiar ideas in perceiving the social thought – these questions certainly require further research. Apart from various canonic Buddhist texts widely distributed among the Buryats, some local didactic literature addressed to the Buryat mass, historical chronicles and other texts, directly or indirectly, were concerned with the idea of the social order. So, the reflections on the social order were a significant topic of Buryat and, generally, Mongolian thought. I also tried to show that many of the problems which appeared in the Western intellectual tradition simply lacked any relevance in that of the Buryat-Mongolian one.

Though I use the term a "universal order" to denote the idea of *yosun*, modern Buryats do not think about it in the absolutist categories. The universe is not seen as homogenous – it has different areas, which are ruled according to their own unique regularities – there is Buryat *yosun*, Russian *yosun*, but also the *yosun* of Buddhism, *yosun* of shamanism, and the *yosun* of Christianity. This vision of the dynamic universe implies the incorporation of different orders and not necessarily the replacement of one order with another. These *orders* are not competing in terms of "objectivity", or "truthfulness" – they are all considered as effective methods of the transformation of the universe.

Social sciences have long perceived the everyday routine as trivial in regard to macro processes, while the Buryats understood it as a motor for universe transformation. The continuum of transformations requires a method instead of an ontology; a pattern instead of meaning. *Yosun*

serves as such technique of the transformation and maintenance of the universe. It distributes actions in time and sequence to introduce a proper harmony and through this harmony, things receive their identity. The human being is not only an object in the dynamics of cosmic processes, but has the ability to change the order of the universe and in this sense is responsible for its maintenance (*yoho sakhikha*) through everyday practices. While working in the field, I have collected various examples of everyday behaviours directed by the so-called "Buryat order" (*Buryaad yoho*). This practical knowledge was the subject of deep reflections in the didactic Buddhist literature of *yosun-u shastir* (shastras of order), and, still, this knowledge can be found in various contemporary publications, leaflets and posters, and in the oral form:

- It is not proper to take and receive things by holding them between fingers and to take or receive things from the back.
- When somebody gives you something, take it from beneath, you cannot take it from the top.
- It is forbidden to muddy spring water, point with fingers to the rainbow and eat while standing.
- It is a sin to step over the objects and instruments lying on the ground such as pitchfork, rake, ax, as well as wood, or stone.

Besides the proper relations with society, the relations with the non-human environment are also seen as important. The position of the body in space, the order of movements – these are the procedures that can disrupt or harmonize the relationship of the individual with the environment, endowing them with vital force, or depriving them of it. The human society is able to influence the continuum of events "out there" and vice versa. Both macro/micro-social and natural processes are seen as interrelated orders – something which is distinguished as the "Buryat order".

The implementation of these everyday procedures, maintaining proper relations and, hence, the order are also a process of building ethnic boundaries and identities. The contacts with a multicultural environment, primarily with the Russian culture, increased the level of Buryat social self-reflection on various levels. What Buryat culture is, or what the Buryat way of behaviour is, are issues constantly discussed in everyday life and in my conversations with interlocutors. National

symbols, language and other important elements of national culture are not necessarily associated with the maintenance of the "Buryat order". Such understanding of identity could contradict the contemporary constructivist projects of Buryat national identity.

The civilizational progress in European societies was considered as the multiplication and sophistication of norms and rules. In the case of Buryats, this thinking of modernity seems to be completely reversed: if previous generations of Buryats followed a huge number of various rules (*yosuns*), the life of modern Buryats is radically impoverishing them (*yoho aldakha*) due to these assimilative processes. The fear of the disturbance of order was one of the most common and discussed topics that I heard during my field research. The general sense of the impoverishment of the *yosun* order negatively affects the "moral" and "physical" characteristics of the nation. The matter is closely related to vital forces that could circulate in connection with this order, and when this order is disturbed, the vitality cannot adequately feed the community. Buryats, as a nation formed within a special tradition, or order (*Buryat yosun*), have common vitality, or – in the language of the "Western" culture – a common soul. When the order (*yosun*) is not maintained, the circulation of vitality is disturbed, causing a nationwide depression and melancholy: just like a water stream that does not reach the place where it is needed. The high level of suicides, social problems and their interpretation always refer to the loss of the order. In this context, contemporary cultural events and projects, like: festivals, performances, movies, apart from the important function of constructing and transferring the cultural canon, serve to strengthen the vital forces of all Buryats. This is related more to attempts to repair the disturbed cosmic order than to the national identity, or the identification in the constructivist sense.

The fact that the Buryat-Mongols had not developed such a distinct sphere of knowledge as "sociology" does not necessarily mean that they could not construct it, or that they did not possess any reflexive sociological ideas. Indeed, there were ideas that could be counted as both reflexive and sociological, however, it would be hard to call them entirely social. Sociology, as understood in Luhmann's theory of communication systems, constructed and maintained its boundary from the environment

[Woroniecka, Łukasiuk, 2013]. Despite the recent theoretical shift from the structures to the meaning and the erosion of the auto-referential character of many social sciences [Woroniecka, 2013: 7], it maintains the major border which is the human community (or individuals) and its distinction from the broadly defined non-human environment. The Buryat social thought does not mark this border. This thought does not separate the individual from the society, and society from its relations with the cosmos. This social thought with its assumptions is more similar to posthumanistic approaches and may contribute to the development of the paradigm of non-anthropocentric humanities.

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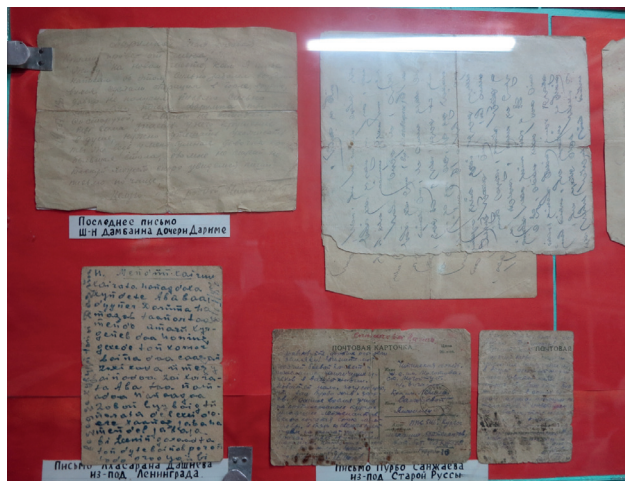
The exhibition showing the didactic literature of the pre-revolutionary period and the Soviet atheistic handbooks. Zugaalai village museum, Aga Okrug, 2013.



Letters written by Buryat soldiers to their families in different scripts (Classical Mongolian, Latin and Cyryllic). During the early Soviet era, in a short time, the Buryats changed their official script three times: the traditional, Classical Mongolian script was abolished as the official script in 1930, Latin script was used in the years 1930–1939; and Cyrillic alphabet was introduced in 1939, and it has been in use since then. The picture shows the letters written during World War II by Buryat soldiers to their families in all these scripts (Classical Mongolian, Latin and Cyryllic), showing the great mess and the problems of preserving the language, the literary tradition and culture. Zugaalai village museum, Aga Okrug, 2013.

The monument of Genghis Khan in Dadal (Mongolia), which is considered to be the birthplace of the Great Khan. Altargana festival, 2014.

People "receiving" the "energy"/vital forces at the birthplace of Genghis Khan. Dadal, Mongolia, Altargana festival, 2014.

Khii morins and *khadags*, the *oboo* ceremony on Chilsaana mountain. Kizhinga, Buryatia, 2014.

Oboo ceremony on Chilsaana mountain. Kizhinga, Buryatia, 2014.

Buryats from China during Altargana festival in Aga Okrug, 2012.

The view from Chilsaana mountain. Kizhinga, Buryatia, 2014.

The Buryats from Russia, Mongolia and China gathered during the Buddhist ceremony *Maidar khural* in Aga datsan. The events of the Civil War and policy of the newborn Soviet state triggered waves of mass migrations all over the former Russian Empire, including the ethnic Buryatia. As a result, the Buryats, in the first half of the 20th century were divided by the state borders of three countries: Russia, Mongolia and China. The relations between the groups used to depend heavily on the policy of the great powers, which, in different periods, would or would not tolerate those relations. The picture shows the Buryats from those three countries who gathered during the Buddhist ceremony after one of the largest Buryat folklore festivals, Altargana. Many of them, for the first time, visited the Buddhist monastery, attended by their grandparents before the revolution and perceived as a mythical place of the past. Aga Okrug, Russia, 2012, fieldwork.

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The matter of social order was developed as a rule in macro-theories such as functionalism or Marxism, which saw the order as constructed by shared norms, values, distribution of labour, power or property. The book attempts to trace the ideas of social order in the Buryat culture and its metaphoric structure using the interpretivist approach as shared sense-making practices. The fieldwork data and analysis of various literature form a grounded theory of social order that could contribute to existing sociological and anthropological perspectives.

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