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**FEMALE CULT IN THE WORLD MODEL OF THE YOUTH AMUSEMENT “ZOOHOY NAADAN”  
AMONG BURYATS OF CISBAIKALIA**

**Dr. Darima A. Nikolaeva**

East-Siberian State Institute of Culture (VSGIK), Russian Federation

ORCID 0000-0001-8414-1270

darimn@rambler.ru

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**Abstract**

The aim of the study is to identify the female cult in the world model of the youth amusement, not only in a theoretical sense, but also in an interdisciplinary context. The problem of studying the integrity of ideas and actions seems to be relevant in the process of studying various aspects of the surrounding world conceptual comprehension. The empirical methods were used to conduct the study. Basing on them, an analysis of the interviews was made. The interviews were realized with three informants in the Alarsky district and six informants in the Nukutsky district of the Irkutsk region, aged from 80 to 90. Desk methods were also used (analysis, synthesis, interpretation). As a result of the study, it was revealed that only elderly, prosperous women, having progeny without loss, healthy, financially secure, were the organizers of youth amusement between the spouses. Therefore, during the fun of young people, they tracked potential brides and grooms, marking them with sacred food. In addition, these women were also organizers of ritual prayers and sacrifices to the spirits of nature, creating an archaic model of the world based on the mother cult in different constants: space, time, folklore, society. Thus, with the example of the youth amusement and the use of modern research methods we revealed the amazing, almost forgotten world of ancient people, who mastered and explained the laws of the Universe through the cult of the mother-progenitor.

**Keywords**

World model – Female cult – Amusement – Mystery – Initiation rite

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DR. DARIMA A. NIKOLAEVA



## Introduction

### Relevance of the problem

The youth amusement “Zoohey naadan” (“Sour cream evening/ game”) was preserved only among a small part of the Buryats of the Cisbaikal region until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All residents of the settlement (“young and old”) and young people from the neighboring village took part in this original game. However, its peculiarity is that the most significant and active participants were elderly people, prosperous women, having no loss of progeny, healthy, financially secure, as well as young people. The rest were present only as guests of honor (old people, old women, men) and assistants-observers (the rest of the village).

As we can see, in this almost forgotten evening rite, we can trace the mother cult, preserved from archaic times. The study of this phenomena in the structure of the world model (hereinafter WM) is of great interest, since it allows us to define it, firstly, as complex multi-level system in the formation of WM, secondly, as a cultural identity preserved from the distant past, thirdly, it allows us to distribute information from information mediums (80-90 years old people). Unfortunately, only five of the nine informants, who took part in the game, have survived to date.

The aim of the study is to identify the female cult in the world model of the youth amusement, not only in a theoretical sense, but generally, in an interdisciplinary context. The problem of studying the integrity of worldview and actions seems to be relevant in the process of studying various aspects of conceptual comprehension of the surrounding world.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks were expected to be solved:

- consider youth amusement through the prism of the female/ mother cult;
- determine the place and role of older women in the formation of the world model in naadan, which has preserved the archaic traces of the youth initiation rite;
- analyze the main components of the world model (spatial, temporal, social, linguistic) and identify how the female cult is constructed;
- develop the model of the female cult functioning in the formation of the world model for the initiation ceremony in the traditional society life system.

Expeditionary empirical methods were applied in the study, resulting in a survey for 3 informants of the Alarsky district and 6 informants of the Nukutsky district of the Irkutsk region aged from 80 to 90, who remembered how they played games in the 40-50s of the XX<sup>th</sup> century. Their adolescence and youth coincided with the difficult years of the Great Patriotic War. Nevertheless, this game was so traditional that the chairman of the collective farm, with the risk for himself, issued some sour cream and flour so that residents (women, girls and teenagers) could carry out this amusement. After the war, the game gradually faded away. It has ceased to perform the main function (“acquaintance of young people”). As the poet N. Damdinov wrote, “... only three crippled men returned home from the war, under the rivers of tears”. Their memories are invaluable sources for studying this ancient ritual.

We also used modern desk methods of humanitarian research (analysis, synthesis, interpretation), representing various principles, approaches and methods in relation to the “women’s question”.

“Zoohey naadan” was described in some detail by the researchers of the traditional culture of the Buryats, like M.N. Khangalov, S.P. Baldaev, I.E. Tugutov, R.P. Sydenova, I.B. Batueva, D.A. Nikolaeva, who considered it mainly in the context of an amusement for young people (“after hard working days, they arranged a game”) and an initiation ceremony.

In the Buryat studies, there is practically no information about the mother cult in rituals and ceremonies, or about the world model of the rituals and ceremonies. Numerous works of T. Zhamtsarano, V. Kopylov, D. Kornakov, K.N. Namsaraev, D. Talko-Grintsevich, K. Khadahane, M.N. Khangalov, S.Y. Neklyudov, N.N. Nikolaeva, G.T. Tsybikov, K.V. Vyatkina, V.P. Girchenko, D.D. Dobriansky, E.M. Zalkind, B.E. Petri, A.P. Shchapov, A.A. Kharaev et al., have a characteristic feature of both historical and ethnographic research with a pronounced desire to give an objective picture of the research subject in accordance with the thesis of N.I. Kostomarov about the need “not to admire the nationality, but to know, to understand it”. Thanks to this principle, a fairly complete general ethnographic characteristic of the indigenous ethnic groups of Russia was given. In their works, women's problems were considered through the prism of clan and family-marriage relations. By describing such elements of traditional culture as kalym, etiquette, religious prohibitions, etc., the position of women was confirmed as “humiliating, difficult and disenfranchised” due to the economic backwardness of the population living according to the laws of natural economy and patriarchy.

In the studies of S.P. Baldaeva, K.D. Basaeva, G.R. Galdanova the position of women in different local-territorial traditions of the Buryat family was analyzed. At the same time, they noted the dual nature of the women position in the family and society and revealed the surviving echoes of matrilocal relationships. In this regard, it is necessary to say about the monograph by L.Y. Dondokova, “The status of women in traditional Buryat society (second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries)”, in which the author examines the social and legal status of women in traditional society and the influence of religious beliefs on her position. In our study, the works of several authors (A.A. Bartanov, R.V. Grebenkin, F.A. Kudryavtsev, N.V. Olzoev) were used as a conceptual basis. They studied gender problems in a comparative aspect, the relation between the behavior standards and the cultural norms in traditional culture, as well as the spatial characteristics of the material culture elements.

Studies representing various principles, approaches and methods of humanitarian research in relation to the “women’s question” (T.A. Bertagaev, R.Z. Zhalsanova, S.V. Ivanov) reveal gender issues based on the analysis of historical-genetic and cultural-semantic aspects of the traditional culture. For example, E.N. Kuzmina in the monograph “Female Images in the Heroic Epic of the Buryat People” (1980) drew attention to the transformation of the female images from zoomorphic to anthropomorphic characters in the oral folklore of the Buryats from the standpoint of the social attitudes to the formation of ethnos. A more specific continuation of this topic is in the monograph by N.N. Nikolaeva “Negative female images in the heroic epic of the Buryats: function, semantics and poetics” (2008). The monograph by D.V. Tsybikdorzhiev “The origin of ancient Mongolian military cults among the Mongols (based on folklore and ethnographic materials of the Buryats)”<sup>1</sup> is of great interest, where the author analyzed initiation rites with the participation of a woman as both an object and a subject of action.

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<sup>1</sup> D. V. Tsybikdorzhiev, The origin of ancient Mongolian military cults among the Mongols (based on folklore and ethnographic materials of the Buryats) (Ulan-Ude, BNTS SO RAN Publishing House, 2003).

We also considered the studies by A. Baiburin, A. van Gennep, N. Zhukovskaya, E. Leach, M. Moss, M. Sodnompilova, M. Eliade, V. Bolshakov, S. Ikonnikova, M. Kagan, Y. Lotman, A. Mol, P. Florensky, et al., where the problems of defining the essence, multidimensionality and dynamics of the cultural and ritual field were studied.

Recently, a new direction has appeared in the humanities (linguoculturology), which studies the cultural space as a culture existence form in the human mind. We used the experience of this direction, analyzing the folklore texts of youth amusement (prayers, texts of yokhor, blessings). From the methodological point of view, the researches of T.D. Skrynnikova<sup>2</sup> are also of great importance for the study of the female cult in the WM of the symbolic space of Buryat folklore.

We also used the experience of operating with interdisciplinary connections, which revealed deeper aspects in the views of the Buryats on the role, place and status of women. Thus, the dissertations by D.B. Batoeva, M.B. Dagdanova, O.V. Shaglanova reveal cosmological representations based on the material of certain aspects of the female space (childbirth ceremonies, clothing and jewelry). In the monograph “Artistic metal processing of the Cisbaikal Buryats of the 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries”, author discusses the origin, technology and design of the women’s wedding jewelry. The above-mentioned authors actively use anthropological and interpretive methods.

Questions of the form, content, structure and history of the female cult formation through ritual, material, family and marriage aspects are considered in a number of works by D.A. Nikolaeva.

As you can see, despite the abundance of works on the “women's question”, the problems of a comprehensive gender study in the formation of WM in the ritual practice of the Buryats were not considered. In addition, in our study, for the first time, traces of the mother cult in the formation of the WM for the ritual amusement of young people (the initiation rite) are revealed. All this contributes to the disclosure of the archaic layers content of the world perception, expanding the framework of the ethnographic, ethnological, anthropological, ethnocultural and ethnogenetic studies. This also implies the testing of modern research methods, which, in turn, leads to the discovery of new perspectives in the study of ethnocultural heritage.

In this regard, it should be noted that the concept of “world model in the traditional society” has repeatedly been the subject of research in the humanities (ethnology, cultural studies, philosophy, semiotics, etc.) and is well developed. In addition, in the works of different scientists, along with the concept of WM, the following expressions are often unambiguous: picture of the world, vision of the world; picture of the world and mythologeme; a ready-made stencil used by a person in the classification and modeling of the world. In this study, we use the WM formulation, since the work is devoted precisely to the “modeling” of the ethnic picture of the world. At the same time, in its most general form, the concept of “world” is considered as a person and an environment in their interaction.

In general, our work is devoted to the study of gender aspects in traditional culture. Literally “*gender*” is translated from English as “genus” and comes from the Latin “genus”. The idea of the opposition of masculine and feminine principles is found in the myths and

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<sup>2</sup> T. D. Skrynnikova, “Symbolic sacred space of the Buryat folklore”, People and Cultures of Siberia. Interaction as a factor of formation and modernization, num 2 (2003): 59-89.

traditions of all known societies. In our work, these differences have a socio-cultural context, they reflect what is considered to be specific only to a man, or only to a woman in youth amusement. It should be noted that the term “sex” describes biological differences between people, determined by the genetic characteristics of the cells structure, anatomical and physiological characteristics and reproductive functions. However, the term “gender” indicates the social status, cultural and socio-psychological characteristics of the participants in the ritual action.

This study aims to test the following hypotheses:

- the mother cult is the key basis for the organization of WM in youth ritual amusement (vertical-horizontal, social, temporal, verbal, etc.). As a basic concept, the cult defines the system of organization of the ritual space in a structural and inseparable unity.
- the mother cult was the basis for understanding and interaction of the surrounding reality and the life of society;
- the mother cult formed the vital elements of society, its structure and internal content.

The scientific approach in this study is determined, firstly, by work with the carriers of folklore and ethnographic sources, the collection of field expeditionary material, as well as by theoretical and conceptual scientific literature. Only with the simultaneous, interdependent study of ceremonial and ritual practice, beliefs, mythology, folklore we can reconstruct archaic forms of world perception, reflected in youth amusement.

The importance of scientific research on the gender aspects of traditional culture lies in the fact that the use of modern research methods and work with information carriers contribute to a deeper acquaintance with the ethno-cultural heritage and the fundamental elements of ethnic culture. In addition, we reveal not only ethnic specificity, but also the typology of archaic views associated with the mother cult, since the relevance of the analysis of the female cult is provoked by insufficient study of the proposed topic in the regional historiography and ethnography of the peoples of Siberia and Central Asia.

The study of the place and role of women in the life support of traditional society is of great scientific importance. Without an objective assessment of the historical tradition, it is impossible to comprehend and analyze the position of women in our time. The elements of patriarchal relationships that have survived in our country continue to regulate the position of women in the family and society, oriented towards social disadvantage (single mothers, low level of child benefits, male chauvinism, servile functions). In the mass consciousness of the population, gender plays an important role in the choice of identification preferences. It should be noted that the cardinal changes in socio-economic and political conditions that took place in the late 20<sup>th</sup> - early 21<sup>st</sup> century contributed to the formation of new images of women, for example, businesswoman, leader, politician. Nevertheless, in the conditions of modern society, the “women’s question”, including its ethnocultural components, is not solved and requires a solution.

## **Materials and methods**

The essential aspect of the study is based on a number of principles, approaches, methods and methodology:

- the principle of historicism allows us to study the socio-cultural realities of the female cult in the youth amusement “Zoohey naadan”;

- thanks to the principle of objectivity, a comprehensive analysis of the totality of the female cult in the structure-forming elements of WM was carried out;
- the value principle of the ethno-cultural originality of the Buryats in matters of gender was defined in various fields of the humanities;
- the principle of consistency is aimed at identifying the female cult in WM in the aggregate of religious-mythological, material, ritual, social components.

These principles made it possible to identify and analyze the expression features of the ritual impact of women, who acted as the subject of the ceremony, on the youth, which was the object of the ceremony, through the formation of WM.

The following approaches are important for the methodological basis of the study.

An interdisciplinary approach assumes a comprehensive nature of the research (P.G. Bogatyrev, D.S. Likhachev, Y.M. Lotman, et al.). Integration of knowledge in the field of ethnography, ethnology, anthropology, history, cultural studies and semiotics contributes to the identification of the female cult universal character in traditional culture.

The historical-systematic approach makes it possible to establish causal links between the position of women in traditional society and religious, mythological consciousness. This made it possible not only to adequately consider and analyze the folklore and ethnographic materials themselves, but also to propose the conceptual apparatus of modern scientific and humanitarian knowledge in relation to the study of a specific phenomenon - the mother cult in traditional ritual culture. Here the female cult is presented and analyzed not only as a set of signs and symbols that make up a special semiosphere of Buryat ethnicity, but also as a complex interweaving of internal and external factors of religious, worldview, ethnocultural and other properties.

Theoretical and conceptual methods were used in the study of traditional culture.

Therefore, historical-genetic, semantic and interpretive methods (A. van Gennep, L.P. Potapov, E.N. Romanova, T. D. Skrynnikova, M. Hope, K. Estelle, et al.) contributed to the study of the female cult phenomenon, where archaic layers of folk culture are a special area of interest. They are associated with the surviving traces of the female cult, manifest as a set of symbolic actions, reflect mythological universals and stereotypes of mythological behavior. Their reconstruction makes it possible to illuminate previously unknown pages of traditional culture, to determine the specific properties of local ethnic traditions and to solve the problems of the genesis of ethnic culture: “The world outlook of people that developed during the era of the mythopoetic thinking dominance and the picture of the world, created in that era, evolved, changed, but in general, it conserved in some societies before the beginning of the twentieth century” (Traditional worldview..., 1988). Thanks to the synchronous method, a systemic reconstruction of the female cult ethnocultural foundations in the WM of youth ritual amusement became possible.

Using the structural-functional method (P.G. Bogatyrev, S.N. Tolstoy, D. Fraser, M. Eliade, K. Levi-Strauss, etc.) made it possible to analyze the structure of the sacred space and, using factual material, to show its elements, internal interconnections, as well as ways and means of functioning of space as a symbolic field of culture, in which women acted as markers within the established mythical traditions.

Thanks to the historical and typological method (A.K. Bayburin, E.S. Novik, S.A. Tokarev, V.N. Toporov, E.M. Meletinsky, B.N. Putilov and others), it became possible to single out the phenomenon of the female archetype in the traditional worldview. The conceptual ideas of these authors helped to analyze the female cult, which has a communicative, sign and symbolic function in ritual practice.

The general theoretical basis of this study was found in the series of books “Traditional worldview of the Turks of South Siberia”<sup>3</sup> as well as in research by I.I. Osinsky, G.R. Galdanova, et al. The looks of these authors on the concepts of “world model”, “tradition”, “traditional culture” were basic for our study. Their work allowed us to consider the female cult, which includes ideas about nature, space, the person’s place in the world, religious and mythological concepts, ideas about the forms of “right” and “wrong” behavior, the organization of life, etc. Forms of the cult functioning, formed in the early stages of history, performed the whole range of mythological and socio-cultural functions necessary for the reproduction of man and society.

From the scientific methods of empirical research, the methods of expeditionary work were used, like description and interviewing. This provided the purposeful perception of various aspects of the female cult in the WM of youth amusement.

Considering the materials (pre-war, post-war) of this work, it should be noted, as mentioned above, that “game” was a popular amusement among young people almost until the middle of the twentieth century. It referred to the culture of some groups of Buryats in Cisbaikalia, which were less influenced by Buddhism. The main goal of this “naadan” was to introduce the youth of neighboring settlements-ulus, formed according to the family-clan principle. To carry out this game, each ulus acted as hosts or guests. Here young people met, found a mate and discussed with each other the possible future. After that, in the fall, the parents of the young men sent matchmakers, then the traditional cycle of pre-wedding and wedding ceremonies followed.

Naadan was carried out in the summer with the appearance of good succulent grass and an abundant supply of milk after the calving of cows and at the end of all sowing works, especially before haymaking. This amusement lasted every night for a week: “they work in the field during the day, and at night they perform yokhor (the circular dance) on naadan”<sup>4</sup>. According to the informants, they did not get tired, they were young and full of strength and energy.

Usually, a special meadow by the river served as a place for holding the evening. To organize this game, adult women of neighboring (spouses) uluses agreed among themselves about the place and time of its holding. They also chose a responsible woman-manager (a respected, prosperous adult woman, having numerous progenies without loss, financially secure and healthy) from the side of the hosts. She had to supervise the preparation of salamat (porridge made of flour and sour cream) and the organization of naadan. The chief “cook” was also a prosperous and respected woman. Sometimes both roles were performed by one woman, she also got help from prosperous women, but they were younger. Teenagers were also recruited as assistants: “the most nimble person was

<sup>3</sup> E. L. Lvova; I. V. Oktyabrskaya; A. M. Sagalaev & M. S. Usmanova, Traditional worldview of the Turks of South Siberia. Space and time. The material world (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> D. A. Nikolaeva, “Youth games-naadans in the traditional culture of the Buryats”, Ethnic history and ethnic culture, (2009): 63-78.

responsible for the fire, the slowest and calmest one was sent for water, etc”<sup>5</sup>. After that, teenagers (in the Nukutsk region, only girls were assigned for this work) collected sour cream, butter, milk, flour from all over the ulus during the day, and then “everyone already knew, that salamat will be cooked and everybody will dance yokhor”<sup>6</sup>.

Structurally, the game is divided into three parts. The first part of naadan is related to the sunset. In the evening, all the inhabitants of the settlement “from young to old” and young guests from the neighboring ulus gathered in the meadow. Women cooked salamat from the collected sour cream, then, with the finished product, they fed the spirits of fire and the area around, sprinkling the first grains of salamat first into the fire, and then, in the four cardinal directions (in the direction of the sun), then treated all those who were present.

Men had the role of guests of honor, while the elderly people were the objects of universal attention and respect.

The eldest men and women began the amusement part of the game. “To start a dance without the participation of old men and women was considered a sin”<sup>7</sup>. If they sat up for conversations, then some of the youth (a young man from the side of the hosts), closer to midnight, delicately asked them to “open naadan”. Then they stood around a specially made fire, held hands and began the slow part of the yokhor, urging young people to join it.

Ерыт нашаа наадандай  
Наадан манай хушараа  
Хушараһынь шэнэлжэ  
Шэнэ еоһор зугаалая.

Come to our naadan  
Our naadan is old  
An old will be renewed  
Let's have fun, singing  
According to the new customs.

This circular dance began with a slow swaying in place, then, gradually, the performers began to shift from foot to foot, and, finally, move in a circle “following the sun”. Then, young people from the side of the naadan organizers joined them. The old people gradually left the circle of yokhor, and then the festival itself. Before leaving, they dedicated their wishes to the youth (yuruly):

Хүрээгээрээн дүүрээн адуу малтай болооройт,  
Хойморороон дүүрэн аша, гушатай болооройт!

Let your stalls fill with cattle  
Let your houses be filled with grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Their departure served as a signal for the rest of the ulus residents to leave the game.

At naadan, together with the youth, only a woman who led the game and a man from the side of the hosts stayed. The man was an expert on folklore material and all the features of guest etiquette, etc.

<sup>5</sup> D. A. Nikolaeva, “Youth games-naadans in the traditional culture...”

<sup>6</sup> M. Y. Zhornitskaya, “Traditional dances of Western Buryats (Based on materials of an ethnographic expedition to the Ust-Orda national district)”, Siberia: ethnoses and cultures, num 5 (1999): 121-143.

<sup>7</sup> M. N. Khangalov, Collection of writings in 3 volumes. Volume 1 (Ulan-Ude: Republic publ, 2004).

Then the longest part of the evening began. The young hosts started the yokhor circular dance, inviting guests to join the dance. It was faster by the nature of the performance. At the same time, a song dialogue took place between the hosts and guests, in which the main topic was the groom looking for his bride:

Хада дээгүүр харгылха  
Ханлагайн түрүүн хурсайнти.  
Хара хүни харгылха  
Ахайн нюдэни хурсайнти.  
Боори дэгүүр харгылха  
Бугайн туруун хурсайнти.  
Боро хүни харгылха  
Ахайн нюдэни хурсайнти.

Moose hooves are sharp  
For the road in the mountains  
The eyes of the groom  
For the road on a dark night.  
The sharp hooves of the red deer  
For the road in the mountains  
The eyes of the groom  
For the road on a dark night.

The guests sang in response:

Хада дээгүүр ерээбди,  
Хандагайн мүрөөр ерээбди,  
Хара хүни ерээбди,  
Хатархаяа ерээбди.  
Боори дээгүүр ерээбди,  
Бугайн мүрөөр ерээбди  
Боро хүни ерээбди,  
Наадани нурагаар ерээбди.

We walked along the slopes of the  
mountain,  
We came on the moose tracks.  
On a dark night we came  
We came to dance in a round dance.  
We walked along the slopes of the  
mountain,  
On the trail of red deer we came.  
On a dark night we walked -  
We came to dance in a round dance.<sup>8</sup>

After that, a whole song contest called “khuhalgan zugaa” (“release a song”) started, its essence was in the witty improvisation of the performers. “Often the singers touched someone, and that one had to immediately find a witty answer”<sup>9</sup>.

During the breaks, the guests and hosts continued to compete in songs, games, the ability to guess riddles, to pronounce tongue twisters, to know their ancestry, to demonstrate physical endurance when performing yokhor, for wit and knowledge of etiquette. Then the girls performed girlish dances and games. For example, in honor of the White Swan-foremother, they danced the circular dance “Ulmeshelge” on half-fingers. During the “haybar” circular dance, the girls played with or shook their jewels.

The remaining adults were closely watching everything that happened. From time to time they performed the “talgakha” ritual, which consisted in treating the distinguished participants. To do this, the man, by the order of the woman, served the guest (the most vociferous, witty, knowledgeable, etc.) a small glass of butter (produced during the salamat cooking), accompanied by the words “haikhan kholoitoish” (“you have a beautiful voice”).

<sup>8</sup> R. P. Sydenova & I. B. Batueva, “The communal holidays of the Osinsk Buryats”, *Ethnological research*, num 1 (2000): 157-165.

<sup>9</sup> M. Y. Zhornitskaya, “Traditional dances of Western Buryats (Based on materials of an ethnographic expedition to the Ust-Orda national district)”, *Siberia: ethnoses and cultures*, num 5 (1999): 121-143.



The final part of naadan is related to the sunrise. Then games, dances and songs stopped. The hosts saw off the guests, who, before leaving, pronounced good wishes for the prosperity of the ulus and its inhabitants:

Үрхөөрөө үни гаргажа,  
 Үүдээрээ үбгэни оруулжа,  
 Хойто хормойёо адуу малдаа гэшхүүлжэ,  
 Урда хормойёо аша гушантаа гэшхүүлжэ ябаарайт!

Let the hearth not go out and smoke come from the hearth,  
 Let the elders be held in high esteem  
 Let the backyard be trampled by cattle and  
 Children trample the forecourt!

Then, all the participants cleaned up the meadow and went home until the next evening.

## Results

So, considering WM in “Zoohey naadan”, we see that the following oppositions are clearly traced: the structure of horizontal-vertical space (center/ periphery, top/ bottom, sky/ earth, this world/ other world, four cardinal points; temporal structure, both in the binary system and in the ternary (day/ night, summer/ winter; past, present future, etc.); social structure (male/ female, senior/ junior, friend/ foe). This made it possible to trace the mother cult in the universal iconic complexes, with the help of which the society has adapted to the surrounding world in order to carry out the ritual action associated with youth.

Firstly, in the structure of space, the most important category of WM is distinguished - the center of the world, that is to say the point of contact between Heaven and Earth. At naadan, this center is multiplied explicitly and implicitly by different objects. First, there is fire. Thanks to the fire, the following occurs: adult women treating sacred milk food to the spirits of fire, the area and all the people are present and a circular dance is performed around it. There is a qualitative change in things (from raw to boiled (cooking salamat), from liquid to solid (release of butter); changing the social-sacred status through initiation ceremonies with guests, like feeding, blessing, etc. (stranger/ friend).

Secondly, one of the widespread images of the center of the world is the image of the World Mountain. Undoubtedly, the mountains were represented as intermediaries between Heaven and Earth where prayers were held. In the traditional culture of the Buryats, this image is associated with the ancestral mountain, where on its top men performed rituals in honor of their ancestors, but women, as aliens, were strictly prohibited from visiting these places. However, in naadan, the idea of the World (ancestral) mountain is implicitly traced at the verbal level in the text of the yokhor, when the theme of the groom sounds, who in search of the bride descends from the mountain.

An equally common image of the center of the world is the World Tree. In the playful image of the World Tree there was a river, which in the spatial structure also acted as a marker between the Universe and man, being the place of their intersection: “If the tree is more related to the vertical structure of the world, then the river is related to the horizontal one” (Traditional worldview., 1988). We can add to the above mentioned that in the Buryat culture, all women’s rituals were associated with the river (“at the meadow by the river”).

Further, in the structure of space in the horizontal plane, the idea of centering the WM is traced by two coordinates - from left to right (in the direction of the sun/ clockwise) and from front to back (directions of the cardinal points). At naadan, women perform the ritual of feeding first the spirits of fire (to the center), then the spirits of the area, splashing in the four cardinal directions. Moreover, their actions were directed in the circle of the sun. Later, the youth repeat these movements, performing a circular dance around the fire.

And, finally, on naadan WM in the horizontal-vertical plane manifests itself in numerical constants. Three-part structure of yokhor (around the fire/ around the sun) and four-part horizontal structure (cardinal directions).

Considering the temporal structure of the WM space, we see that naadan had, firstly, a clearly pronounced calendar character (the beginning of summer, the appearance of good grass, an abundance of dairy food), and secondly, the time was from evening to morning, that is to say after sunset and before sunrise. Thirdly, here you can trace the cosmogonic fixation, where there are three stages of life: past, present, future and seniors, adults, youth.

In naadan, the social structure shows the preserved genetic connection between the female cult and the initiation rites of young people in order to transfer them to the “adults” group, to verify the possibility of forming a family. This moment confirms the activity of women who gave birth safely, who, as subjects of the rite, performed the priestly functions of initiators: organizing and leading the merrymaking; preparation of ritual dairy food (salamat); propitiation of the deities of fire and nature; the ceremony of feeding the participants of the ritual action with prepared food; highlighting particularly distinguished potential grooms in contrast to passive men.

Old people played a special role and functions in naadan, namely, first, their performance and chanting of the text in a circular dance at a slow pace. The beginning of the circular dance, swaying in place, combined with a wide chant, correspond to a state of static. This is confirmed in the text, where the theme of the renewal of the old world can be heard. Secondly, they say their wishes for the well-being and happiness of society, youth in particular. It should be noted that among the Buryats the concept of “old man” did not mean an old man. This category included men and women who were experts in folklore, traditions, customs, masters in the performance of old songs. They enjoyed special honor, authority and respect from the whole society. Among them, there could be young people. However, in general, the elderly people enjoyed respect and attention.

The youth, as an object of the ceremony, actively demonstrated their readiness for adult life, family and marriage relations through knowledge and performance of folklore material, thus passing tests through competitions. The girls’ dances and games showed potential grooms that they were already associated with the cult of the Mother Swan, who gave birth to 11 Khorin (eastern) clans and 2 western clans (Nebesnaya, 1992), and playing with jewels stimulates female fruitful powers, because it was believed that these jewels were a repository of sulde (souls of children and animals) and ward off evil spirits.

## Discussion

The organization and conduct of the youth “Zoohey naadan” is based on the mother cult, which was the key basis for the formation of the WM in this amusement. As already mentioned above, the main purpose of the ritual game was the initiation of the young people to the marriage, childbirth in order to test them for family and marriage relations. Based on

the analysis of folklore and ethnographic material, this cult was confirmed by the activity of adult women giving birth, who, in the role of priestesses-initiators, marked the main parameters of WM (spatial vertical-horizontal, temporal, verbal, cosmo-social, etc.), which feature is penetrating symbolism.

Undoubtedly, the main categories in WM are space and time, which are universal<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, the spatial vertical-horizontal WM in youth games is not homogeneous and manifests itself in the constants of statics and dynamics. Considering such spatial categories as the center and the periphery, it should be noted that the center is associated with the dynamics, as the highest sacred vertical, connecting the Earth and Heaven. The peculiarity of the “Zoohey naadan” amusement is that it was held at the meadow by the river. Here, in addition to the traditional center (fire), a feature of the ritual action is the horizontal model (river) and the implicit World Mountain (among the Buryats, the mountain clan is male).

These mediators were used by women in a polyfunctional and polysemantic meaning. In the spatial structure of the rite, the female cult is relevant in the relationship of women with the elements (spirits) of nature: earth, water, fire and air. “The value attitude to the rite, in the plane of cultural reality, everyday and magical-ritual behavior, are associated with the idea of the sacred space as a place of contact with supernatural forces”<sup>11</sup>.

So, for the sacred cleansing of the surrounding space in order to conduct ritual games, women, representing the archaic image of the mother-progenitor, prepared female milk food (salamat), sprinkled with prayers the first portion into the fire three times, then, also with prayers on the four cardinal points, treating the spirits of nature. Then they treated the guests and all those who were present. Thus, the surrounding space was assigned by feeding both friends and foes with their female food. In addition, the Buryats performed rituals of asking for sulde (child's soul) for childless spouses by the fire.

Further, it is traditionally considered that the river is the border between the worlds. The Buryats had a special respect for water, it was forbidden to make noise near the water. In order to collect water, they knocked on the surface of the river with the bottom of a ladle and asked permission to take water. If there was a need to take water after sunset, they asked for forgiveness and explained the reason, for example, “a woman gives birth”. If the Buryats drove past the lake Baikal, then they wrapped the horses' hooves with rags (not to disturb the spirit of Baikal). Therefore, during the ritual there was no open appeal to the river, but we noted that the “Zoohey naadan” was performed in a “meadow by the river”, but not at the bank of the river. We can add that water is a feminine element, which contains maternity creative potential: “primeval waters”, “everything was born from water”.

The main purpose of the rite was the assignment of potential grooms/ strangers who came from another world. Among the Buryats, the idea of the World Mountain corresponds to the ancestral mountain, that is to say the center where the ancestors on the male line reside. It is implicitly traced at the verbal level in the text of the yokhor, when sounds the theme of the groom, who descends from the mountain in search of the bride. Thus, here you can trace the path of a stranger (guest-groom), which comes from another world to this “mastered by women” world.

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<sup>10</sup> T. D. Skrynnikova “Symbolic sacred space of the Buryat folklore”, *People and Cultures of Siberia. Interaction as a factor of formation and modernization*, num 2 (2003): 59-89.

<sup>11</sup> S. B. Adonyeva, *Fairy text and traditional culture* (Saint-Petersburg: Saint-Petersburg University publishing, 2000).

It is interesting that in many folklore stories there is a motive when a hero climbs to the top of a mountain in search of a bride. “And then he took out a pipe the size of a husky and a pouch of tobacco the size of a sleeve and lit it while hunting. Between two puffs he looked into the distance and noticed the brilliant palace of the king Agu”. The text also proves the following: “Climbing a high mountain, dismounted from a horse, ... He sees on the other slope three copper palaces, shining with a wondrous light in the evening rays”.

We draw attention to the passivity of men, whose role was only as guests of honor, which indicates that, firstly, there was a period when men were included in the feminine gender/ family. Therefore, in this amusement, they behaved like strangers. As for the man who praised the distinguished potential grooms and treated them with ritual butter, according to D.V. Tsybikdorzhiev, this feeding ceremony is the evidence of the ancient custom of victory over a woman, which manifested in victory during pre-wedding competitions. The researcher believes that pre-wedding tournaments are a phenomenon of the paternal family era, when men are relatives of the bride, and she does not select worthy grooms herself at tournaments<sup>12</sup>. However, at the amusement, a man chose a potential groom by the order of the woman. This moment is a confirmation of the surviving traces of the female cult, when it was not the groom who chose the bride, but on the contrary, the bride's mother chose her future son-in-law. Secondly, the passivity of men against the background of the activity of women could indicate the division of types of economic and labor activities according to gender. For example, in male ancestral rites, the meat of a sacrificial animal was used. Therefore, men did not have to show themselves while cooking food associated with female symbols. It should be noted that the sacrifice to natural patron deities (not ancestors) was brought with milk, where salamat was the embodiment of the female essence. In addition, this type of food was usually used by women during ceremonies associated with the introduction of a stranger into their society (groom, youth of another family) and endowing it with a sacred substance – a fruitful potential. It was believed that the salamat butter, which was treated to a potential groom, stimulated his fruitful powers. For example, among the Yakuts, a shaman used such butter during a ceremony with a childless woman, thereby endowing her with the ability to impregnate<sup>13</sup>.

And, finally, in our opinion, respectful attitude towards strangers – potential grooms, symbolized their statics, in other words, the inviolability of the world and society.

Also, through the concepts of dynamics and statics, the WM and the numerical symbolism of naadan are revealed. For example, the symbolism of the WM dynamics can be traced in the three-part performance of a circular dance (from slow to rapid). The idea can be developed further: old people, adults, youth; past, present, future. Taken together, this corresponds to the stages of the World creation: birth, growth and final design, when the “birth of the sun” occurs in the final part of the evening<sup>14</sup>. Static integrity is determined by the four cardinal points, the elements of nature, seasons, days. And all this is in a sacred relationship with women who model different structures of the WM. In the actional-verbal structure of the WM horizontal plane (circle, square), the actions and prayers of women were

<sup>12</sup> D.V. Tsybikdorzhiev, The origin of ancient Mongolian military cults among the Mongols (based on folklore and ethnographic materials of the Buryats) (Ulan-Ude, BNTS SO RAN Publishing House, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> E. N. Romanova, Yakut holyday “Ысыах”: sources and representations. Simchenko B. (ed). Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Yakut Institute of language, literature and history (Novosibirsk: Nauka: Siberian publishing house, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> D. A. Nikolaeva, “Mythological ideas about motherhood in the traditional culture of the Buryats”, Religious Studies, num 2 (2010): 3-15.

in relation to some center and to the movement of the sun, orientation to the cardinal points (left/ right, front/ back, top/ bottom), marking the vertical-horizontal space with numerical constants, namely, 3-part dynamics along the vertical and 4-part statics along the horizontal.

The female cult in the temporal structure of WM is also determined by the rhythm of nature, the seasons of the year, the time of day and, as a result, the abundance of young juicy grass and calving of cows (dairy food). N.B. Dashieva in her monograph “Calendar in the traditional culture of the Buryats” writes that “the winter-spring economic season is a process of creation ... as a short period of warmth is the result of creation”<sup>15</sup>.

The Buryats performed initiation rituals (youth games, initiation into shamans) at the beginning of summer, before the solstice during the growing season of plants, lengthening the days. This is the time for young people to make sacrifices.

As for the daily time, the Buryats tried to perform most of the actions before sunset: assemble the yurt, complete the construction of the roof of the wooden yurt, complete the wedding celebration, etc. However, “Zoohey naadan” was performed after sunset and finished after sunrise. This is due, firstly, to archaic views on the gender division of the day. So, the day, as the time of static, correlated with the male time (harmony, order, law). Whereas night is the time of dynamics, something feminine (chaos, transformations, magic). This moment is confirmed by the activity of women and the passivity of men (this is not their time). It is at this time, firstly, that a person can be transferred from one status to another (from children to adults; from an ordinary person to a young shaman, etc.). Secondly, a new sun is born. In the space scheme considered by A. Villa Rojas, the points of sunrise and sunset of the daylight during the maximum declination of the sun on the days of the summer and winter solstices (the “corners of the world” scheme) were proposed as an interpretation of the sign from the “formula of rebirth”<sup>16</sup>.

The maternity potential of the social basis is also traced when the current generation turns to the past to ensure a prosperous future. As you can see, “the formula of time has been replaced by a picture of the world”<sup>17</sup>. In general, in the rite, time cannot be considered outside the connection with space, since “Due to the inseparability of time and space, space is absorbed by time: when the dimensions of space become inaccessible for comprehension by spatial measures, time becomes a means of mastering space” (Space ..., 2008).

M. Eliade argues that for most of our ancestors there was no difference between the past and the present: “With the help of rituals, a person could move without any danger from the usual flow of time to the Sacred Time”<sup>18</sup>.

In “Zoohey naadan” all time gradations, like seasons of the year, time of day, etc. endowed with the sacred degree of fertility radiation, fruitfulness and well-being. All this was connected with the idea of birth/ procreation: the period of the appearance of a good grass, a new harvest, an abundance of dairy food, etc. (the earth gives birth); time of the event - night (time of the birth of the sun); and the actual time preceding the formation of “new cells

<sup>15</sup> N. B. Dashieva, *Calendar in the traditional culture of the Buryats* (Moscow, Ulan-Ude, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> E. A. Krasulin, *Sacred organization of the village spaces among the Maya Indians. History and semiotics of Indian cultures in America* (Moscow: Nauka, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> L.G. Skorodumova, *The element of water in the linguistic world model of the Mongols* (Moscow: Altaica, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> M. Eliade, *Sacred and laical* (Moscow: Moscow State University Publishing house, 1994).

of society”; the current generation, through an appeal to spirits (the past) models (generates) its future.

Youth naadan is characterized by a correlation with a cosmogonic ritual, having cosmological and sociogonic orientation. We see that the entire sequence of actions by adult women, as subjects of the ritual, was aimed at their implementation, associated with initiation actions with young people as neophytes (objects of the rite). The youth had to prove that they were the connoisseurs of folklore material, etiquette, wit, initiative, physical endurance, etc. We draw your attention to the fact that the girls had to demonstrate the feminine potential associated with the mother cult. It is reflected in the Ulmeshelge dance in honor of the Mother Swan and the haybar circular dance, which, firstly, was an image of the game of birds and fire, secondly, it scared away evil spirits, thirdly, it stimulated female fruitful forces.

Finally, at the youth evening we can single out the cosmo-social aspect, which can be traced in the WM language, where women, through sacrifices, prayers, appeals to the spirits of fire and nature, create the main structure of the naadan WM. In a conversation with the ethnographer S.B. Bolkhosoev, this topic was supplemented by an interesting thought. He drew attention to the old people and guests leaving naadan, who pronounce the good wishes (“юрөөлы” - yuruly). Here is the idea of receiving grace from another world is manifested. Old people as representatives of a sacred group, belonging to other world and guests (from another world). As we can see, according to traditional ideas, both groups perform the function of blessings on the continuation of life and the receipt of happiness, namely, fire in the hearth, the birth of children and the multiplication of livestock, because according to archaic views, grace (the souls of children, animals, health, well-being, etc.) is received by the worshipers from another world.

As you can see, at the evening, the female cult can be traced in the opposite constants of WM, like dynamics (women, youth) and statics (men, old people), own world (women, men, youth) and a foreign world (guests, old people). At the same time, the social structure is based on the strict differentiation of the traditional society, where each gender and age group perform a certain function, namely, women - organizational, men - stabilization, old people - blessings, youth - passing the initiation rite through demonstrating knowledge of folklore material.

Thus, the mother cult was the basis for the understanding and interaction of the surrounding reality and the life of society, as well as the formation of vital elements of society, its structure and internal content. “Zoohey naadan” was in the nature of the mysteries, where the youth of the spousal clans demonstrated their emotional, moral, physical maturity in front of the older women in the family and was closely interconnected with the rhythm of nature. Thus, the calendar and daily time of the amusement, correlating with the semantic period of youth, the heyday of the fruitful forces of nature, the fertility of Mother Earth and the time of night in aggregate actualized the “beginning / birth / creation” paradigm. Undoubtedly, any ritual action for any ethnos is the most important mechanism for preserving the sacred value meaning. In this respect, the mother cult contains cultural symbols that are very relevant and were perceived by the carriers of traditional cultural information as something natural. The mother cult, highlighted in the youth naadan, can be found in all spheres of folk culture (ceremonies, rituals, folklore, family and marriage relations, etc.). “The use of cultural symbols ... is aimed at contact with the supernatural, and this contact is derived from specific, vital reasons for a person or a collective” An analysis of the role, significance and place of women in the Buryat culture reveals a complex of multifunctional and polysemantic properties.

## Conclusion

Thus, the use of modern methods for studying the folklore and ethnographic material of youth amusement showed that all the key ways of sacred development of the existence environment, the foundations of the WM organization (space, time, gender and age structure of society, as well as all internal content) are based on the mother cult. In the aggregate of the material, spiritual, ritual and other aspects, it is characterized by mythical ideas about a mother-woman. Created in the early period of the Buryat culture development, these views act as a basic category in accordance with mental stereotypes, which requires further research. In addition, reconstruction of the latently preserved archaic mythological ideas about the mother cult, formed in the early culture, makes it possible to identify complex cultural and genetic processes that determined the ethnic originality of the Buryats.

The study of the female cult in ritual practice, expands the understanding of the ethno-cultural heritage, as well as family and social conditions in traditional culture. The interest in the gender aspects of traditional culture allows us to speak not only about the complexity and ambiguity of genetic and cultural processes, which expand our ideas about historical heritage, but contributes to solving problems related to ethnocultural and social changes in modern society. This study plays a certain role, both in the creation of the Buryats history and in preserving the memory of their original culture, which in recent decades has gone into the past. In addition, it makes a significant contribution to the ethnology of the Buryats and fills the existing gap in the anthropological and gender studies of the Buryat traditional culture. The presented work makes it possible to more deeply study and solve the problems associated with the ethnic and cultural genesis of people in the ethnography of the family and social situations.

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