

# THE “VERTICAL OF SHAMANIC POWER”: THE USE OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN POST-SOVIET TUVAN SHAMANISM

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**This article addresses the use of political discourse and the shaping of institutionalized organizations in post-Soviet shamanism in the south Siberian Republic of Tuva. It argues that many organizational features of today’s shamanism result from the creative integration of legal, academic, and political concepts that have been mostly elaborated under the Soviet/Russian centralized state governance and were thus historically alien to shamanic practice and discourse.**

**Starting from the early 1990s, the leaders of the Tuvan shamanic revival used these concepts (such as “religious organization of shamans” or “traditional confession”) pragmatically in order to take advantage of their favorable relationship with authorities, to assure a better public place for their religious organizations, and to establish their authority over the shamanic network. Nevertheless, this use of political discourse was not without consequences for the development of Tuvan shamanism. The organizational aspects of post-Soviet Tuvan shamanism in particular have been profoundly shaped by Russian political idioms of hierarchy and centralized power.**

**Keywords:** Shamanism; State; Religion and Politics; Religious Revival; Tuva; Siberia; Postsocialism; Post-Soviet Transformations; Bricolage

This article aims at analyzing the relationship between post-Soviet shamanism and political power among Tuvans, a Turkic-speaking population living in the south-Siberian Republic of Tuva within the Russian Federation.<sup>1</sup> It traces back this relationship from the present day to the early 1990s, when the ritual and therapeutic practices of Tuvan shamanism started to reemerge in the wake of the Soviet Union’s disintegration. During this period, the leaders of the shamanic “revival” managed to establish a close relationship with post-Soviet authorities and to promote shamanism as a powerful and institutionalized network of religious organizations called “shamanic societies.”

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<sup>1</sup> According to the All-Russia Census of 2010, the population of the republic is about 307,000 people, approximately 80 percent of whom are Tuvans (All-Russia Census 2010); this makes the population of Tuva one of the most homogenous from ethnic, linguistic, and cultural points of view.

I will argue that most organizational aspects of post-Soviet shamanism as a field (in the Bourdieusian sense)<sup>2</sup> have been structured by its connections with authorities at the local and federal levels. On the one hand, state authorities have provided the shamanic leadership with several practical advantages that were of great importance during the early phase of the shamanic revival and its subsequent development. On the other hand, the institutional organization of post-Soviet shamanism has been itself modified in the process of adapting to the post-Soviet context through a creative *bricolage* of political and legal discourses. As we will see, many present aspects of the institutional organization of post-Soviet Tuvan shamanism metaphorically reproduce features of the contemporary political model of the Russian Federation.

As with other populations of Siberia and Inner Asia (Shimamura 2004), Tuvan shamanic revival started in the early 1990s as a reaction to the identity crisis provoked by the collapse of the USSR and evolved in a context of strong economic and political uncertainties. Its rapid adaptation to this new context reflected broader social and political transformations and should be analyzed as a part of the postsocialist transition in the Republic of Tuva. According to Verdery (1996:193), one of the prominent features of the postsocialist transition is the combination of two opposing phenomena that often exist simultaneously, which she defines as the "destatizing" and "restatizing" tendencies. For example, the weakening of the state can be profitable to some forms of individual entrepreneurship, but a strong rejection of this "destatizing tendency" can be found in medicine or in cultural management. A partnership with the state is then often perceived as a way (and actually can be such a way) to overcome the difficulties of transition in domains that used to be under strong state control during socialist times (213–215). From this perspective, post-Soviet Tuvan shamanism is an interesting object of analysis that shows that the "restatizing" trend can encompass even social phenomena that historically have not been directly promoted or supported by the state.

Shamanism's compatibility with the state and political power is a recurring debate in anthropology. Two recent works on Tuvan and Darhad shamanisms, by Lindquist and Pedersen respectively, develop quite different views on the matter. According to Lindquist (2011), post-Soviet shamanism has contributed to the construction of a Tuvan national identity in the transnational arena but has failed in domestic competition with Buddhism because its reach is limited to the locality and family. According to Pedersen (2011:44–79), Darhad shamanic thought was strong enough to "encompass" the postsocialist state and to represent and reproduce itself through new figures of contemporary social and political life in rural Mongolia.

Such contrasting views are not unusual in the literature. Unlike the "great" religions, shamanism is often perceived as (and has often been historically) a

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<sup>2</sup> The relations between post-Soviet Tuvan shamans will be understood here in terms of unequal distribution of capital (social, symbolic, even academic), which produces domination and struggles between shamans. From this perspective I will argue that certain shamans use their links with the political field to consolidate and reproduce their dominant positions within the network of shamanic societies.

community-scale phenomenon unable to produce power structures or to provide them with ritual support. For example, the French anthropologist Hamayon (1994) claimed that Siberian shamanisms were structurally not very compatible with centralized political power, notably because of their pragmatism, their refusal of dogmatism, and their lack of ritual codification. In dealing with “ambivalent nature,” Siberian shamans did not worship the spirits but instead deployed an art of negotiating with them and even tricking them. Their responsibilities were the private and peripheral matters of social life rather than the collective rituals of social reproduction. Unlike the “great” religions, according to Hamayon, shamanism would embody a form of counterpower in society (1994:86).

On the other hand, Humphrey (1994) provided several examples of shamanism’s compatibility with political power in Inner Asia: from the visionary shaman Kokochu encouraging Genghis Khan to become “master of the world” in the early Mongol empire (1994:202) to the priesthood-like and codified “court shamanism” of the Manchu state of the eighteenth century (208). From Humphrey’s point of view, “different manifestations of shamanic practice may support or undermine political authority and may even emerge from the core of the state” (193). There could be “registers” that include “types of shamanic language, imagery, and practice manifest in particular contexts of political discourse” (200). Therefore, shamanism in Inner Asia or in Siberia is not necessarily structurally incompatible with the centralized state or with smaller polities, but this compatibility could take different shapes depending on cultural and political context.<sup>3</sup>

In the case of post-Soviet Tuva, it is possible to follow Humphrey and to argue that a new synergy in the relationship between shamanism and the state emerged following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Indeed, the time of transition opened for leaders of the shamanic revival a space of opportunities that had never before existed. Yet, in order to exploit these opportunities, they had to adapt to Russian political and legal discourse insofar as shamanism, like any other form of “religious” or “spiritual” life, came under the authority of new Russian laws. In particular, they had to use and integrate concepts of political discourse and categories of juridical practice that were historically alien to Tuvan shamanism. As we will see, if the leaders of the shamanic revival managed to exploit these concepts to their own advantage, this use of the official political discourse of the post-Soviet Russian state was not without consequences for the development of Tuvan shamanism after the collapse of the USSR. The paper will focus in particular on three aspects of this state influence on shamanism: first, how political and legal concepts have shaped the main organizational aspects of “shamanic societies”; second, how the relationship with political authorities has transformed the organization of contemporary shamanic practices; and third, how political ideas of “centralization” and “verticalization,”

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<sup>3</sup> In a much broader geographical perspective, in twentieth-century Venezuela and Guyana (Vidal and Whitehead 2004), shamanic practices were believed to provide indigenous peoples with political offices and other types of work, thus have been symbolically integrated into state life; besides, shamanic dreams and visions have often become powerful discursive instruments to predict the results of elections and/or to influence them.

which lie at the core of the current Russian model of political governance, have been metaphorically reproduced in the current organization of Tuvan shamanism.

The article consists of three parts. First, I will provide historical and ethnographic background on Tuva and on the social organization of Tuvan shamanism (encompassing the second half of the nineteenth century, the beginning of the twentieth century, and Soviet times). Second, I will briefly describe the post-Soviet political location of Tuva within the Russian Federation in order to better illustrate the current "verticalized" trend in relationships between the political center and the periphery. Third, I will analyze the actual development of post-Soviet shamanism and provide three examples (in chronological order) of borrowing and deployment of political and legal concepts that structure the organizational aspects of Tuvan shamanism today.<sup>4</sup>

### SHAMANISM IN HISTORY AND ETHNOGRAPHY

Prior to approximately the beginning of the 1920s, most Tuvans were cattle breeders and hunters. Like their close neighbors from the Altai-Sayan area, they were shamanists. They believed that their everyday life and wealth depended on different kinds of good and malevolent spirits and that shamans had the power to control these with a help of their own shamanic spirits. In 1753, the Tuvans became subjects of the Manchu state (Qing dynasty) that ruled China and Mongolia from the middle of the seventeenth century until 1911. To ease the running of Tuva, the Manchu governors introduced the same principles of territorial, military, and administrative division as in Mongolia. They appointed feudal governors who were mostly Mongols and let them rule the new country according to Mongol traditions (Mongush 2001:39–41). It was under the rule of these governors that Tibetan Buddhism of the Gelug school, the main religion of Mongolia, began to spread in Tuva in the second half of the eighteenth century. However, the impact of Buddhism on the population was limited and uneven: stronger in the south (near the Mongolian border) and in the west of Tuva, much weaker in the north. Buddhism did not manage to supplant shamanism, and the old shamanic beliefs and practices coexisted with new ones, as was also the case for other small ethnic groups in the area (for example, the Darhad from northern Mongolia; Badamxatan 1986).

In 1921, the independent state of the Tuvan People's Republic was created. In the beginning, the new country continued to support Buddhism, but it quickly fell under the influence of the USSR (Moskalenko 2004:103–120). From the end of 1920, Tuva systematically applied the main Soviet policies: notably, it drastically limited the public space for religion and the possibility of religious education (*Istoriia Tuvy* 2007:243–250). These policies turned quickly into persecution, especially of Buddhists not only because of Buddhism's organized and thus more visible practices

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<sup>4</sup> For reasons of space and coherence, I will circumscribe my analysis to the organizational aspects of the current shamanic revival within the frame of the so-called shamanic societies. I will not treat their direct and indirect implications on the shaman-client interactions and ritual practices.

but also for political reasons: indeed, the pro-Soviet Tuvan leaders perceived the Buddhist clergy as their main rivals for the control of power (Moskalenko 2004:113–114). In 1944, Tuva was finally annexed to the USSR and became a part of the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (RSFSR). By this time, the community and cultural heritage of Buddhism had been already shattered, while shamanism had been reduced to marginalized and clandestine ritual practices.

### SHAMANISM IN THE PAST AND ITS SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, Tuvan shamanism, unlike Buddhism, had been a mostly “private” practice. While Buddhist collective ceremonies in temples and monasteries gathered the inhabitants of a *sumon* or even of an entire *kozhuun* (respectively, the intermediate and largest administrative units in the Manchu empire), shamans led rituals mostly for their closest neighbors and relatives. They performed healing and fortune telling, propitiated the forest spirits before hunting expeditions, and led funerary rituals. Even if some sources suggest the existence of collective ceremonies for the benefit of the whole community, for example the worshiping of an *ovaa*<sup>5</sup> or of the water canals used for irrigation (Kenin-Lopsan 1999:189–194), shamans did not seem to be the first-choice specialists in such situations. Regular collective ceremonies were more often led in Tuva by Buddhist lamas (Kon 1934:122–127) or by elders (Adrianov 1917). Similar traditional distributions of ritual knowledge could be found in other populations of Inner Asia where different types of ritual competencies were assigned to distinct categories of specialists (Funk 2005:79; Humphrey and Onon 1996:320).

Shamanism also contrasted with religions such as Buddhism or Christianity because of its lack of an organized milieu, including clergy. Unlike the Buddhist disciples, who studied together for years in monasteries under the close control of elder lamas, young shamans met more experienced ones only in the particular context of very short ritual training (Diakonova 1981:136; Diószegi 1968:288). They continued then to live on herding and hunting—exactly like any other ordinary member of their communities—practicing their art at the demand of their relatives and neighbors. Common beliefs and legends also betray a lack of interaction between shamans. For instance, some Altai populations thought there could be only one shaman at a time in a community; if a new shaman appeared, it meant that the old one would die soon (Potapov 1947:161). In Tuva, shamans were believed to be unable to tolerate the presence of other shamans, to kill their rivals magically, and to “devour” them (Kenin-Lopsan 1999:223).

Because of this lack of a collective dimension in shamanism, the interaction of Tuvan shamans with the Manchu state power structures was weak at best. As far as we can conclude from existing sources, shamans were outside the scope of the Manchu administration’s interests and did not enjoy any support from the feudal authorities ruling Tuva, the opposite being the case for Buddhism (Mongush 2001:40–55). After

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<sup>5</sup> *Ovaa* (Tuvan) are sacred shrines made of stones (or sometimes of branches) marking important points in the geographical and social landscape: mountains, passes, family pastures, and hunting territories. They are believed to house the master spirit (Tuvan: *éé*) of these territories.

the 1930s, when the initial state support for Buddhism in the Tuvan People's Republic turned into violent persecution against the clergy (106), shamans and their practices remained private and discreet and, therefore, were a much more difficult target for antireligious policies. In this context, the lack of an organized social milieu turned out to be an advantage for shamans. Procommunist and then Soviet authorities in Tuva did not know how to efficiently fight shamanic practices. While defining shamanism as a "religious survival" that had to be eradicated, they de facto tolerated the presence of some ritual specialists in remote rural areas. Starting in the late 1960s, several Soviet and foreign ethnographers, such as Petr Karal'kin, Sev'ian Vainshtein, Vera Diakonova, and Vilmos Diószegi, managed to meet shamans and "ex-shamans."<sup>6</sup> Later, official reports from the Tuvan administration stated the presence of about forty shamans in the 1980s (their number grew slightly just before the USSR's collapse) but did not mention any concrete measures to prevent them from conducting their rituals (Khomushku 1998:103–104).

To summarize, before the 1990s shamanism in Tuva had not been the object of close attention from the authorities, be it positive (support) or negative (like the violent persecution of the Buddhist lamas). If it continued to survive through Soviet times, it did so on the margins of society as the "dispersed religion" (Humphrey and Onon 1996:9) it had been historically. Indeed, mythological and ritual knowledge was distributed between a few practicing shamans, "ex-shamans," expert laymen, elders, and other ritual specialists, and was therefore difficult to outline conceptually and to eradicate completely from social life.

### **POLITICAL HISTORY OF POST-SOVIET TUVA: DECENTRALIZING AND RECENTRALIZING TENDENCIES**

Immediately after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Tuva witnessed a rise of nationalist movements; partly under their influence, the first post-Soviet constitution of Tuva, adopted in 1993, included the possibility of secession from the Russian Federation (Moskalenko 2004:179–188).<sup>7</sup> Post-Soviet Tuvan ethnonationalism corresponded to the early 1990s decentralizing tendencies of Russia, best summarized by Russian President Boris Yeltsin who once suggested that the national republics "take as much sovereignty as [they] could swallow." In Tuva, the revival of shamanism, initiated in 1992–1993 by a group of urban intellectuals in the capital Kyzyl, had no explicit connection to nationalist and secessionist parties. However, it began as part of the

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<sup>6</sup> People who claimed to have abandoned their ritual practice. However, it is not easy to evaluate the truth of such declarations: for example, Diószegi (1968:310) witnessed a shamanic healing session led by an ex-shamaness. Besides, according to shamanic conceptions among Tuvans and many other Siberian populations, one can neither become a shaman by his own will nor stop his ritual practice, because such choices belong only to the spirits, who severely punish disobedience. Many ex-shamans let the authorities destroy their drums, or gave them to local museums, but some of them used other rituals objects as substitutes.

<sup>7</sup> This secession chapter was later repealed from the second constitution of Tuva, adopted in 2001.

general political decentralization of the early 1990s and provided strong arguments for the valorization of local cultural heritage over the former “Soviet/Russian” culture. Therefore, emerging networks of people who were interested in practicing traditional rituals easily managed to obtain symbolic and financial support from local authorities. For example, the first Tuvan-American academic and practical symposium on shamanism held in 1993 in Kyzyl was co-organized and cosponsored by the Tuvan government, becoming one of the key events in the post-Soviet history of shamanism.

But from the 2000s onward, this general trend has been reversed. Since Vladimir Putin became first the interim and then the official president in 2000, decentralizing trends in Russian politics have been supplanted by a strong move toward centralization imposed by Moscow. Paradoxically, Tuva, a remote republic with a very short history of relations with the USSR and with one of the largest proportion of indigenous people in Russia, was quickly integrated into the mechanics of federal governance.

This integration operated firstly at the level of the political elites. While all Tuvan governors are still natives of the Republic, they are no longer elected by the population. As elsewhere in Russia, they are formally “appointed” from Moscow according to the election-reform law introduced by Putin in 2004, which abrogated the direct elections of governors in the federal subjects of the Russian Federation. This reform was at the core of Putin’s drive to reinforce the “vertical” axis of the united executive powers: in order to allegedly guarantee more effective governance, regional authorities had to be subordinated to the federal center and their autonomy had to be limited. As a result, while the first post-Soviet leader of Tuva, Sherig-ool Oorzhak, was elected twice as president (in 1992 and again in 1997) and once as the chairman of the government (in 2002),<sup>8</sup> the candidacy of the present supreme political leader, Sholban Kara-ool, was formally submitted for approval from the deputies of the Tuvan parliament (Ulug Khural) by federal authorities: the first time by Vladimir Putin (in 2007) and the second time by Dmitrii Medvedev (in April 2012).

But the political links between Moscow and Tuva go even further. Sergei Shoigu, the Tuvan-born minister of emergency situations in Putin’s cabinet and one of the leaders of the United Russia party, is very influential both at the local and the federal levels. He has made himself the main promoter of Tuvan issues in Moscow and has become the closest representative of the centralized Russian state for Tuvans.

Not surprisingly, Tuva’s electoral support for Vladimir Putin and his United Russia party is one of the most significant among the different districts and republics of Russia. According to official election results,<sup>9</sup> the inhabitants of Tuva gave more than 85 percent

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<sup>8</sup> According to the constitution of Russia, there can be only two consecutive presidential terms for one candidate (at the federal and the regional levels). Therefore, in 2002 Sherig-ool Orzhak had no legal possibility to stand in a third presidential election as he had already twice been elected president of Tuva. In order to circumvent this rule, the president’s office has simply been transformed into the chairman of the government’s office.

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted here that the opposition (mostly in Moscow and Saint Petersburg) contested the results of the 2011 parliamentary and 2012 presidential elections claiming widespread fraud.

of their votes to United Russia during the State Duma election in December 2011 and more than 90 percent to Putin during the presidential election of March 2012.<sup>10</sup> This swing in political support from the above-mentioned nationalist, anti-federal, and anti-Russian tendencies in the Tuvan political scene of the early 1990s is explained both by the strong top-down influence of political factions over the population and by the deep dependence of the Tuvan economy on federal subsidies.<sup>11</sup>

Certainly, at the level of everyday life Tuva is still quite an isolated region, with a linguistically and culturally homogenous population that has few direct economic and cultural connections to Moscow and to Russia more generally. However, administratively and politically Tuva is now fully integrated into the post-Soviet model of governance and participates in the centralization trend that has been imposed over the last decade by Moscow on all the subjects of the Russian Federation.

### **CONCEPTS AND INSTITUTIONS: THE POLITICAL CONSTRUCTION OF SHAMANISM IN POST-SOVIET TUVA**

I have briefly outlined the two main trends and features of the political relationships between Tuva and the federal center. I will now focus on the relationship that the post-Soviet Tuvan shamanism has developed with institutions and actors of the political sphere at both the local and federal levels. I will try to show in particular that the leaders of the shamanic revival systematically borrowed categories and concepts from the discourses that were elaborated within Russian political and legal space during Soviet and post-Soviet times.

Shamanic leaders used these concepts in order to organize and promote ritual practices of shamanism as major public phenomena in the cultural and religious revival in Tuva but also as a tool to establish their own authority over the shamans and their new organizations. The institutional and organizational features of shamanism have adapted well to post-Soviet political trends: from the rise of religious pluralism and decentralization of the early 1990s to the revalorization of traditional values (and traditional religions) and progressive centralization starting in the mid-1990s.

I will analyze this process of adaptation and transformation through three examples that focus on the most important features of the actual organization of shamanic practice in Tuva. I will first take a look at the concept of "religious organization" inherited from Soviet times, which has found a second life in the post-Soviet laws of the 1990s. I will then consider the notion of "traditional religion" introduced into public discourses on shamanism, and finally I will describe a recent attempt of one of the shamanic leaders to create a new hierarchical supercentralized organization. These three examples also refer to different phases in the development of post-Soviet shamanism, providing a synthetic overview of its evolution.

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<sup>10</sup> Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation (<http://www.cikrf.ru>).

<sup>11</sup> Tuva receives almost 75 percent of its revenue from the federal budget of the Russian Federation and is one of the most economically dependent regions (<http://atlas.socpol.ru/portraits/tuva.shtml>).

### THE INSTITUTIONAL FORM OF “RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION” AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The first shamanic religious organization, *Düŋgür* (The Drum), was created by a small network of people, mostly intellectuals from Kyzyl. Its founder, Mongush Kenin-Lopsan, born in 1925, is a well-known ethnographer and a specialist in shamanism, which he had studied since the 1960s. In 1993, the Tuvan Ministry of Justice officially registered *Düŋgür* as a religious organization. *Düŋgür* was followed in 1998 and after by several other organizations of shamans. By 2009, there were eight shamanic “societies” (as they are commonly called in Tuva), mostly based in the Kyzyl,<sup>12</sup> and several other organizations were preparing their files for registration. While not a shaman himself,<sup>13</sup> Kenin-Lopsan has managed to promote himself during the 1990s as the supreme symbolic leader of the Tuvan shamanism. As the president for life of all Tuvan shamans, he exerted a strong moral authority over almost all the shamanic societies. Thus, the “religious organization” has become the main institutional framework for ritual practices of Tuvan shamanism, even though there were many “independent” shamans who did not belong to any organization.<sup>14</sup> To many Tuvan laymen these new arrangements seemed so unusual that they were questioning the magical power of these new shamans and the conformity of post-Soviet shamanic organizations with Tuvan tradition.

As we have seen, the very principle of an organized network of shamans did not exist in the past; a “religious organization” is therefore a completely new category in the history of Tuvan shamanism.<sup>15</sup> It initially came with the Soviet law and was intended primarily for “great” religions such as Orthodox Christianity and Islam. During Soviet times, authorities would either officially register religious communities (recognizing their existence but also controlling them) or refuse their registration and outlaw them. In both cases, registration as a religious organization (or its denial)

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<sup>12</sup> Data provided in 2009 by the state office for interaction with religious organizations within the Tuvan government.

<sup>13</sup> Kenin-Lopsan has often stressed the important role of his grandmother-shaman, *Khandyzhap Kuular*, in his early career and his life-long interest in shamanism. Tuvans systematically interpret this kind of ancestry as a probable indication of the “shamanic gift”—extraordinary magical powers transmitted within the family. However, Kenin-Lopsan does not explicitly define himself as a shaman. He does not perform rituals with a drum and does not call spirits to heal people; he only performs for his visitors the 41-pebbles divination, a traditional technique that is not restricted to shamans’ ritual expertise.

<sup>14</sup> There are some forces that drive shamans to work in shamanic “societies,” and others that drive them out. Briefly, while membership in a shamanic organization may represent a symbolic and economic constraint for the more experienced and popular shamans, other shamans prefer the relative security of the “societies,” where they are kept in contact with new clients and guaranteed a minimal level of regular income.

<sup>15</sup> During the 1990s, “religious organizations of shamans” and similar structures appeared also in other post-Soviet contexts, for example in Buryatia and Khakassia, where they had not existed in the past. Shamanic leaders from Tuva and other Siberian republics maintained regular relationships. However, personal contacts cannot explain similar scenarios in the post-Soviet revival of Siberian shamanisms, which are mostly due to common legal and political trends in post-Soviet Russia.

was used as a tool to control, cut down, or curb the activities of believers (Odintsov 1994:122).

Through the reforms of the 1990s, the role of religious organizations in mediating relationships with the state has progressively changed. At the very beginning of the 1990s, although the former ambition to control religious life had disappeared, this form of governance persisted. Registration as a "religious organization" continued to provide religious groups with legal recognition and, furthermore, with different concrete benefits, such as tax exemptions (VAT, income tax, property taxes), status as a legal entity and thus the right to organize large-scale public events, and the possibility of officially inviting foreign guests to such occasions.

The last two advantages have been particularly important for the development of shamanism in Tuva. In the summer of 1993, Dūᅡgūr organized the first Tuvan-American symposium on shamanism, together with the Tuvan government and its foreign partners from the Foundation for Shamanic Studies, a US-based international organization with subsidiary centers worldwide "dedicated to preservation, study, and teaching of shamanic knowledge for the welfare of the Planet and its inhabitants."<sup>16</sup> For the leaders of the Shamanic revival in Tuva, these connections were a fundamental resource: they reinforced the local legitimacy of shamanic leaders, gave them access to international networks of shamanism and spirituality, and attracted financial and symbolic resources to Tuva.

For individual shamans, the fact of being a member of an official religious organization such as Dūᅡgūr or, later, other shamanic societies meant being able to interact with domestic and international shamanic/spiritual networks and to perform rituals not only for the local clients but also for Westerners.

Beside the contextual advantages granted by the official registration of Dūᅡgūr (and of other shamanic societies later on), the legal form of "religious organization" also had a pervasive influence on the organization of post-Soviet shamanism itself. Conceived as a hierarchical entity (supposing at least a director and ordinary members), the "religious organization" organized networks of individual shamans into a hierarchical structure with Kenin-Lopsan at the very top, the directors of different "societies" in the middle, and affiliated "ordinary" shamans at the bottom.

With hierarchy came the unequal distribution of authority, decision-making power, and access to useful resources. The framework of religious organizations had different important implications for the development of post-Soviet shamanism.

A first significant consequence was a certain bureaucratization of shamanic charisma (in the Weberian sense). Soon after the founding of the Dūᅡgūr society, Kenin-Lopsan established rules for the "recruitment" of shamans, which were reproduced later by other societies. In accordance with his own ethnographic data (Kenin-Lopsan 1987:11), the new shamans recruited in Dūᅡgūr were divided into five categories: at the top were the "hereditary" shamans who were connected to the spirits of their shaman ancestors and were supposed to be the most magically

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<sup>16</sup> See the Foundation's website (<http://www.shamanism.org/fssinfo/index.html>).

powerful,<sup>17</sup> and in the other four categories, all the other shamans were connected to different types of wandering spirits and were supposed to be less powerful. Even today, every shaman within the organized network belongs to one of these categories and has a certificate that confirms his title and allows him to work officially. In the societies, the legitimacy of a shaman is built up not only through efficient ritual work with clients (as it was in the past and as it still is, to a certain extent, for “independent” shamans) but also through references to an established position within the organization’s framework.

A second consequence has been the monopolization, by the shamanic societies and their directors, of contacts with external networks. Directors of the societies have indeed more opportunities than ordinary shamans to establish links with such external partners—from cultural milieus (musicians, film directors), shamanic/spiritual/esoteric circles, and the media—that provide new clientele in Tuva, elsewhere in Russia, and abroad, as well as concrete opportunities to perform rituals. It follows that societies (and their directors) hold the social capital that attracts shamans, maintains the existing hierarchy, and, therefore, perpetuates the dynamics of the organized shamanic network. The Tos Déer (Nine Skies) society, with its late director, shamaness Aj-Chürek Ojun, was the first example of this synergy between Tuvan shamanism and Russian and foreign esoteric and cultural milieus. Beginning in the early 1990s, Aj-Chürek Ojun was many times invited to Italy, Germany, Austria, and the United States to participate in events organized by the Foundation for Shamanic Studies. A talented performer with an intuitive understanding of the visual and musical dimensions of shamanism, she also took part in various cultural events, such as the International Theater Olympiad in Moscow (2001) and in Üstüü-Khüree, a yearly international live music festival for the revival of Buddhism in Tuva. As a result, visitors from abroad knew Aj-Chürek as one of the leading lights in the field of Tuvan shamanism, and her fame benefited the development of the shamanic society she ran in Kyzyl. Later on, other shamanic society directors, such as Kara-ool Dopchunool (see below), developed similar strategies to attract new clients and tourists from Russia and elsewhere, extending their circle of contacts to European musicians, contemporary artists, and scholars.

A third consequence of the post-Soviet organization of shamanic practice according to the “religious organization” model has been the emergence of a new, more complex economy that involves ritual specialists themselves, their directors, clients, and state institutions. Unlike “independent” shamans, who negotiate their honoraria directly with clients, members of societies have to charge the prices for rituals established by the society. Furthermore, they must give half of their revenues to the society. In turn, the society pays for the rent and/or upkeep of the common house and contributes to a pension fund for its members. Being a member of a society does not necessarily provide a very high income but it guarantees a certain degree of visibility among the local clientele and thus a certain regularity in ritual work.

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<sup>17</sup> On the construction and use of biographical and genealogical narratives among contemporary Tuvan shamans, see Pimenova (2011).

These consequences have not only translated the influence of the legal form of a "religious organization" on the development of post-Soviet shamanism but also reproduced this influence. In particular, I believe the two latter points (the monopolization of useful contacts and the provision of access to economic resources) are the main reasons why the organized societies, even if frequently criticized for their "antitraditional" character by Tuvan people and even by shamans themselves, persist today and have even increased in importance. One should not, however, overlook the fact that Tuvan authorities clearly preferred to deal with organized and visible partners, and their support was always intended to help shamanic societies, not individuals.

### SHAMANISM AS A TRADITIONAL CONFESSION/RELIGION IN LEGAL DISCOURSE

Similar to the "religious organization," the concept of "traditional confession" has also entered contemporary shamanic discourse through the law. It appears notably in the 1995 law of the Republic of Tuva "On the freedom of conscience and on the religious organizations." This local law recognizes three "traditional confessions": shamanism, Buddhism, and Russian Orthodoxy.<sup>18</sup> Two years later, the same idea of a symbolic hierarchy of religions was reiterated in the federal law of Russia, which distinguishes certain religions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism) as having had a "particular role in Russian history." These legal developments arrived after a short period of religious pluralism in the early 1990s and were part of a "traditionalist" turn in post-Soviet Russian society. Many experts saw them as the "great" religions' attempt to increase their influence among the population and accurately outlined some of the potential and real dangers of these laws (Shterin 2000:202–204). Indeed, even if these laws still recognize equal rights to all religions on paper, they also contain clauses that the state administration can easily interpret in favor of certain religions (the "traditional" ones) and against others that are historically more recent in Russia.

In Tuva, where Orthodox Christianity is relatively weak for historical and demographical reasons,<sup>19</sup> the administration considered Buddhist and shamanic religious organizations to be their privileged public partners. From 1995 until now, they have granted financial support to Buddhist *khüree* (temples/monasteries) and to the most important shamanic societies in Kyzyl. In the latter case, state support took different forms: financial contributions to events and manifestations, means of transport (for example, cars in order to help shamans to visit their clients in rural areas), real estate (this was the case of the first *Düŋgür* house near the government building in Kyzyl), or assistance in obtaining a house lease (that is how the Adyg *Éeren* shamanic society obtained its quite spacious premises). Furthermore, Tuvan

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<sup>18</sup> For the text of the law, see Anaiban, Guboglo, and Kozlov (1999:127).

<sup>19</sup> Orthodox Christianity was introduced to Tuva in the nineteenth century by Russian tradesmen and settlers. Its influence has always been limited to a small part of the Russian-speaking community, other local Russians being Old Believers. Today, Orthodox Christianity remains the religion of the Russian minority.

authorities contributed to shamans' increasing visibility in public space by asking their advice on highly symbolic public issues, such as the recent discussions about the future organization of urban funerary facilities in Kyzyl (Oorzhak 2009).

It is worth emphasizing here that Tuvan laymen do not necessarily share the "religious" understanding that has been adopted by local authorities and which clearly benefits shamanic leaders. Practices are indeed quite different from legal discourse. Tuvans frequently consult shamans for their everyday problems, but they hardly see them as representatives of a collective realm to which they belong. For instance, the available statistical data show a very weak identification of Tuvans with shamanism: only between 2 and 7 percent of believers declare themselves to be "shamanists," compared with 40–60 percent who declare themselves "Buddhists" (Khomushku 2001, 2005).

More importantly, the attitude of laymen toward shamans is different from, say, Christian believers' attitude to priests. While harmful spirits and master spirits of holy places are a part of their "natural world" (Lindquist 2008), Tuvan laypeople often say they do not believe "in shamanism" in general and do not trust "shamans" because most of them are allegedly "quacks." Occasionally they consider themselves lucky to meet one who is trustworthy and who they believe to be endowed with particular talents of insight and efficacy in ritual action. In order to find this unique "true" shaman, some clients even submit the different specialists they consult to blind tests, asking them to foretell on vaguely formulated questions in order to check if they really have exceptional powers (Stépanoff 2007:173). This attitude, mixing general mistrust with pragmatic considerations, is not unique to Tuva. It has been observed in local shamanisms elsewhere in Inner Asia, for example in the context of political changes and growing economic uncertainty in postsocialist Mongolia (Buyandelgeriyin 2007).

### IS SHAMANISM ACTUALLY A RELIGION?

Why has the idea of shamanism as a traditional religion/confession been so easily accepted by Tuvan authorities, to the point that shamans are allowed to claim state support and to express their beliefs publicly? One hypothesis is that the understanding of shamanism as a religion in local laws and political discourse was prepared by pre-existing theories from Soviet ethnography that was, in turn, shaped by its long-term relationship with the state.

If the concept of "religion" was certainly used earlier by ethnographers studying Siberian ritual practices (for example, Bogoraz 1939; Shternberg 1936), the "religious" understanding of shamanism became particularly prominent in the humanities since the 1960s. Of great relevance was the publication by Soviet ethnographer and chair of the Department of Ethnography at Moscow State University, Sergei Tokarev, of his theoretical monograph on the "first forms of religion" (1964). This understanding remained the dominant paradigm in Soviet ethnography until the 1990s, mainly because it served the ideological needs of the Soviet atheist state. As Leonid Potapov, one of the leading specialists on the Altai area, put it later (1991:11):

For Soviet researchers, not to recognize shamanism as a religion is unacceptable from theoretical and practical points of view ... The objective scientific definition

of shamanism is a matter of great importance for the antireligious propaganda among Siberian populations, as well as for atheist education.

Paradoxically, the Soviet ethnographical conception of shamanism as a religion, elaborated as a tool to fight against shamanic practices or, at least, to label them as "backward," turned out to be an advantage for post-Soviet shamanic leaders dealing with the public promotion of shamanism. Considering Kenin-Lopsan's ethnographic background and his proximity to Tuvan authorities since the launching of the Dūngür society and the organization of the 1993 Tuvan-American symposium, it is probable that Soviet ethnographic conceptions became a valuable resource during the adoption of the Tuvan law on religion in 1995.

By contrast, many Western but also some Soviet and post-Soviet Russian, scholars have pointed out that shamanism could hardly be defined as a religion. While a full analysis of this anthropological debate is beyond the scope of this article, it will be useful here to synthesize some of these academic views in order to stress that describing shamanism as a confession/religion is a political tactic rather than an "obvious" definition.

Amongst recent works on this issue, Humphrey clearly stressed the difficulty of using scholarly concepts such as "shamanism" and "religion." In her work on shamanism among the Daur in Manchuria, she wrote that the concept of religion "seemed wrong for ideas and beliefs which are never set out as a general theory and make use of relatively few abstract concepts, for which there is no holy founder, no organized institution, no moral dogmas, and no authoritative corpus of books" (1994:49). Post-Soviet ethnology and anthropology brings up the same question in a different way. For example, Kharitonova (2006:87–100) relies on the Soviet ethnographer Igor' Vdovin's heterodox perspective on Siberian shamanisms to argue that these are complex phenomena that include two distinct "social domains." On one hand, there are the practices of shamans who interact with spirits; these interactions being an art of negotiation in order to heal and to resolve clients' practical problems. On the other hand, lay worldviews (Russian: *mirovozzrenie*), beliefs, and ritual practices could be considered part of a religious "domain" as far as they do not require negotiation but only the worship of spirits. In this second case, laymen do not need shamans, who have been often excluded from collective ceremonies performed by elders in many Siberian and Inner Asian societies (Kharitonova 2006:96).

In both of these understandings the practice of shamanism appears to be more a set of ritual techniques used on behalf of individual clients rather than a regular practice performed on the behalf of the entire community. One can recall here a classic sociological definition of religion: Mauss and Hubert ([1902] 1966:13–15), as well as Durkheim ([1912] 2007), stated that the distinction between religion and magic lies in their respectively collective and private natures. For Durkheim, religion is "an eminently collective phenomenon" in which there is an organized cult and clergy and where believers are connected by multiple reciprocal ties. By contrast, magic is a private matter: there can be clients, but no Church of magic (96).

According to the Durkheimian conception, shamanism is thus much closer to magic than to religion. In the case of Tuva this applies clearly to past shamanism, for it was mostly a family-scale phenomenon. But it is also partly true in the case of post-Soviet shamans whose everyday practice is still largely made up of private rituals for individual clients. This means that the reciprocal ties between clients are lacking. Without them, there could hardly be any collective shamanic identity in the same sense as for “great” religions.

At the same time, things are not so black and white as the classical Maussian/Durkheimian definition might suppose. The most prominent ongoing changes in Tuvan shamanism concern precisely the emerging collective dimension that coexists with the private one. Indeed, Tuvan shamanism constitutes today a multilevel phenomenon that does not entirely fall into one or another pole of the religion/magic opposition. On the one hand, it still presents important “magical” features, particularly if we focus on shaman/client and client/client relationships. On the other hand, there is a new collective dimension represented by the religious organizations of shamans and their leadership, by the rules of hierarchical distinction, and by the discourse on the nature of shamanism. One can sometimes witness rituals performed by several shamans in public places on highly symbolic occasions, such as the Tuvan New Year (*Shagaa*), just as Buddhist lamas do. As a result, post-Soviet Tuvan shamanism appears more as the sum of various ritual and therapeutic practices that now exist in an organized framework with “corporatist” rules. Being legally recognized as a confession/religion, the network of shamanic societies has an opportunity to aspire to a religious role in the public sphere. In a certain way, legal definitions and political discourses enhance the collective, “religious” dimension of post-Soviet shamanism.

#### **DISCURSIVE USES OF THE CONCEPT OF “RELIGION”**

What are the uses of legal definitions besides the concrete financial assistance already mentioned above? Here I will provide an example of discourse intended to protect the corporation of shamans, to increase the legitimacy of its leaders in the public space, and even to give them some rhetorical weapons in their implicit battle against lamas for the authorities’ attention and support.

One of the most prominent features of the post-Soviet situation in Tuva is the emerging discourse on shamanism as the most ancient religion and its role in Tuvan society and world history. This discourse is reproduced by leaders of the Tuvan shamanic revival on public occasions, notably in their interactions with the state, cultural figures, and the media.

The concept of “religion” is a necessary element of this discourse. To show how it is formulated and for what purposes, I will refer here to a “diplomatic” accident. In 2006 the Russian Minister of Defense Sergei Ivanov made a blunder saying: “Sometimes ... newspapers publish a good article besides the advertisement of brothels, shamans, and other quacks” (Likhanova and Kenin-Lopsan 2006). Shamans were not supposed to be the targets of this diatribe. But this phrase has been understood in Tuva as an example of mistrust and condescension toward Tuvan culture and was vehemently

discussed in the local media. Kenin-Lopsan immediately reacted, addressing an open letter to the minister. He wrote:

Shamans, representatives of one of the official confessions of the Republic of Tuva and of other regions of Russia ... have always belonged to the most humanist religious movement in world history. . . .The Wise Men who brought the offerings to Jesus Christ were shamans, in other terms, the first priests of paganism. The shamanic religion has been the first religion of all the people in the world, the source of spiritual cultures of all ethnicities. (Likhanova and Kenin-Lopsan 2006)

It is important to stress here the use of the rhetoric of organized religion ("priests") and the reinterpretation consisting in putting shamanism at the very beginning of the history of world religions (here, Christianity). Furthermore, the logic of this discourse fits the concept of the "first form of religion" even if it does not mention it explicitly. The discourse developed by Kenin-Lopsan clearly aimed at overcoming the local dimension of shamanism in order to place it, in terms of both geographical and historical influence, in the same league as the "great" religions.

The concept of religion is therefore used as a tool to add value to shamanism and to attach institutional and political weight to its leadership. So far, these discourses seem to have accomplished their goals. For instance, an influential Tuvan administrator and politician I interviewed stressed that shamanism was indeed the "true Tuvan religion."<sup>20</sup> He also referred to Kenin-Lopsan's expertise and to his frequently quoted idea—expressed more than once by the latter and on different occasions—that Buddhism in Tuva was an "imported religion, relatively young from the historical point of view."<sup>21</sup>

To conclude, even if Soviet definitions of shamanism as a "religion" are arguable from both an academic point of view and a lay perspective, they gave resources to post-Soviet shamanic leaders and prepared the ground for an understanding of shamanism as a religion/confession in the Tuvan law of 1995. As a result, academic concepts and, later, categories of legal practice ("traditional religion/confession," "religious organization") defined the position of shamanism in the public sphere but also shaped it internally, building its hierarchy and creating a synergy between shamanic leaders and authorities. In the next section we will see how this synergy continues to develop and to "restate" shamanism.

### THE "VERTICAL OF SHAMANIC POWER"

Since 1993, the field of Tuvan shamanism has been dominated by Mongush Kenin-Lopsan, founder of *Düggür* and president for life of all Tuvan shamans. Even though shamanic religious organizations were formally independent and managed each by its own director, Kenin-Lopsan exerted a strong authority over the network of

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Vladimir Bagaj-ool, Kyzyl, August 19, 2003 (political expert and, at the time of the interview, advisor on national issues for the Tuvan government).

<sup>21</sup> I quote here my own interview with Kenin-Lopsan, Kyzyl, July 26, 2003.

societies. Those who opposed this network tended to be marginalized, while others who had Kenin-Lopsan's support enjoyed better access to local customers and tourists.

However, starting approximately from 2004, another figure has risen in prominence in the Tuvan shamanic scene: Kara-ool Dopchun-ool, founder and director of the society Adyg Èëren (Bear Spirit). His growing legitimacy came from different sources. He started his path in shamanism under Kenin-Lopsan's patronage in the middle of the 1990s. Kenin-Lopsan granted Kara-ool Dopchun-ool the first title of the Great Shaman (Tuvan: *Ulug kham*) and appointed him director of of Dügür in 1999. However, one year later they cut ties for some unclear reason, and Kara-ool was fired from his directorship. In spite of his isolation, Kara-ool continued without Kenin-Lopsan's approval. He founded his own society in 2001 and in a few years managed to considerably improve its position. From a marginal group of shamans who waited for their clients in a small decaying house in a Kyzyl suburb, by 2004 Adyg Èëren had become one of the biggest shamanic societies in Tuva. In particular, it managed to move into a bigger and more central house thanks to the useful connections that Kara-ool Dopchun-ool had established with the Kyzyl town council. In a few years, Kara-ool has managed to accumulate his own symbolic and social capital, to build his authority, to develop his own network, and to establish contacts with important partners from other milieus. He also eventually restored his relationship with Kenin-Lopsan but on a more equal footing.

Yet Kara-ool had even bigger ambitions, and the evolving situation in Tuvan politics gave him hope that he would be able to fulfill them. In 2007 the Russian President Vladimir Putin "suggested" the candidature of Sholban Kara-ool as the new chairman of the government of Tuva, which was approved by the Tuvan parliament. This change of leadership also meant a change of leading political factions. These factions (sometimes inaccurately referred to as "political clans" in Tuva) are groups of influence with strong roots in extended family ties, in identities based on actual or imagined genealogical links,<sup>22</sup> but also in broader regional identities (Russian: *zemliachestva*). This factionalism was an important feature of Tuvan administration during Soviet times and dates further back to Manchu feudal governance (Lamazhaa 2008:230–277). Even if Tuvan leaders deny it, the "clans" are still there in post-Soviet times (272–273). In such a system, a change in the top leader leads to subsequent changes at all other levels of political authority, from the top (government of Tuva) to the bottom (local administration in villages) and from Kyzyl to the countryside. New officials are recruited from the loyal factions; they are the top leader's allies and sometimes even relatives. In other terms, Tuvan local politics is still based on a logic of regional and family alliances. This logic turns out to be compatible with the model of centralized and "verticalized" integration in the Russian Federation, in which loyalty to power is an important key to success.

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<sup>22</sup> These genealogical groupings, also called "clans," are nowadays more imagined than actual. They are supposed to be connected through extended patrilineal links. They often (but not systematically) bring together people with the same family names: the Saltchak, the Tumat, the Irgit, and so on.

Luckily for the Adyg Ééren society, Kara-ool Dopchun-ool (the shaman) and Sholban Kara-ool (the chairman of the government) are both natives of Ulug-Khem, one of the provinces of central Tuva. While they have most likely known each other personally for a long time, their common regional origin is enough to put them in the same network of relatives and acquaintances. Kara-ool Dopchun-ool, in any case, does not hide his ties with the chairman's faction, using this information rhetorically to stress his own weight and to inflate his social capital.

This has led to Kara-ool's attempt to take control of the entire shamanic network with the aim of reinforcing its degree of centralization. The following episode reveals the influence of political discourse on shamanism and, at the same time, the logic of the reproduction of hierarchy in its social organization. In 2009, Kara-ool Dopchun-ool managed to get himself elected supreme shaman of Tuva. He organized this election himself despite Kenin-Lopsan's (who still was president for life of all Tuvan shamans) disapproval. During the election, Kara-ool tried to gain the trust of other shamanic societies by giving their directors honorific titles of his own invention (like the "great traditional shaman"). These titles were supposed to have a symbolic value in the new hierarchical organization he was attempting to impose over Kenin-Lopsan's already existing network. From this point of view, Kara-ool's project reproduced hierarchical distinctions already established in the 1990s in Dūnggūr and in other societies under Kenin-Lopsan's control, perpetuating the practice of distributing certificates and titles. But Kara-ool also appointed several shamans to be his "representatives" in different provinces of Tuva, naming them the supreme shaman of Tozhu province, of Ulug-Khem province, and so on. This system of local representatives went much further than Kenin-Lopsan's shamanic network's geographical spread. It was intended to replicate the administrative divisions of the Republic of Tuva and its model of governance, where the political center appoints its subordinates to insure their loyalty rather than letting them be elected.

After this "election," Kara-ool attempted to transform his new symbolic status of supreme shaman of Tuva into a lever of power that would concern all Tuvan shamans. For instance, he tried to create a new all-encompassing organization that he intended to call Centralized Administration of the Shamanic Societies (Russian: *Tsentralizovannoe upravlenie shamanskimi obshchestvami*). He planned, of course, to become the director of this organization and tried in the meantime to convince all the directors of the societies in Kyzyl and in the provinces to join him.

I witnessed one of these encounters in the society Ush-Möörük (Three Mountains Summit) in Ulug-Khem province.<sup>23</sup> In a very electoral manner, Kara-ool explained to the society's members that his project of a new centralized organization would provide several practical advantages, especially for small organizations of shamans, such as the Ush-Möörük: First, it would allow the directors of the societies to obtain support from the local administration in a more simple way. Second, it would improve the representations of shamans in public space and enhance the position of shamanism compared to Buddhism, which was, according to Kara-ool, unfairly favored

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<sup>23</sup> Field notes and video data, Shagaan-Aryg village, July 23, 2009.

under the previous chairman's administration. Finally (and this was supposed to be Kara-ool's trump card), the new centralized organization would give to the directors of the societies (and to Kara-ool himself) the power to control the "independent" shamans.

It is important to note that in the discourse used by shamanic leaders to justify the framework of organized societies, "independent" shamans are often defined as "quacks." By doing so, the societies' directors claim to protect their clients from being deceived. This criticism can be explained by the fact that independent shamans, unlike the members of the societies, keep all their fees for themselves. Indeed, from the directors' perspective, independent ritual practice represents a serious loss of income for the entire organized shamanic economy. According to Kara-ool, his centralized organization would provide a solution to this problem: it would be in charge of finding independent shamans in Kyzyl or in remote villages and forcing them to become dues-paying members of a society. In other terms, it would create "vertical integration," which would be the only authority granting shamans legitimacy and which would control the shamanic economy in a more restrictive way.

Consider, for example, two fragments of Kara-ool's speech:

Yesterday President Medvedev conversed in Moscow with several priests. They decided together to boost traditional confessions. And we shamans, we are indeed a traditional confession! You, shamans, will keep working as usual. What will be better? Your working conditions. You will receive more clients. People now support shamanism. Before they were afraid, because we were oppressed during all these years of Oorzhak's rule [the previous chairman of the government], while the lamas were well supported. This was unfair! . . . And now [under the government of Sholban Kara-ool] we are again on an equal footing!<sup>24</sup>

Kara-ool introduced into his speech two key elements mentioned previously. First, he reminded the directors of shamanic societies of the practical advantages of belonging to a "traditional confession" and of acting as legitimate collective partners of the authorities. Second, by referring to the key figures of the federal Russian state representing the vertical axis of political power in Russia from the federal to the local level, he metaphorically suggested his own closeness to those who make important decisions concerning the whole Tuvan shamanic network.

To fully understand the meaning of this discourse, it is important to stress that it is used here as a tool to negotiate Kara-ool's future power. The Centralized Administration of the Shamanic Societies is a project that has yet to be completed. Though Kara-ool is a very efficient director of his own society Adyg Éeren and holds the symbolic title of supreme shaman of Tuva, his authority does not extend to the whole shamanic network. It still has to be built by convincing as many shamans as possible to cofound the Centralized Administration and to participate in it. He is reinforcing his power within the shamanic network through a discourse that refers to

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<sup>24</sup> Video data, Kara-ool Dopchun-ool meeting Ush-Möörük society's shamans in Shagaan-Aryg village, July 23, 2009.

other types of authority (state power) and to the "vertical" logic of contemporary Russian governance.

Despite all these efforts, in 2009 Kara-ool's attempt to centralize the entire shamanic network failed. The directors of the societies, afraid of losing their relative autonomy, preferred to rely on Kenin-Lopsan's authority in order to keep the status quo, asking him to arbitrate this delicate situation. Yet, it seems only a matter of time before Kara-ool Dopchun-ool succeeds in placing the shamanic societies of Tuva under his firmer hierarchical control. His ambition is to eventually take the position of Kenin-Lopsan and to reinforce the "verticalization" of shamanism and its ties with political power.

## CONCLUSION

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, incompatibility with the state does not appear to me to be an intrinsic quality of shamanism. If many of its historical forms, as is the case of Tuvan and, more generally, of Siberian shamanisms in the past, had little interaction with elders and/or feudal governors, there are other situations when shamanism and the state can develop closer links and even some forms of reciprocal "instrumentalization." Following the perspective developed by Humphrey (1994) on this issue, I have argued that post-Soviet Tuvan shamanism has produced a particular synergy in its interaction with political power. This interaction includes the interplay of strategic and tactical interests between political authority and shamanic leaders and allows the latter to successfully adapt to the current political and legal context.

This adaptation has two interconnected aspects: the first concerns social organization, and the second concerns discourse and representations.

Since the early 1990s, Tuvan shamanism has taken the form of "religious organizations," a particular institutional frame that had been initially used in the USSR to control the "great" religions. It persisted after the collapse of the USSR and provided believers with access to some practical advantages, especially when the concerned religious organizations belonged to "traditional confessions" as it was the case for Tuvan shamanism from 1995 onwards. Indeed, the shamans who created the first shamanic religious organizations obtained material and financial support from post-Soviet authorities. But the form of religious organizations of shamans ("shamanic societies") has not been simply an inert shell. It shaped the internal hierarchies of shamans and, notably, allowed the directors of these societies to monopolize useful contacts with external networks, both locally and internationally, leading to the reproduction and reinforcement of shamanic leaders' authority over their networks.

Adaptation to this favorable new relationship with the state manifests through discourses developed by the leaders of the shamanic revival, such as the ethnographer and President for Life of all Tuvan Shamans Mongush Kenin-Lopsan and the director of Adyg Èeren society Kara-ool Dopchun-ool, as well as other societies' directors. This small but influential "shamanic elite" knows the advantages of good connections

with political partners who support shamanism as one of the “traditional confessions” embodying Tuvan cultural distinctiveness. Their discourses valorizing partnership with the authorities can be understood, according to terms proposed by Verdery (1996), as a form of “restatizing” tendency. Certainly, the fact that shamanism is moving closer to the state surprises many Tuvans since this proximity never existed in the past. But nobody seriously criticizes this relationship: on the contrary, the post-Soviet state is perceived positively as an authority that has the power to protect shamanism and to enhance its role.

The leaders of the revival introduce into contemporary shamanic language legal and political categories that were produced in other times, for other religious movements, or within other social fields, like politics. Yet, this creative *bricolage* and the integration of alien categories and concepts into contemporary shamanic discourse have turned out to be compatible with Tuvan shamanism. They did not blend into it, but were rather superimposed upon it. As a result, shamanic leaders project ideas of efficient centralized and “verticalized” governance on ritual practices that remain mostly private, decentralized, antidogmatic, and relatively autonomous from any external authority besides the shaman himself.

Discourse that brings shamanism closer to the state does not have only pragmatic uses, such as obtaining aids and support. Insofar as it is now shared by more and more individuals (shamanic leaders, ordinary shamans, and laymen), it also shapes the new public dimension of shamanism. It lays the foundations for an emerging collective identity of shamans as a kind of new professional corporation whose members have more need now than in the past to interact with each other and with the political authorities. The use of political and legal discourses certainly does not affect all levels of shamanism as a complex, multilayered phenomenon. But it does allow shamanic leaders to carve a legitimate space for themselves and their organizations.

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## «ВЕРТИКАЛЬ ШАМАНСКОЙ ВЛАСТИ»: ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОГО ДИСКУРСА В ПОСТСОВЕТСКОМ ТУВИНСКОМ ШАМАНИЗМЕ

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Эта статья представляет собой анализ использования политического дискурса в создании и развитии институциональной структуры религиозных организаций шаманов в постсоветской Туве (Тыве). Многие аспекты социальной организации сегодняшнего шаманизма сформированы под влиянием понятий законодательного, академического и политического языка, который вырабатывался в рамках советской, а затем постсоветской модели централизованного государственного управления.

С начала 1990-х годов заимствование исторически чуждых для шаманизма концепций и категорий юридической практики способствует поддержанию диалога между лидерами шаманских организаций и властями и обеспечивает шаманам заметное место в публичном пространстве республики. Шаманизм сегодня оказывается вполне совместим с государством. Однако заимствования изменяют социальную организацию шаманской практики, которая сегодня, в отличие от XIX и XX веков, вписана в сложные иерархические и экономические отношения внутри «поля» шаманизма.

**Ключевые слова:** шаманизм; государство; религия и политика; возрождение религий; Тува (Тыва); Сибирь; постсоциализм; постсоветские трансформации; бриколаж