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**THE CULT OF THE HEAVEN IN THE RELIGIOUS TRADITION
OF PEOPLES OF EASTERN AND INNER ASIA**

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Abstract

The article analyzes the religious traditions of the countries of Eastern and Inner Asia, where the cult has gained great popularity. The cult of Heaven is studied and considered from ethnoconfessional, cultural, social, and political aspects. The research presented in this article reveals the autochthonous and rational-pragmatic aspect of this cult, which is characteristic of agricultural China and its settled population, as well as the universal and abstract-philosophical aspect peculiar to nomadic confederations and tribal unions of the Turkic-Mongolian peoples, inhabiting the territory of Inner Asia. The cult of Heaven is studied as its political composite during the Shan-Yin state formation in the territory of China, where it acts as the divine guarantor of the supreme power of the Shang-Yin rulers; the political content of this cult in the state formation of the Great Steppe of Inner Asia is also considered. It is traced how the political content of the Chinese cult of Heaven as a guarantor of supreme authority influences the ideology of the rulers of the first state formations of nomadic tribes in the neighboring region of Inner Asia, which were in closest cultural, political and economic contact with the powerful neighbor.

Keywords

Tengerianism — Traditions — Religious beliefs — Nomadism — Politics — Power

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Introduction

The topicality of the study is determined by the exceptional importance of the research of the Cult of Heaven as the religious tradition of the peoples of Eastern and Inner Asia. This cult is one of the most widespread and influential, it played a huge role in the religious culture, ethno-confessional and socio-cultural traditions. It played the crucial role in the ideology formation of statehood, both in the settled, agricultural China, and the nomadic confederations and tribal unions, the nomadic empires of the Turkic-Mongolian peoples of Inner Asia.

The article is aimed at revealing the features of the formation and development of the cult of Heaven in the religious tradition of Eastern and Inner Asia, identifying the common features and principles of interaction and mutual influence of religious beliefs of the peoples inhabiting this region.

The leading approach to the study was a systematic and integrated approach based on the method of comparative analysis.

The article reveals the functional features and content of this cult in Eastern Asia - China and the religions of the peoples of Inner Asia; their common features and differences are revealed; the autochthonous nature of this cult in Eastern Asia and its universalism, which reflects the dynamics of the culture of the peoples of Inner Asia, is shown; the interaction of the cultures is revealed as well as the influence of the political content of the China's cult of Heaven on the formation of the ideology of states in the Great Steppe is represented. The materials and conclusions of the article can be useful for further study of the religious traditions of the peoples of Eastern and Inner Asia in terms of their interaction and mutual influence.

Discussion

Beliefs of Heaven in China date back to the most ancient period of its history. They are recorded in the early written texts relating to the first millennium BC. In later texts, they are used in cosmological and mythological stories, where these beliefs constitute a necessary component.

The most popular story in these stories is the myth of Pan-gu (盘古), recorded in the 3 BC in the work of Xu Zheng "San wu li ji" (三五历记), meaning "Historical records of the three [rulers] and five [emperors]", although it arose long before that. The myth says that the world was in a state of chaos, and Heaven and Earth looked like a chicken egg. Pan-gu was born in that chaos. 18,000 years later the egg connecting Heaven and Earth separated them from each other and got divided into two parts: dark, blurred - yin (阴) and light, pure - yang (阳) (Yuan Ke)¹. The formation of the cult of Heaven as a deity begins in the Neolithic period of the Chinese history and is associated with the formation of animistic beliefs of the ancient Chinese inhabiting the basin of the Yellow River. The first settlements of the Chinese, according to the famous Chinese scientist Yuan Ke, were characterized by scarce natural resources, which forced the inhabitants to cultivate the land very early; they "were busy with mostly practical activities, and did not speculate on the mythical"².

¹ Myths of Ancient China. Beijing: 1960.

² Yuan Ke, Myths of ancient China (Beijing: 1957).

Therefore, early religious beliefs were directly related to the practical needs of the Chinese. Practicality and rationalism of the ancient Chinese caused their purely pragmatic attitude to beliefs as an additional means of achieving a good harvest. The agricultural orientation of economic activity of the ancient Chinese caused the formation of the cults of Heaven (天崇拜), Sun (太阳崇拜) and Earth (土崇拜), which were directly related to the results of their practical activities - agriculture. The beliefs were reflected in ancient Chinese myths, where all three cults were presented in a close relation, which was the result of the same pragmatic approach to these cults, since the Sun, Earth and Heaven affected their economic activities equally. The connection between the cult of the Earth and Heaven was stipulated by the Chinese belief about fertility and reproduction. The Earth was personified as the female principle (妇女崇拜).

The Earth was called the Mother Earth (地母). Fertility and reproduction presupposed the marriage of the Earth as a deity with another deity, Heaven, which represented the cult of the masculine principle (男根崇拜). The cults of Heaven and Earth in a mythological line are gradually transformed and further personified (see: Li Qiao, 中国民间住伸 (Zhongguo minjian zhu shen, Chinese Folk Deities.)³. It is also worth noting that the personified divine power of Heaven, as well as of the Sun and the Earth, continued to be strictly limited by the practical needs of the economic activities of the ancient Chinese. However, further development of the social infrastructure of the ancient society required the improvement of the principles of social regulation, which stipulated the need of the cults with regulatory functions. Such functions to a greater extent were eventually attributed to the totem gods. (On the totem deities of China, see Wang Xiaodun, Yuan shi xinyang zhongguo gu shen 原始信仰 中国古神⁴. In its turn, the consolidation of the role of social regulation caused the complexity of the governance structure, which required better management of social processes and accrescency of power. The power during that period was concentrated in the hands of the tribal leader, who gradually formed and developed the management structure. Accrescency of power is accompanied with the processes of its sacralization, which directly leads to a cult of power. The cult of power is supplemented with a religious cult. A totem deity becomes this cult, while animistic cults still remain within the practical needs of the economic activities of the society. They remain even during the formation of a proto-state headed by the ruling Shan-Yin dynasty, which ideologically exercises and maintains its power by appealing to its totem ancestor Shang di (上帝), whose cult gradually has begun to rise above all other deities.

Shan di was considered the ancestor of the Shan-Yin, and therefore the rulers of Shan-Yin had to prove their special status as the closest relative of this deity, their direct descendants. Such close kinship gave the right to rule over all the people and control all the members of the Shan-Yin society on behalf of their divine ancestor. The totem functions of Shan-di as the ancestor of the Shan rulers gradually acquired ideological orientation. His main role was the ideological protection of the Shan rulers' right to have power. Since the Shan wangs are the direct descendants of the Shan-di, any encroachment on their right to rule can be exposed to divine punishment. Direct kinship with the supreme deity placed the Shan rulers and their entourage on the highest level in the political and social hierarchy.

As a result, under the conditions of the state formation the main function of Shan-di was the function of ideological protection of the position of the Shan-Yin dynasty as rulers

³ Li Qiao, Chinese folk deities (Beijing: 1997), 187-193.

⁴ Wang Xiaodun, Early beliefs and ancient deities of China (Shanghai: 1989).

of the country, justification of the legitimacy of their power, and therefore the Shan-di continued to be the totem deity of the Shan-Yin people. The totem nature of this cult was also a convenient means of exercising the right to inherit power - an essential component of the statehood formation. Hereditary power presupposed the presence of power in the hands of a single ruler - the leader. A single ruler must rely on the authority of the supreme deity, and Shan-di was declared to be such a deity. Shan-di, therefore, acted as the supreme deity, standing over all other deities of Ancient China, the number of which, as is known, was quite sufficient at the time of the formation of the proto-state of Shan-Yin. The Heaven in this pantheon of deities continued to serve for the practical needs of the Chinese and was viewed in close connection with the cults of the Sun and the Earth. Meanwhile, with the formation of a proto-state, the cult of the Earth began to be attributed with ideological functions and was not seen only as a source of fertility, but also as a unified territory for the Shan-Yin people, a reflection of the territorial community and the integrity of Shang-Yin. Shan-di continued to remain the supreme deity of the Chinese until the overthrow of the Shang-Yin dynasty of the Zhou and Zhou dynasty establishment (around 1046 - 221 BC). The initial period of their ruling is between 1046 - 771 years BC, and it is marked in the history as the period of Western Zhou (Zhou). This governing period is characterized as the beginning of the process of administrative structures formation, which was being established on the analogy with the Shan-Yin one. The main objective of the Zhou rulers was to unite the peoples from the subordinate areas and maintain the central structures of power. The ownership structure and hierarchical model of the highest nobility subordination were formed during this period; the power of the ruler – the wang - was still based on his sacral origin⁵.

At first, accrescency of power was carried out at the point of the sword. «The predominant military power of the Western Chou rulers is generally recognized by scholars familiar with the new materials», Herlee G. Creel notes in his work "The Origins of Statecraft in China. Volume one. The Western Chou Empire"⁶. At the same time, the scientist admits that reliance on military force should "have important consequences, which have so far been researched insufficiently. An extremely important point is finance. The maintenance of a professional army on a vast territory for a long time requires considerable material costs. It carries important implications that have as yet been little explored. A very significant one is financial. The maintenance of a competent military establishment over a large territory for a long period of time requires economic resources. Far-flung garrisons could hardly especially in a time when agricultural techniques were not greatly advanced-merely "live off the country"; especially they could not do so without engendering a degree of resentment of which there seems to be no indication in the sources, says Herlee G. Creel in his work "The Origins of Statecraft in China"⁷. In this case, the authority of the power had to rely not only on the military power, but also the ideological foundation. In other words, in order to maintain the power, it was necessary to have an ideological basis for the right of the Zhou to have this power. Only divine authority could become such a foundation in the conditions of that time. Therefore, after adopting the Shan-Yin governing model, the Zhou also adopt the principles of their religious beliefs. As S. Kuchera observes, "after the Zhou took possession of China, there was a mixture of Shan-Yin and Zhou cultures, which also reflected in the field of religious ideas and beliefs"⁸

⁵ History of China from ancient times to the beginning of the 21st century (Moscow: Nauka, 2016).

⁶ Herlee G. Creel, The Origins of Statecraft in China. Volume one. The Western Chou Empire (Chicago, London: The university of Chicago press, 1970).

⁷ Herlee G. Creel, The Origins of Statecraft in China. Volume one. The Western Chou Empire (Chicago, London: The university of Chicago press, 1970).

⁸ S. Kuchera, Tian. Spiritual Culture of China (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 2007).

A single supreme deity like Shan-di was to become the ideological guarantor of the power for the Zhou. But, as is well known, the Zhou people could not appeal to the authority of the Shan-di, because his patronage extended exclusively to the Shan-Yin people, and he could only protect the power of his closest descendants. On the other hand, the Zhou people could not appeal to the authority of their own totem deity, their ancestral ancestor Lord of Millet Grains (后稷, Hou Ji), who is mentioned in the Zhou document “Shi jing”⁹

The totem deity of the Zhou, Hou Ji (后稷), could not become the supreme deity for the conquered tribes, including the Shan-Yin proto-state, since its authority extended exclusively to the Zhou. Therefore, to ideologically strengthen their power and ensure its legitimacy, they were forced to appeal to a more universal deity. Heaven was such a universal deity. There are some factors why Heaven was recognized as the supreme deity in Zhou China. First, as has already been said, the Zhou rulers faced the task of strengthening their power not only with the help of military force, but also by appealing to the supreme deity, as the Shang-Yin rulers did when appealing the authority of the Shang-di.

However, the totem ancestor of the Shan-Yin, Shan-di, could not act as a guarantor of their power. A universal deity was required in the conditions of multiethnicity during the Zhou state formation. The Zhou, before they conquered the Shan Yin in the west of Zhou, bordered on the Sino-Tibetan, united by the name di, and also the Tibetan, who were collectively called qyanami, in the north and northwest - with the Indo-European and, possibly, Altaian¹⁰. They as well as their neighbors worshiped a multitude of deities, among which Heaven was especially distinguished. It can be assumed that the worship of Heaven as a deity was due to the influence of religious traditions of the neighboring peoples such as the Altai, Tibetan, Sino-Tibetan and Indo-European. On the other hand, the god of Heaven was not alien to the Shan-yin. Heaven at the time of Zhou power formation was popular both among the Zhou and the conquered peoples. In other words, it already had the characteristic of universality and stood above ethnic separations. Therefore, it was natural to replace the deity Shan-di with the cult of Heaven, as a presiding deity. Such a replacement was dictated solely by political motives. Taking into account the special significance of the Shan-di cult for Shan-yin rulers, the Zhou people tried to adopt its attributes and use it to establish its own, universal deity, Heaven, which was not associated with totemic obligations and was worshipped not only by the Zhou, but Shan-Yin people and other conquered tribes. As the Shan-Yin rulers declared themselves to be the direct descendants of the Shan-di, and thereby justified their right to power, the Zhou, by announcing their totem deity as the guarantor of their power, declared themselves sons of Heaven - Tian zi (天子), and the whole territory under their control was declared Heavenly - Tian xia (天下). By declaring Heaven as the supreme deity, they treated the Shan Yin deity with due respect. In the scientific literature it is widely discussed the fact that Wu-wang (武王), who defeated the Shan-Yin army, sacrificed to the deity Shan-di in the temple of the Shan-yin ancestors. The fact is remarkable as Wu-wang performed a ritual in honor of Shan-Yin, not of his kinship deity. He did not take advantage of the power as a winner, but gave it to the rightful heir, and only then the power passed on to the Zhou Wang. This was a reflection of the Zhou rulers' desire to impose a legitimate power by providing it with divine significance. The Zhou did not reject the legitimacy of the power of the Shang-Yin rulers, they recognized the fact that it was given to them by the deity of Shan-di, which, in turn, was subject to Heaven. As Kh.G. Krill puts,

⁹ The canon of poems: The great odes, the Shenmin cycle, the people.

¹⁰ History of China from ancient times to the early 21st century (Moscow: Nauka, 2016).

“the Chinese historical tradition claimed that the deity of Shan-di worshiped the deity of Tien (Heaven) from the beginning of the beginning” (Kril H.G. Formation of state power in China. Empire of Western Zhou / Translated from English by R.V. Kotenko, St. Petersburg, 2001. - p. 364). Heaven, thus, was placed above the deity of the Shang-di and it showed mercy to the first rulers of the Shang-Yin. In the Book of verses (Shi jing, 诗经) it is said that Cheng Tang (成汤,), the founder of the Shang Dynasty, received his attributes of power (qiu, 球) from Heaven. Heaven did not only give him these attributes, but also showered him with its grace for his glorious deeds, patronized him and his descendants (诗经, 商 颂, 长发, Shi jing, Shang song, chang fa, Shi Jing, Shin’s hymns, ode Long hair). However, the patronage of Heaven over the Shan-Yin rulers ceased due to the unworthy behavior of the last Shan-Yin rulers. They did not justify the trust of Heaven, their actions did not comply with its command. In Zhou monuments, the evidence of unworthy deeds of the last Shan-Yin rulers is noted. The document “Shan shu” (“Shu jing”, “The Book of History”) writes about Shan Wang Shu’s misbehavior (王 受), who did not respect Heaven, sank in drunkenness and debauchery, violence and tyranny, and consequently was punished by Heaven (书, 周书, 泰誓, 上, Shang shu, Zhou shu, tai shi, Shan Shu, Zhou scriptures, Great Vow, Part 2). It was particularly condemned that the last Shang-yin rulers ceased to pay respect to their ancestors, ceased to perform the ritual of honoring their ancestors. Therefore, robbery, violence, debauchery, self-interest began to flourish. In the ode “Oh, the waving of the widths!” from the “Shi jing” there are Zhou Wen wang’s words (Wen wang, 文王), Wu wang’s father, (武王), who defeated the army of the last ruler of Shang Yin. He addresses to the last ruler of Shan-Yin, and condemns Shan Wang, reminding him of the fate of the Xia dynasty (夏 about 2070 - 1600 BC), which, according to Chinese traditional historiography, was defeated by Heaven command, by Chen Than for the sins of Jie (桀), the last ruler of Xia (Shijing, Daya , Dangzhishen, Dang 诗经, 大雅, 荡 之 什, 荡, Shi jing, Big odes, the Dan cycle, the ode “Waving widths”). In Shan-shu, the words of Wu-Wang (武王) also state that Heaven deprived the mandate of the rulers of Xia, giving the command for Cheng Tang to throw down Xia (商书, 周书, 泰誓 中). This Wu-Wang’s speech was uttered before his march over Shan Yin. He justifies his campaign against Shan Yin, viewing it as the command of Heaven to punish the cruel Shan-yin ruler. In other words, Heaven predetermined the fate of Shu Wang (受 王), as well as the fate of Jie (桀), the last ruler of the Xia dynasty, famous for his cruelty. Thus the Zhou sources recorded the legitimacy of the Zhou dynasty, as it was given by Heaven. By putting Zhou as the supreme deity, the rulers provided themselves with an ideological justification to impose and hand over the power. After conquering the Shang-Yin and other neighboring tribes, the Zhou rulers united a multi-ethnic state formation and established a new dynasty of Zhou, having presented the cult of Heaven as the divine patron of their dynasty. Moreover, the rulers of Zhou declared Heaven as the supreme deity, which gave them power over the conquered. They also put forward the concept of how Heaven granted them with power. This concept is a doctrine of the heavenly mandate (Tien Ming, 天命). The very concept can be interpreted as heavenly predestination. Heaven, according to this cult, hands over its mandate to the ruler, who deserved the right to have this power. The recipient of this mandate becomes the ruler of the Heavenly Empire. The ruler controls the Heavenly Empire according to the will of Heaven, thereby he realizes the Will of Heaven (天意, tian). The Will of Heaven defines all the events of the world, the destiny of people, social and political realities, the principles of the relationship between people inhabiting the Heavenly Empire; between parents and their children; between the ruler and his people. The most important condition for the heavenly will was the obligatory worship of their ancestors. The patronage of Heaven extended not only over the ruling Zhou elite, but also the whole Heavenly Empire; this also concerned punishment. Heaven deprived the rulers of the

mandate to have the right to rule, it also punished ordinary mortals for their unfaithful deeds. Heaven gave people the laws, defined the principles of their relationship, it monitors the moral state of the society, encourages people to follow its commands; the document “Shi Jing” serves as the evidence (Shi jing. 诗经, 大 颂, 荡 之 什, 烝 民, Shi jing, Daya, Dangzhishen, zhengmin, Shi jing, Big odes, cycle Dan, ode “Mass of the people”). People are also punished for their sins (Shi jing, 诗经 大 颂, 荡 之 什, 召 旻 Shi jing, Daya, Dangzhishen, zhaomin,, Shi jing, Big odes, cycle Dan, ode “Sprawling mulberry”). Heaven can influence people by causing natural disasters. However, this influence exerts only in a social and political context. The relation of Heaven to the nature outside the social and political context is not practically mentioned in the Zhou documents. Moreover, in his work “Lun yu”, Confucius - a master of the Zhou monuments - asks: “Does Heaven say? And meanwhile, four seasons change, things are born. Does Heaven speak?” (论语, 阳 货 第 十七, Lun yu, yang huo, Lun yu, Chapter 17, Jan Ho). Here, the philosopher directly points out that Heaven has nothing to do with the fact that the seasons change, and things are born in the nature. This characteristic of Heaven, indicating that Heaven has nothing to do with what is happening in the nature, places the functions of Heaven closer with the functions of Shandi: they do not go beyond the social and political spheres. The system of public administration, established in the Zhou period, based on the authority of Heaven as the guarantor of supreme power, the “heavenly mandate”, laid the solid foundation of China’s political culture, which was further perfected during the Han era. Confucianism, which became the official ideology of Han’s China, formulated the basic principles of government, which formed the core of China’s political culture, where the state power is sacred and serves as a continuation of the Heaven’s creative power. The emperors were declared the sons of Heaven. Later throughout the history of imperial China, up to the Xinhai Revolution of 1911, the state power was understood as a direct continuation of the Heaven’s creative work - the highest sacred value in the Far East¹¹ These principles could not but exert their influence on the political organization of the forming nomadic empires in the neighboring region of Inner Asia, which were in the closest cultural, political and economic contacts with the powerful neighbor. Being an autochthonous phenomenon of each peoples in East Asia and the steppes in the Central (Inner) Asia, it acquires common ideological features during the formation of a polyethnic community within the unified state formation in these regions; there the autochthonous cult of Heaven becomes a universal deity for all polyethnic communities. Obviously, this is a natural process of the cult of Heaven development in the context of the interaction of cultures and religious traditions of neighboring peoples, both agricultural China and steppe, cattle-breeding state formations. However, the specific political accumulation of the content of the cult of Heaven as a guarantor of the supreme power of the rulers of empires undoubtedly possesses China’s influence as a civilization of a higher level of development, with the most perfect example of the political content of the cult of Heaven. However, this influence will occur long after the cult itself is adopted among the nomadic tribes of Central Asia, during the state formations in the Great Steppe. Prior to this period, the cult of Heaven, having an autochthonous character of its origin, received a religious sacralization as Tengarianism in the context of interaction and interference only within the region of Inner Asia as a universal doctrine of the steppe civilizations. Initially, this cult appeared among the nomadic tribes of Central Asia as a system of religious beliefs and ideas associated with the deification and worshiping of the monotheistic Heavenly deity called the Supreme Heaven-Tengri or Heavenly God (Tengri-Kudai); the cult combined functionally and synergistically interrelated syncretic cults of a polytheistic nature, which one

¹¹ A. S. Martynov and E. B. Porshneva, “Teachings and religions in East Asia during the Middle Ages”, Peoples of Asia and Africa num 1 (1986).

way or another, directly or indirectly, were connected with the concept of the Supreme Heaven, or the Father of Heaven (“Heaven-Father”), which was considered central, basic and crucial structural element of this cult system - The Cult of the Mother Earth, the area hosts, Sacred Mountains, totemic ancestors, etc¹². While the development of the Heaven cult in China occurred exclusively autochthonously in the context of its own religious cultural environment, the religious culture of the Mongolian peoples developed as part of the dynamic culture of the Great Steppe with its pronounced nomadic civilization, worldview, belief system that developed a special and specific form of ethnic psychology, nomadic mentality and traditional values. The basic elements of the nomadic civilization still remain as the common cultural heritage among all the Mongolian peoples: signs, symbols, language, values, rules of the nomadic way of life, social norms, social sanctions, mythological and real ideas, behavioral norms, etiquette, customs, traditions, rituals¹³. The historical interaction of numerous ethnic substrata (the Turk, Manchu, Tibetan, and Mongol) and their cultural traditions contributed not only to the enrichment and synthesis, but also evolution, and therefore the development and improvement of the entire religious system of the peoples of Central Asia. The continuity of the most general paradigms of the religious culture of this region and its historical stability were dialectically combined with the processes of its progressive development, where the experience of the previous stages, their achievements were not discarded, but preserved and synthesized into an integral system of religious consciousness and behavior. One of the earliest forms of the religion of the Mongolian peoples (Hamag Mongol), inhabiting the modern areas of Inner Mongolia of China, Mongolia itself and the two regions in the Russian Federation - Buryatia and Kalmykia - is a specific system of beliefs and cults, which is based on the inspiration and deification of objects and phenomena of nature, the belief in magical influence on the surrounding with the help of Heaven and heavenly deities; worshipping of sacred mountains, reservoirs, sacred territories always begin with the worship of the Eternal Blue Heaven¹⁴. This religious system, with the features of earlier forms of religion (magic, totemism, fetishism, etc.), gave the religious system of medieval Mongols a more systematized and institutionalized character. The person or character that carried out many religious and social functions in tribal and tribal collectives played a very important role. In the traditional understanding of the representatives of the metamongolian community, this person or character was a mediator between the world of people and animals with heavenly deities, as well as a specific supreme deity, originally personified as the Eternal Blue Heaven (KhukhaMunkheTengari). This religious system may have common origin with the shamanic traditions of the Mongolian peoples, but it is still too early to assume so. The initial stage of the development of the religious system, later called as “Mongolian shamanism” or “shamanism of the Mongolian peoples”, “Central Asian shamanism”, dates back to historical antiquity - the Paleolithic and the Neolithic periods. At the same time, it is necessary to emphasize that many scholars of the religious culture of the Mongolian peoples tend to interpret this religious phenomenon not as shamanism at all, but as existing “Tangarism” or “Tangrianism” (see the Mongolian – “Tengarian Murgel-Tengarian Zaya”). In our opinion, the word does not sound harmonious in Russian, but still adequately reflects the phenomenon itself.

¹² L. L. Abaeva, Buddhism and the cult of mountains in Buryatia (Moscow: Nauka, 1992).

¹³ L. L. Abaeva, "Mongolian peoples in the vector of adaptation of Buddhist theory and practice", In *Buddhin Madlag Uhaana Hoggild Mongol Magergedin Iulussan huv nemer. Olon Ulsin Erdem shinzhilgeenty Hural* (Itgeluudine emhtgel) (Ulaanbaatar hot: 2015).

¹⁴ L. L. Abaeva, “Religious culture of Mongolian peoples in space and time”, Proceedings of the 10th International Congress of Mongolists Vol: I, Prehistoric and the period of Mongolia's relations with various civilizations (2012).

The academician Shirabyn Bira¹⁵ was the first to mention the phenomenon. The researcher initiated the problem of studying the Tangari cult among the Mongolian peoples at the 29th session of the International Conference on Altaic Studies in 1986 in Tashkent. He emphasized the exceptional importance of studying this problem, which is widely spread among scientists who study “representatives of ancient centers of civilizations of Central and Inner Asia”. The deepest roots of the “Tangrianism” are found in the cosmogonic myths of both Mongolian and Turkic ethnoses - for example, among the modern ethnoses of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan¹⁶. While the early religious ideas of the Chinese about Heaven and Earth had an exclusively pragmatic character and were directly tied to their practical activities, they had an ideological orientation among the nomadic peoples of Central Asia. In the process of their historical development and as a result of cross-and-intercultural relations, the inhabitants of Central Asia formed an identical dual religious-worldview system (“Heaven – Earth”) as a specific form of social self-organization, ordering the “subjective” in consciousness and worldview, on the level of the “objective” nomadic worldview. From the initial cosmic chaos, in their opinion, a certain order emerged, the traditional picture of the world was formed; this form represented the religious-ideological order as well as the associated structure of social and natural life on the basis of this dual organization.

Z. Bat-Otgon, a Mongolian researcher and practitioner of the Tangrian tradition, believes that the traditional set of beliefs and worldview (“su uhaan”) of the Mongolian peoples “arose from the tengari”, i.e. the origin (the author’s “root”) of the knowledge and mentality of the Mongolian peoples arose “with the help or through the mental abilities of the Eternal Heaven”¹⁷. At the same time, the phenomena of Heaven consists of the phenomenon of Earth, its soil, mountains with caves and peaks, vegetation, animals and insects; there is direct communication and interaction between Earth and Heaven, where the phenomenon of Heaven (Tenger) as a blue sphere overhead. Such a complex, according to the author, is a single whole and constitutes a peculiar unified community. The universe, as well as the surrounding world (later - the sansaric world) viewed through the nature of Tangrianism and the perception of the Mongolian peoples, has a conical shape. The traditional Mongolian yurt has the same form, including the latticed walls (khana), the wooden door (khaalga), the pillars (bahan), the poles, with which the upper circle of the yurt (yun) is supported, the circle of the smoke hole (thono) and all other requisites. The nature, as the surrounding world of the Mongolosphere, is also part of the universe and contains a deep meaning. “Everything that existed before humanity appeared - the universe, the earth with its soil, the mountains, the flora and fauna, the sun and the moon, the heavenly bodies, the planets, the sansaric world, the wind, the snow and the rain, the night and the day – all of these represented the nature not only as a material part of the universe, but also was a part of it and the universe itself” (ibid., p. 108). “The laws of the nature and the universe are identical,” the author concludes. It is worth noting that the oldest form of the traditional yurt of the Mongolian peoples was in the form of a cone.

Mongolian ethnographer G. Tserenkhand notes that, according to the results of his field research and materials collected during many years of ethnographic research in different aimaks of the Mongolian Republic, “the best place for a wedding and a home for

¹⁵ Shagdaryn Bira, Mongolian Tangarian Uzel. Mongolian Tengerism. Thuvoer Zohiol, barimt bichgude. Selected papers and Documents (Ulaanbaatar: 2011).

¹⁶ Turgun Almas, Uighurs. Second edition (Moscow: Publishing House MIR, 2008).

¹⁷ Zulaagiin Bat-Otgon, Munkh Tenger ba Shinzhlekh Uhaan. (Ulaanbaatar: 2014).

the young just after the wedding was a conic hatch “Urts”¹⁸ The preference was given to it because Urts was considered a more ancient and traditional dwelling than the yurt, its genetic predecessor. It was believed that to marry children in Urts means to bring happiness to the young in life. This custom was observed not only by the poor, but also by the rich. When characterizing the structure of the universe, the researcher Bat-Otgon uses the Buddhist term “samsaric world” to correlate the walls of the traditional Mongolian yurt to the locus of the moon, uni-with the locus of the galaxy; toono, in her opinion, enters the locus of the Eternal Heaven. When giving an outline of the model of the universe, the relations of the planets, the loci of the sun and the moon, galaxies and mega-galaxies, the existence of a multitude of stars, Bat-Otgon comes to the conclusion that there is no single existing or alone-wandering heavenly phenomena. The accumulation of phenomena in the heaven in the mentality of the Mongolian peoples is associated with the heavenly dwelling (ger). Or, to put it in simpler terms, the star cluster is the smallest dwelling of the whole universe¹⁹. In the process of historical development, this religious phenomenon gradually evolved from lower forms to higher ones under the influence of more developed ethnic and world religions (Tibetan Bon, Iranian Zoroastrianism, Mithraism of Tibetan-speaking groups of the Himalayan and Pre-Himalayan regions, Nestorianism, Buddhism, etc.), acquiring an increasingly complex and systematized character; as a result, it turned into a harmonious highly developed religion, which has almost all components of a developed religious system: its cosmology and mythology, ritual, organizational structure, etc. In our opinion, historically, this religious system of the metaethnic Mongolian community goes back to the ancient religious beliefs of the Mongol and Turkic peoples of Central Asia, later called the Tengrian religion, whereas the classical shamanism of the Evenk and Manchu dates back to the beliefs and cults of the Tungus-Manchu peoples of Central Asia, the Far East and Siberia.

According to some representatives of the Mongolian ethnic community the Eternal Heaven contributes to the progress of the society and their individuals to move forward (i.e. upward). The proverb proves this: “A person must be moved forward (upward), [so that he reaches] to the blue heaven” “Huniyg about tatazh, Hoch tengert hurgumui”. There is also a common belief that there exists a certain substance, called “suns”, which is close in its meaning to the Christian term “soul”: “Amti Buhin Sunstay, Amgyu Buhan enentei” – “All who have a breath have a soul, everyone who does not have a breath has a master”²⁰. Bat-Otgon, for example, believes that almost everything can have “suns”: people, plants, animals, mountains, trees, stones, the sun, the moon, planets, stars, constellations and even some objects with a hard shell (hutu bi). The universe, the nature and even an atom have a “suns”. The scientist does not mention what kind of charged atoms have “suns” - positive (eerieh tseneg) or negative (sorokh tseneg) ones (reference). But if we project this postulate on the humanity, it turns out that people with bad intentions still have a “suns”, and therefore atoms with a negative charge can also possess “suns”. “Suns” from the Mongolian language is not always translated and perceived as a “soul”; it would be more appropriate to identify this term as the “essence”, “true meaning”. The Eternal Heaven, according to Bat-Otgon’s definition, is the supreme and absolute essence in the universe. The scientist gives his interpretation of the cone-shaped hierarchical ladder, where the Eternal Heaven is on the top. The first version of this cone-shaped hierarchy is the following: 1. The Eternal Heaven (Monchtanger); 2. Centers of distant galaxies (busad galaktikijn tov), 3. Stars of distant galaxies (busad galaktikuuyn od); 4. Center of the galaxy (manaj galaktikijn tov) 5. Oduud

¹⁸ G. Tserenkhand, Tserenkhand, G. Mongolchuud: the Ugos-Soel, zanszavshchil (Ulaanbaatar: 2005).

¹⁹ Zulaagiin Bat-Otgon, Munkh Tenger ba Shinzhlekh Uhaan (Ulaanbaatar: 2014).

²⁰ P.C. Natsagdorj, Genghis khana zalligyn tovchon (Ulaanbaatar: 2006).

(zvezdy); 6. The sun (nar); 7. Planets (gariguud); 8. The moon (sar); 9. The core of the Earth (dehlhijn com). The second version of the conic hierarchy: 1. The eternal Heaven (Monkh Tenger); 2.9. blue tangri (Hoch 9 tenger); 3. 99 stellar tengris (Hokh mankhan99 tenger); 4.33 blue tengries Khurmasts (Hokh Khurmast 33 tenger); 5. Stellar Tangris (Odon Tenger); 6. Tangri of the Sun (Narantehngehr); 7. Tengri planets (Garigan Tenger); 8. The tangris of the Moon (Saran Tenger); 9. Deceased substances (Ukhagsdine suns) (Bat Otgon. Monkhtaner bah shinzhlehuhaan - Ulaan Baatar, 2014.- p.24-31). According to the author, these variations of the hierarchical ladder can not only contact each other, but also penetrate into the sansaric world of people. At the same time, unlike world religions, this religious phenomenon was historically somewhat limited by the peculiarities of tribal ethnic communities (the Turkic and Mongolian peoples - the inhabitants of Central Asia). This religious tradition never became a national religion of either Mongolian or Turkic peoples, although in the Mongol empire there were attempts to create a national religion based on the context and structure of the archaic beliefs and cults of this region.

In the Middle Ages and later it covered all spheres of life not only of the Mongolosphere but also of the Turkic world, influencing the formation of the culture, way of life and psychology of ethnic communities, reflecting the nature of their economic activities, their relations with the nature, and the features of social organization - tribal, territorial - community, extraterritorial and other structures. As a result of historical development, the personification of Heaven as the supreme and leading sacred deity of the Mongolian area is transformed regionally and locally into the category of regional and local guardian deities of the region, so the religious system of "Tengrianism" evolved for centuries, adapting not the best forms of religious beliefs and cults of Tungus-Manchurian ethnoses inhabiting adjacent territories of Inner Asia along with Mongolian ethnoses.

It should be emphasized that the mythological consciousness of the Mongolian nomad always connected the nature (macrocosm) and man (microcosm) into one whole, and the image of the mountain always performed very important functions in his consciousness, as it played the role of a mediator between different forces (elements) of the universe - man and nature, heaven and earth, etc. The universe according to the views of ancient and medieval Mongolian peoples consists of 128 538 619 284 000 planets, stars and constellations. All of them, according to the knowledge of physics, are grouped into 3000 galaxies, which in turn are combined into 472 loci (ger). The phenomenon of Tenger, in Bat-Ochir's opinion, who is a physicist by education, consists of two components, which represents a rather complex structure: Ten + Ger (reference). "Tenger" is a locus of stars and constellations according to the law of their location (oddyn gehrt, oddyn oshih huul). "Ten" - is a law of the existence of constellations, which includes the amount, the distance between the heavenly bodies, their location (odny bognoorol, odny gehr, odny galaktik). "Ger" includes a set of stars and constellations, a locus, a galaxy (odny bognoorol, odny gehr, odny galaktik). In the opinion of the famous scientists - Mongols' ethnographer and religious study scholar N.L. Zhukovskaya and Buddhist study scholar V.I. Korneva - the Kalachakra concept of the Vajrayana tradition, which has become quite widespread among the Mongolian peoples, points to the interconnection and interdependence of the universe and man. (Zhukovskaya N.L. Categories and symbols of the traditional culture of the Mongols, Izd-vo Nauka, Moscow, 1988, p.13-14, Kornev V.I. History of World Religions, Moscow, 1999; p.14; p.97; p.183).

Consequently, the cultural and confessional identification of the Mongolian peoples at certain historical moments transforms its traditional structure according to the existing system of ethno-cultural environment, simultaneously reducing and changing the prior

motivations and values, gaining many characteristics of the transformed and modernized society. However, practically the entire Mongolian metaethnic community at the historical stage of its development was integrated in the Buddhist culture and adopted only Buddhist ritual and cult practices, but also its entire doctrinal and philosophical system, which eventually incorporated pre-Buddhist religious knowledge and practices. During the period of the statehood formation in the Great Steppe, the social, ideological and religious functions of Heaven are increasingly supplemented with ideological ones.

As it has already been mentioned, the principles of the political cult of China could not but affect the political organization of the forming nomadic empires in the neighboring region of Inner Asia, which were in the closest cultural, political and economic contacts with the powerful neighbor. After the collapse of the once powerful Tang Empire, the era of political disunity of China began; it is recorded in history as the era of five dynasties and ten kingdoms (五代十國 Wǔdài Shíguó), which was later replaced by the establishment of the Song dynasty (960 - 1127), which was opposed by the Liao Khitan empire (916 - 1125), and then the Jin Jurchen Empire (1115-1234), which defeated the Liao Empire.

The confrontation between Song and Jin resulted in the fact that Jin conquered a significant part of the territory in the north of China; the ruler of Song was forced to recognize himself as a vassal of the Jin emperor and had to pay him an annual tribute. Despite this, the Jurchen, like all the conquerors of China, felt the influence of the greatest Chinese culture, especially political one. These beliefs were based on the principles of Confucianism in the Han era, with its teaching about Heaven as the divine guarantor of supreme power and its management mandate given to the sovereign being the most important person like a husband for a wife, and a father for his son. The Heaven chose a worthy ruler who carried out the will of Heaven, and the Heaven could cast him down for violating this will. According to the ancient document of Shan Shu, the whole history of China's statehood began when Heaven handed the mandate to the first legendary Xia dynasty and deprived it of this mandate for violating the will of the last ruler of Xia. (See: 诗经, 大雅, 荡之什, 荡, Shījīng, Daya, Dangzhishen, Dang).

The process of the formation of a single Mongolian state under the rule of Genghis Khan took place in the Great Steppe in the conditions of a cruel internecine war of nomadic tribes inhabiting the Great Steppe. This was occurred during the heyday of the Jin Empire, which pursued a "divide and conquer" policy towards hostile nomadic tribes, and the tribes in their confrontation constantly looked back at their powerful neighbor, periodically entering into allied relations with him. Temujin was in alliance with China in his war with the Tatars. Temujin, who was known for his tolerance to various religious beliefs, worshiped the eternal blue Heaven. The ideological influence of the cult of Heaven as a guarantor of supreme power was reflected in his attempts to unite all the Mongols under his control. One of the cornerstones of Mongolian Tengrianism as a national and state religion was the idea of the Heavenly choice of Genghis-Khan as the Supreme Ruler for "all the Mongols"; thus he who was considered not only the "master" and "ruler" (khan-ezen) of his people, but also their spiritual leader, the main religious priest and the "Son of Heaven" who manages the "Will and Power of the Eternal Blue Heaven", combining spiritual and secular power, religious and military-political, as well as administrative functions.

This, in fact, a priori postulate was an indisputable axiom of the entire political culture and at the same time - the fundamental "dogma" of the cultural and religious ethno-confessional tradition, empowered by the special Heavenly Charisma; it was assigned to its "Golden Kinship" (Altan Urug). Being unconditionally legitimate heir of his "Golden", i.e.

Heavenly kinship, the Son of Heaven, Genghis Khan, received all the powers to sacralize his power and the functions of the Universe Ruler from the Eternal Blue Heaven; his power spread out not only for the entire Celestial Empire, but the entire “Middle World” and the Universe.²¹

One cannot fail to see the traits of the cornerstone concept of the cult of Heaven in the political culture of China associated with the Heavenly Mandate (Tien Ming 天命), the Will of Heaven (tian and 天意) performed by the Emperor, who is considered the son of Heaven (Tian Tzy 天子).

In the Guyuk-Khan's document to Pope Innocent IV (1246), found in the archives of the Vatican, the first lines read: “By the power of the Eternal / Blue / Heaven/ declare/our, Khan the Great Ulus and the Universe, the order ... by the Power of the Eternal God ...” (cited in: “The Document of the Great Khan Guyuk to the Pope of Rome, Innocent IV, Echo of the Ages, No. 3/4, 2002.) At this time, Pope Innocent attempted to reach an agreement with the Mongols of Genghis Khan, trying to convert them into Christianity, but the letter of Guyuk-Khan made it clear that the Mongols professed Tengrianism which was based on monotheism as well as in Christianity; the Eternal Blue Heaven of the Mongols, who is the Father of Heaven (“Etzeg Min-Tangari” was the usual formula at the beginning of the prayer calls to the Heavenly Father God) possesses greater cosmic energy and strength, which he shares with “his children”, including his chosen Supreme Ruler on the khan's throne (Hamag Mongol).

The Tengrianism, defined not as monotheism, but rather a “dialectical monism”, is based on the idea of the “One”, which is above all dual oppositions and contradictions, including the opposition “One vs. plural”, which presupposes the opposition “monotheism vs. polytheism”; as a result this cult (in its metaphysical and religious-philosophical sense) was considered by the Mongols to be a doctrine of a higher order, superior to Christianity and other monotheistic religions as it, undoubtedly, confers its “chosen ones” with a greater charisma, comparable only with unlimited strength and power of the whole Universe, and even more than that, the entire Cosmos, which includes all the “existing” and “non-existing” (i.e. the Void).

This concept of being chosen by God (compare with the Chinese Heavenly mandate 天命), the heavenly “choice” of Mongolian khans is mentioned in the letter of Mongke-khan to King Louis, and is known only in the Latin version: “/ This is the Command of the Eternal God. In Heaven there is only one Eternal God, and on Earth there is only one Lord, Genghis Khan, the Son of God ...” (see: *ibid.*). At the same time, Genghis Khan is unambiguously, theosophically and theologically named as a God - Deus and “Son of God” (i.e. Son of Heaven), which corresponds from the political point of view quite adequately to “One Lord” of all lands - *unus dominus*.

The blue Heaven-Tengri is called Deus eternus. Thus, on the basis of these three documents cited above (Guyuk-Khan's letter, Edict Munke, Munch's letter), the following hierarchy of the three main elements of the Tengrian concept of imperial power is established in the national-state cultural and religious tradition of the Mongols of Genghis Khan: 1) God of Heaven - Eternal Blue Heaven; 2) Tengri-Heaven given- Genghis-Khan, the only chosen one of the Eternal Blue Heaven and God-Father; 3) the ruling emperor at

²¹ N. V. Abaev, “Tengrianism as a national and state religion of the Turkic-Mongols of Central Asia”, *Karadeniz, Black Sea - Black Sea. Quarterly Int. Journal of Social Sciences* Vol: 19 (2013): 401-403.

the moment. However, the traditional pyramid of power and power relations officially recognized in the popular national-state religion in the esoteric tradition was supplemented with the “Black Sky” (Khara Tengri), the highest and sacred element on the top of this pyramid.

The “black” in this case cannot be understood literally as a black color which symbolizes something negative - this is in fact the darkest color that the heaven acquires at the time of the highest concentration of darkness when it dialectically turns white and turns into a white heaven. Therefore, the definition of “khara” in “Hara Tengri” (compare with Tuvinian “Kara Daer”) should be interpreted as “especially sacred”, “most sacred”, which corresponds to the meaning of the word “kara” in Old Uigur as “sacred”, “especially worshipped”; one should also bear in mind that the term “Kara Daer” is synonymous to “Urt-Tengri”, meaning “Eternal Heaven” (compare with the Chinese “hsien-tian” – “previous, earlier Heaven”, which is followed by “late Heaven” – “hou-tian” 后天). In other words, the Eternal Blue Heaven is not, nevertheless, the main Absolute, while “The Black heaven” is, as it unites and combines (and therefore also refers to the “One” - the Buryat-Mongolian “Gansa”, Tuvinian “Changys”) the qualities of the White, Blue, and Black Heaven.

Conclusion

The Cult of Heaven, being one of the most widespread and influential religious cults of agricultural China, and the nomadic peoples of the Great Steppe, originated at the earliest stage of the religion formation in these regions, and influenced greatly the formation of their religious culture and ethno-confessional consolidation. At the same time, the functional features and content of this cult in China and in the religions of the Steppe differ from each other. In China, with its agricultural culture, the cult of Heaven had an exceptional pragmatic orientation, while in the Great Steppe it was not directly tied to the practical life of nomads, and fulfilled the ideological function, being entwined with the system of religious beliefs and cults, functionally and synergistically interrelated with interconnected syncretic cults of local deities. Therefore, if the development of the Heavenly cult in China was exclusively autochthonous in terms of its own religious cultural environment, in Inner Asia it was developing as part of the dynamic culture of the Great Steppe with a distinct nomadic civilization, belief system and nomadic worldview that developed a special and specific form of ethnic psychology, mentality and traditional values. During the formation of state, both in agricultural China, nomadic confederations, and tribal unions, nomadic empires of the Turkic-Mongolian peoples of Inner Asia, it becomes the cornerstone of the ideological justification of the power legitimacy, thus turning into an integral part of the political culture. Political culture was originally formed in China, which was a powerful neighbor to the nomadic tribes of the Great Steppe, so the principles of its political culture affected the political structure of the forming nomadic empires that were in the closest cultural, political and economic contacts with it.

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