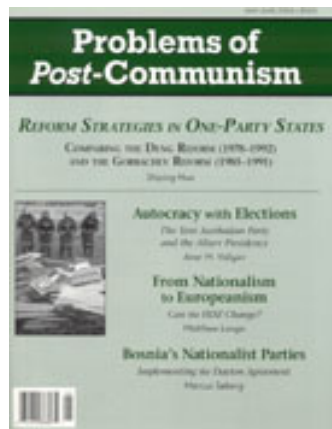


This article was downloaded by: [73.167.119.229]

On: 31 July 2015, At: 05:36

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London, SW1P 1WG



Problems of Post-Communism

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/mppc20>

Finding “Their Own”: Revitalizing Buryat Culture Through Shamanic Practices in Ulan-Ude

Justine B. Quijada^a, Kathryn E. Graber^b & Eric Stephen^c

^a Department of Religion, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT, USA

^b Departments of Anthropology and Central Eurasian Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, USA

^c Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, MA, USA

Published online: 30 Jul 2015.



[Click for updates](#)

To cite this article: Justine B. Quijada, Kathryn E. Graber & Eric Stephen (2015) Finding “Their Own”: Revitalizing Buryat Culture Through Shamanic Practices in Ulan-Ude, *Problems of Post-Communism*, 62:5, 258-272, DOI: [10.1080/10758216.2015.1057040](https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2015.1057040)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2015.1057040>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the “Content”) contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

Finding “Their Own”

Revitalizing Buryat Culture Through Shamanic Practices in Ulan-Ude

Justine B. Quijada,¹ Kathryn E. Graber,² and Eric Stephen³

¹*Department of Religion, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT, USA*

²*Departments of Anthropology and Central Eurasian Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, USA*

³*Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, MA, USA*

The shamans working at the Tengeri Shamans’ Organization in Ulan-Ude, Republic of Buryatia, claim that their work is devoted to reviving “traditional” Buryat culture, despite local criticism of the “nontraditional” institutional nature of their practices. Ethnographic and survey data collected in 2012 confirm that this is in fact the case for the urban Buryats who are drawn to the organization. Shamanic healing at Tengeri requires patients to learn family genealogies and revive clan rituals, and it offers both practical opportunities and encouragement for the use of the Buryat language, thereby providing a locus for cultural revitalization.

INTRODUCTION

“Why didn’t they go to their own (Rus. *k svoim*)?” Katya asks me, referring to the people who visit the Tengeri Shamans’ Center, a relatively new enterprise serving a largely urban population in Ulan-Ude, the capital of the Republic of Buryatia. Although she now lives in Ulan-Ude, Katya grew up in a small fishing village by Lake Baikal. Katya’s maternal uncle is a shaman in that village, and when she has a problem, she goes to Uncle Vova. She is both fascinated and confused by the idea of a shaman center. This article is an attempt to address the implications of her deceptively simple question.¹

Practitioners of shamanism, which is increasingly taking on institutional forms, proclaim shamanism to be a locus for reviving Buryat “traditional culture” more broadly. Tengeri, for example, in one of their infrequently published newsletters, describes the primary mission of the organization as the “rebirth of religious shamanic traditions and customs of the Buryat people ... [and] ... the preservation and development of the cultural heritage of the republic”

(Bolotova 2012, 2). Some local residents, however, consider institutional forms of shamanism to be, by their very nature, “nontraditional.” In this article, we analyze survey and interview data collected during the summer of 2012 at the Tengeri Shamans’ Organization in Ulan-Ude, Republic of Buryatia, that substantiate Tengeri’s claim.

Survey data collected at five of Tengeri’s public ceremonies indicate that participants at Tengeri maintain lower rates of Buryat language attrition than average in Buryatia, and that a significant number of participants who did not participate in shamanic rituals as children now attend clan offering rituals (Bur. *tailgan*). Participants who spoke Buryat as children tended to keep speaking Buryat as adults, which is unusual in and of itself, but in addition, 20 percent of those who did not speak Buryat at home as children state that they do now. Likewise, those who grew up in families that engaged in shamanic practices tended to continue to attend clan rituals, but more than half of those whose families did not participate in shamanic activities as children have begun to attend clan rituals. In sum, participation in shamanic rituals at Tengeri correlates with the revival of these cultural practices.²

What is most interesting about this revival is that, despite rhetoric in Tengeri’s publications, most people do not turn to Tengeri or shamanic practices in order to revive “traditional” forms of knowledge. Rather, most of the people in Ulan-Ude with whom the authors have engaged over many years of fieldwork seek shamanic intervention to solve problems

Address correspondence to Justine B. Quijada, Department of Religion, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT, USA.

E-mail: [jqquijada@wesleyan.edu](mailto:jquijada@wesleyan.edu).

Color versions of the figures in this article can be found online at www.tandfonline.com/mppc.

rooted in contemporary life: physical and mental illnesses, alcoholism, or family and business troubles.³ “Traditional” forms of knowledge are revived in the process, almost as a by-product of shamanic treatment. These findings have implications for other populations invested in reviving cultural heritage. One cannot speak to one’s ancestors if one does not know them, nor do Buryat ancestors speak Russian. Since shamanic interventions involve communicating and negotiating with ancestors, Buryat language, genealogical knowledge, and traditional kinship customs become practical and necessary. For those seeking shamanic treatments, traditional forms of knowledge that were once discouraged, and deemed useless vestiges of the past by the Soviet state, are revalued as practical matters of life or death.

Katya’s question, “why didn’t they go to their own?” must be seen in relationship to a history of Soviet modernizing initiatives in Buryatia that produced a highly educated urban population, whose ties to rural kinship networks vary widely. At the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century there was a nascent Buryat intelligentsia (see Rupen 1956). Building on this early intelligentsia, and a literate monastic population, intensive state-sponsored modernization initiatives in the postwar period turned a predominantly seminomadic pastoral population into a highly educated and urban nationality. Buryats overwhelmingly embraced the possibilities offered by the Soviet state and by the 1970s had begun to dominate cultural, professional, and administrative positions within their republic (Chakars 2014, 89–116; Giuliano 2006, 52).⁴ These successes by Soviet standards came at the price of native-language maintenance and religious knowledge. As Chakars (2014) demonstrates, the process of “building socialism” was framed in a language of modernization and progress that discursively constructed pre-Soviet Buryat cultural practices as “backward” and “primitive” in contrast to “modern” Soviet progress. Dramatic social change began through state violence in the 1920s and 1930s, but it was the new habits of Soviet life in the post-World War II period that left little space in everyday life for Buryat language use and religious practices.

Language attrition is the most easily observed result of these social changes, and perhaps the most salient loss felt by contemporary Buryats on a daily basis. The percentage of ethnic Buryats who actively used and understood Buryat declined over the late Soviet period, as did the domains in which the language was used—trends that have continued in recent years. In the 2002 All-Russian census, 72 percent of the total Buryat population of the Russian Federation reported knowledge of Buryat, or 353,113 out of the 445,175 respondents who identified their nationality as Buryat (Rosstat 2004). By the 2010 census, that number had fallen to 45 percent, or 206,430 of 461,389 (Rosstat 2012–13, 11, 146). Within the Republic of Buryatia, the decline has been even sharper. In the same period, the percentage of the republic’s Buryat population reporting knowledge of Buryat fell from 81 percent, or 222,107 out

of 272,910 (Rosstat 2004), to 43 percent, or 122,882 out of 286,839 (Rosstat 2012–13, 212).⁵ More subtly, Buryat has been receding from public life. Despite a considerable amount of Buryat-language media production and well-institutionalized Buryat language education, the domains of usage are restricted (Dyrkheeva 2002, 2003; Graber 2012). In a recent survey of language attitudes among Buryats, only 2.4 percent of respondents in Ulan-Ude reported using Buryat in work or school (Khilkhanova 2007, 81), laying bare one of the main reasons that the language is not seen as necessary or practical for socioeconomic success.

Religious practices and their relationship to family ties were also profoundly affected. During the initial years of the Soviet Union, in the 1920s and 1930s, violent religious repression decimated the ranks of both shamans and Buddhist lamas, and drove much religious practice out of the public sphere. Family relationships and geographically grounded kin-type mutual aid relationships (Rus. *zemliachestvo*) remain important to contemporary Buryats, but the ways these relationships are manifested, once grounded primarily in ritual, have changed dramatically. Soviet institutions fostered civic, professional, and educational relationships, while the religious rituals that had once fostered kinship relations were suppressed (for example, see Batomunkuev 2003). Kinship and clan relationships, always a backbone of the informal or “grey” economy under socialism, became essential during the economic dislocations in the post-Soviet period, when many urban dwellers relied on village relatives for food, and urban relatives became the only source of cash for subsistence-based village economies (Long 2008; Metzko 2003). The ritual forms of kinship, however, have been more difficult to revive. Whether for such practical reasons, or due to disillusionment with Soviet ideology or the increasing awareness that “cultural heritage” is something valuable within contemporary global circles, Buryats in Ulan-Ude regularly and routinely decry their loss of cultural knowledge as well as their lack of Buryat language skills. (As my Buryat language teacher, who had no ties to shamanic practices, told me, “Before, every Buryat knew their genealogy to ten generations. But now, you’re lucky if people know their great-grandparents!”) In doing so, contemporary Buryats often reproduce, albeit in a revalued form, the Soviet discourse that opposes Buryat cultural “traditions” to “modernity,” figuring “culture” as something that was wrongly sacrificed in favor of progress. Yet even for those who would like to revive Buryat language and cultural practices, there is limited practical use for these forms of knowledge in urban Ulan-Ude, and for most people the daily process of living is hard enough that there is little time or energy for something they might like to do, but for which they have little immediate need.

Ever since the 1990s, shamanic practices have become increasingly visible in the public sphere in Buryatia, and

most locals agree that the number of practicing shamans has increased exponentially. The first shamans' organization, Bo Murgel, was founded in 1993, and its founder, Nadia Stepanova, became a local celebrity (Humphrey 2002, 211; Zhukovskaia 2000, 27). In addition, in 1997, as part of the new laws on religious activity in the Russian Federation, shamanism was recognized as one of four "traditional" religions by the Republic of Buryatia (Shaglanova 2012, 80; Zhukovskaia 2000, 27). Nevertheless, when I first visited Ulan-Ude in 2003, many of the people I spoke to considered shamanism to be an ethnographic curiosity, whereas in 2012 a thick book on shamanism, authored by a shaman, was for sale at the Cash and Carry supermarket (Gomboev 2010), implying that the supermarket chain at least considered there to be considerable popular interest in the subject.

The Tengeri Shamans' Organization, which describes itself as the "most active association" pursuing the revival of Buryat-Mongolian shamanism in Buryatia today (Bolotova 2011, 2), has played a considerable role in increasing both the public visibility of shamanic practices and the sheer number of shamans initiated under its auspices. Although there are several registered shamans' organizations in Ulan-Ude with offices, in 2012, if you got in a taxi and asked for the "shaman center," the taxi driver inevitably took you to Tengeri.

And yet for shamans to belong to a state-registered religious organization with an office, a newsletter (however infrequently published), and plans to construct a shamanic "temple" (Rus. *khram*), is viewed by many local residents and scholars as absolutely nontraditional. The same taxi drivers who delivered me to the Tengeri center would sometimes obliquely criticize it by noting that "before, shamans didn't do this," referring either to the center itself or, more commonly, to the giant billboard outside the center that lists the dates of public ceremonies. Both Zhukovskaia (2000) and Shaglanova (2012) firmly distinguish rural shamanic practitioners (including those who, like Katya, now live in the city) from urban shamans and their clientele, describing the latter as "neo-shamans." Aware of these critiques, and explicitly hostile to the term "neo-shaman," most of the urban shamans I spoke to, all current or former members of Tengeri, claimed that "these days" it is absolutely necessary for shamanism to take an institutional form; this is a trend that is not limited to Buryatia but is becoming widespread in post-Soviet Siberia (Balogh 2010; Balzer 2005, 2011; Lindquist 2005). When I pressed them to define why "these days" an institutional form was necessary, one told me vaguely, "the times are such" (Rus. *vremena takie*), while another explained that since Buddhism and Russian Orthodox Christianity are recognized by the state, shamanism must be recognized as well if it wishes to survive.

But what does it mean for shamanic practice to become institutionalized? Although local scholars, shamans, and

their clients debate what is or is not "traditional" for Buryat shamanism, the question is not merely a matter of whether or not "traditional" content can exist within a "nontraditional" institutional form. Shamanism and the figure of the shaman have, in historical, anthropological, and popular descriptions, often been defined in fundamental opposition to institutional forms of religion. The shaman is often defined as a "bricoleur" (Levi-Strauss 1963), a trickster-like figure whose power derives in part from being outside social and institutional structures, by definition marginal or marginalized (see, for example, Lewis 2003 [1971]; Taussig 1987). In contrast, scholars such as Caroline Humphrey have argued that shamanism should be considered a field of discourse (Thomas and Humphrey 1996). Humphrey and colleagues argue that shamanism is not an "ism" but a discourse that must be viewed in its historical and social context in order to determine how shamanic knowledge is formed in relationship to institutions of power (Humphrey and Onon 1996; Thomas and Humphrey 1996; see also Pedersen 2011). Like Humphrey, contemporary Buryat shamans argue that institutionalized shamanism is not necessarily new, citing shamans at Genghis Khan's court as precedent for their own project of institution-building.

In addition, using "tradition" as a category of social scientific analysis comes with its own baggage. Despite decades of arguments troubling the idea of the "traditional," the term remains with us, especially in regard to indigenous populations. One reason is the powerful discursive association between shamanism and the past in the popular understanding of shamanism as "archaic techniques of ecstasy" (Eliade 1964). This widespread understanding of shamanism as "archaic," of which Eliade's work is but one example, and which resonates with a global New Age fascination with shamanism, is part of the reason that the term "tradition" is used by our interlocutors. Shamans at Tengeri and elsewhere write and speak of preserving traditions, argue their forms are more "traditional" than those of their rivals, and validate their work by arguing that Buryats must preserve shamanic "traditions" that have been lost by other (implicitly more modern) peoples. Since the work of Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), it has become a common understanding in social science not only that "tradition" is invented, but also that claims to tradition and authenticity are always also claims to power and authority, and furthermore that such claims must be understood within this context (see for example Conklin 1997; Gal 1998; Lindquist 2005; Vitebsky 2003).

The tension produced by the term "traditional" is an existential condition for many indigenous populations, such as Buryats.⁶ "Tradition" evokes a timeless, unchanging identity that no contemporary individual can possibly achieve, producing what Povinelli calls the "melancholic subject of traditions" (Povinelli 2002, 39). Yet indigenous communities expend tremendous effort preserving and

reviving “traditional” practices not merely because they are necessary to the political performance of difference, but also because these practices are essential to sustaining community bonds and a sense of self. For many contemporary Buryats, especially those who turn to shamanic practices, the loss of “tradition” is experienced as physical and mental suffering (see Quijada 2009, 2011). Therefore, despite its baggage, we cannot entirely dispense with the term “traditional,” as it marks meaning for our interlocutors, both shamans and local scholars. We must, however, pay close attention to the meaning being generated when our interlocutors invoke it.

For example, Katya, cited in the introduction, would most closely fit Shaglanova’s description of a “shamanist migrant” to Ulan-Ude, an urban resident with strong ties to rural life “who preserve[s] special knowledge of Buriat traditional shamanism in the urban area” (2012, 77). Katya, however, does not use the word “tradition.” For her, this is a matter of kinship: shamans are not traditional or nontraditional, they are “yours” or not.⁷ Tengeri is not “hers” and hence she would not seek them out for treatment or to conduct a ceremony. As Shaglanova (2012) notes, however, many urban Buryats whose families have lived in Ulan-Ude or Irkutsk since the 1960s, when Soviet-era social engineering projects drew increasing numbers of Buryats to the cities, have no shamans who are “theirs.” For many of these urban Buryats, religious revival in the post-Soviet period has overwhelmingly meant interest and involvement in Buddhism rather than in shamanism. Nevertheless, increasingly urban Buryats have been turning to organizations like Tengeri for help with physical, mental, and social problems, and in the process they begin to revalue and return to pre-Soviet forms of kinship relations and Buryat language use.

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF SHAMANISM IN BURYATIA AND THE HISTORY OF TENGERI

Tengeri achieved its current status as a registered religious organization in 2003. In accordance with Russia’s 1997 Law on Religious Associations, any group wishing to be recognized by the state must register under one of two categories: a religious organization (which entails various rights such as the ability to issue visa invitations and, most important, to claim land from the city for construction projects) or a religious group (which has fewer members and fewer legal privileges). In addition the law distinguishes between “traditional” religions and nontraditional ones, with a greater burden on nontraditional ones for registration. At the republic level, shamanism is recognized as being a “traditional” religion in Buryatia, which makes it easier for shamanic institutions to participate in the registration process. One of the members was able to demonstrate that a grandparent had been a practicing shaman, thereby meeting the criterion

that the group had existed for more than 15 years. It helped that Tengeri was not the first shamans’ organization to register as such in Buryatia.

Justine Quijada first worked with Tengeri in 2004–2005, and at that time the organization was small and ambitious, with a tightly knit group of core founding members. By the summer of 2012 that group had splintered into three separate organizations. The original organization, Tengeri, still existed under the leadership of Bair Zhambalovich Tsyrendorzhiev, who had been director since at least 2004. A former veterinarian from Aga, Bair Zhambalovich studied with a Buryat shaman in Mongolia, and had been brought to Ulan-Ude by Victor Dorzhievich Tsydypov and Budazhap Purbuevich Shiretorov. These two founding members of Tengeri left the organization around 2010 and founded their own organizations. Budazhap Purbuevich’s is registered as a religious organization, and is pursuing land to build a shamanic center of his own. Victor Dorzhievich’s Blacksmith Shaman’s group is registered as only a religious group, by choice.

Tengeri has claimed land from the city and is constructing a shamanic “worship center” in Novaia Komushka, a peripheral area of Ulan-Ude. In 2012 this consisted of a one-story central building with a receptionist, a kiosk where ritual supplies are available, and small rooms for shamans to use to see clients. Two outlying buildings with yards are used for rituals, and three more buildings are under construction. The front gate has an enormous billboard announcing the dates of public ceremonies, and a wooden cairn (Bur. *oboo*) topped with a cow’s skull, modeled after one outside a shamans’ organization in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia (See Figure 1).

Summer is a particularly intense period at Tengeri. The center is open all year and shamans use the rooms in the main building to see clients, some by pre-appointment, and others who simply walk in looking for help. Large ceremonies, however, are held only in the summer. The summer ceremonial season begins at the end of May with the spring *tailgan* to “open the gates of heaven” and ends in September with a fall *tailgan* to “close the gates of heaven.” In the intervening months, three kinds of ceremonies are held: publicly announced, regularly scheduled *tailgan* ceremonies for particular place deities (these are the ceremonies where surveys were conducted); clan *tailgan* ceremonies held on behalf of clients; and initiations for prospective and current shamans.⁸ A *tailgan* is a ritual in which an offering is made to an “other-than-human person.”⁹ It is a fairly flexible ritual form, which will be discussed further below.

In 2012, in addition to the regularly scheduled public *tailgan* ceremonies, initiations were held back to back, and sometimes concurrently, all summer. Prospective shamans travel from Chita and Irkutsk oblasts, and from as far away as Moscow and St. Petersburg or even Germany, to hold initiation ceremonies. Not all the initiates are Buryat, or even partially Buryat. Ethnic Russians, Germans, and



FIGURE 1 Tengeri Shamans' Center, Novaia Komushka, Ulan-Ude, Republic of Buryatia, 2012. Photo by Roberto Quijada.

members of other Eurasian nationalities have been initiated, and they claim to communicate with their ancestors in their own languages rather than in Buryat.

Surprisingly, this practice is not what is most derided as “nontraditional” by Tengeri’s critics. Many people in Ulan-Ude accept the idea that Buryat shamanic methods might work for non-Buryats, and, according to Tengeri’s director, about a quarter of Tengeri’s clients are local ethnic Russians. Instead, I have heard many people, including some of Tengeri’s neighbors, as well as local scholars, criticize their “advertising,” such as the billboard announcing when ceremonies are held, as shamans “traditionally” do not identify themselves as such and are not supposed to engage in healing activities for profit. Several people, from a newspaper reporter to a taxi driver, offered the critique obliquely, by asking me, as an “expert,” whether I thought shamans who advertise were “authentic.”¹⁰ In contrast, some former members of the organization criticize the way that Bair Zhambalovich and those at Tengeri refer to him as their teacher (Rus. *uchitel'*) and themselves as students (Rus. *ucheniki*). They argue that this is a Buddhist conceit that sets up a false authority structure, noting that “traditionally” shamans help each other by conducting initiations or sharing advice, but their only teachers are the *ongons* (ancestor spirits, discussed below).

Both of these practices, advertising and the student/teacher model, are part of creating an institutional structure. Shamans who have a physical building to maintain must generate enough income to keep the center running. Sensitive to the accusation of “advertising,” all the members of Tengeri vociferously deny that there is any profit, and claim that they invest any extra income in the construction project. Members of Tengeri argue that the billboard is not “advertising” so much as educating a public that knows little about shamanism. The student/teacher model helps maintain an organization that does

not pay salaries or have formal employees. The institutional form—having a building to go to, a stable website, email, mailing address, and a receptionist who can guide new clients to the appropriate shaman—are all part of Tengeri’s mission to make shamanic treatment accessible to those who do not have “their own” shamans.

The institutional form also enables long-term networking between shamans from other areas of Siberia and Mongolia, some of whom have participated in Tengeri’s annual International Shamanic Conference and *Tailgan*, held in August at Olkhon Island. Most of Tengeri’s networking is focused, however, on building relationships with academic researchers in Moscow, Korea, and the United States, as well as clients and initiates from Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Europe. There are already Tengeri branch offices (Rus. *filialy*) in Irkutsk and Chita, and there is talk of opening one in Moscow. Tengeri members consider these networks, facilitated by the internet as well as surprising levels of word-of-mouth connections, to be much more valuable in generating legitimacy and visibility than connections to other Siberian practitioners.¹¹

METHODOLOGY

During the summer of 2012, the two principal investigators (Quijada, an anthropologist of religion, and Graber, a linguistic anthropologist) conducted interviews and participant observation with shamans and other ritual participants at five public rituals and a handful of private initiations. In addition, survey data was collected at the five public rituals held by Tengeri to make offerings to specific deities: Bukhe Bator, Losad Khan, the Darkhan (blacksmith) *ongons*, Khihaan Ulaan, and the 13 deities protecting Lake Baikal.

Public *tailgan* rituals usually take several hours. Participants were canvassed during the ritual, and the completion rates were very high. Offerings to Bukhe Bator were made at the sacred site for this deity in the Tarbagataiskii district outside Ulan-Ude. Offerings to Losad Khan, the Darkhan *ongons*, and Khihaan Ulaan were made at the Tengeri center in Novaia Komushka, Ulan-Ude. The offerings to the protectors of Lake Baikal were made at the tenth annual International Shamanic Conference and *Tailgan* on Olkhon Island. Overall, 479 respondents were surveyed on (1) basic demographic questions and (2) questions intended to measure their involvement in types of behavior that Tengeri claims to seek to revive, and which are generally seen to index Buryat cultural identity, including Buryat language use during childhood and presently, participation at clan *tailgans*, and participation at other Tengeri-sponsored events. Of the 479 participants, 192 self-reported being ethnically Buryat. This article draws on data only from those who self-identify as ethnically Buryat.

Of this sample of Buryats, 59 percent ($n = 112$) were women. 62 percent were married ($n = 118$), and of those who were married, 88 percent ($n = 104$) married someone who was reported to be Buryat as well. Nine percent ($n = 17$) were between the ages 18 and 23 (born after 1989), 36 percent ($n = 69$) between 24 and 35, 23 percent ($n = 44$) between 36 and 45, and 32 percent ($n = 62$) greater than 45 (having lived half their lives or more under communism). For all statistical analyses, Pearson's chi-squared tests were applied. This article focuses on two aspects of "traditional behavior" that are statistically linked to attendance at Tengeri ceremonies: attending clan *tailgans* and speaking Buryat at home.

CLAN TAILGANS

Of the sample, 72 percent ($n = 139$) of the attendees indicated that they had been to their clan or family *tailgans*.¹² Within this group, significant differences emerged. For example, 82 percent of men reported attending family *tailgans*, whereas only 66 percent of women reported doing so ($\chi^2 = 5.67$, $p < 0.02$). The gender difference may be due to the fact that some families may restrict attendance at clan *tailgans* to only the male members of their families. Regarding indices of "traditional culture," attendees were asked whether they had participated in shamanic practices as a child. Of those who reported that they had not engaged in such practices as children, 64 percent currently do attend family *tailgans*; of those who had engaged in such practices as a child, 81 percent currently do so as well ($\chi^2 = 7.12$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting a rise in interest in family *tailgans* among those who had not participated during their youth.

Furthermore, participants were asked whether they had attended other ceremonies carried out by Tengeri before. Of those who reported that they had not been to other Tengeri

ceremonies, 59 percent had been to their family's *tailgans*, whereas 80 percent of those who reported that they had been to other Tengeri ceremonies had been to their family's *tailgans* ($\chi^2 = 9.07$, $p < 0.01$). In addition to asking whether or not respondents attended family *tailgans*, the survey asked how long they had been doing so. Although not everyone answered this question, two-thirds of those who did stated that they had been attending clan *tailgans* for 10 years or less, while only one-third answered over 10 years or stated that they had always done so. Ten years was chosen as a dividing marker in these questions because Tengeri was celebrating its tenth anniversary in 2012. This additionally lends support to the claim that Tengeri is providing a locus for engagement with more "traditional" cultural observances, at least as represented by participation in clan ceremonies.

Why should we consider attending clan *tailgans* such a crucial marker of "traditional" Buryat identity? Classic ethnographies of Buryat shamanism (Banzarov 1997; Dugarov 2002; Galdanova 1987; Gerasimova et al. 2000; Humphrey 1971; Krader 1954; Mikhailov 1987, 1990, 2004; Tugutov 1978) argue that shamanic practices were "traditionally" clan-based and linked to other Asian forms of ancestor worship as well as to the place-based spirit masters usually associated with indigenous shamanic practices. According to these accounts, a Buryat shaman's primary responsibility is to maintain healthy relations between the living and dead members of his or her clan, ensuring that if the living honor and feed their ancestors, the ancestors will protect and watch over their descendants. The spirits (*ongons*) with whom the shaman communicates, and who possess his or her body during trance, are the shaman's own ancestral shamans, who have chosen him or her to carry the clan's gift for this generation. The clan *tailgan* is the means by which this responsibility is enacted.

Many of the contemporary Buryats with whom we have worked consider attending a clan *tailgan*, a ceremony where all the members of the family reunite once a year to make offerings to their ancestors, to be both a familial duty and something that marks the attendee as "more Buryat." Humphrey, based on archival records and research done in Buryatia in the 1960s, states that attendance at the clan *tailgan* "was a sign of membership of the patriline and legitimate birth" (Humphrey 1971, 130). She notes that the term *tailgan* was usually used for western Buryats, and that eastern Buryats, who were predominantly Buddhist, replaced the *tailgan* with the clan *oboo* ceremony, often presided over by a lama (1971, 132). The logic of the ceremony, however—that clan members often travel long distances to ancestral territories in order to attend a ritual that defines them as members of a kinship group—applies in both instances. In addition, eastern Buryats are more likely to have written genealogies, called in Buryat *ug-un bichig* (Humphrey 1971, 133–38).¹³

In village-based clan *tailgans* in the Kabanskii district, where Katya is from, each family within the clan brings a birch branch decorated with a ribbon for each member of the family, both those “born” into the clan and their spouses, so that even those who are not physically present are metonymically present.¹⁴ After “treating” or “feeding” (Rus. *ugoshchat’*) the ancestors, the living must eat as well. Although the details of the ceremony vary from village to village and shaman to shaman, the central idea is hospitality and reciprocity (Long 2008). The other-than-human persons (*ongons*, or place deities) are fed by the living and are thus brought into a mutual aid relationship (Figure 2).

A *tailgan* can be held on behalf of any collectivity or social group. During the Soviet period, collective farm brigades would hold *tailgans* (Humphrey 1998). A documentary film about Buryat shamanism (Bernstein 2006) shows the multi-ethnic crew of a fishing boat making offerings to Lake Baikal. The annual ceremonies held by Tengeri at which we conducted surveys in 2012 were this type of *tailgan*, held in honor of a specific deity/place spirit master, and open to anyone who wished to maintain a positive relationship with that other-than-human person. In addition to these annual, public ceremonies, people come to Tengeri to arrange for clan *tailgans*, where members of a family will gather to offer a sheep to their ancestors. While ideally one should make these offerings on one’s ancestral clan territory, the prevailing wisdom at Tengeri is that a ceremony anywhere is better than no ceremony at all.¹⁵ Members of the organization often state that the main reason for building a shamanic center is to have the space necessary to conduct rituals like this. Over the course of the summer in 2012 clan ceremonies were held there on a weekly basis. The following section contrasts two clan *tailgans*, in order to illustrate the role that an organization like Tengeri plays in reviving this type of “tradition.”

A friend of ours from the city, an academic who used to self-identify as Buddhist, invited us to his mother’s family’s *tailgan* in the village. He and his immediate family (his mother and siblings) had only recently started attending. Although his own explanations were grounded entirely in psychology and, as he put it, “rational, not faith-based reasons,” he was very positive about his new involvement in this tradition. “I don’t believe in any of it,” he pointed out, “but it is important for the family to get together so that people who need help get connections to family who can help them. We are not individualistic yet. We still need family.”

The family members we met in the village were similar to Katya in their own relationship to the ritual. The principal investigator spoke briefly with the shaman who led the ritual. He worked professionally as a bookkeeper, but received his calling through illness and was trained by the shaman who had conducted the ceremonies before him. He had every expectation that when the time came, someone from the next generation would be selected to study with him and learn how to conduct the ceremony. His description of becoming a shaman stressed the idea of study (Rus. *uchit’sia*), the need to learn the proper way to conduct the ceremony, which is a strong contrast to the way shamans at Tengeri emphasize the “calling” as a transformative life event (see Quijada 2011).

“Do you also do healings? Or only clan ceremonies?” I (the anthropologist of religion) asked in Russian. “*Ügüi*, *Ügüi*,” he answered, using the Buryat for “no.” Only clan ceremonies, he specified in Russian. “How have things changed?” I asked. “They haven’t changed. We’ve always done it this way,” he responded. “Even during the Soviet times?” I pushed. “Things were very strict then. You had to do rituals at night.”

His experience represents one form of contemporary Buryat shamanism that should perhaps best be categorized



FIGURE 2 Offerings at a clan *tailgan* ceremony in Kabanskii district, Republic of Buryatia, 2012. Photo by Roberto Quijada.

as continuous. For village residents this type of shamanic practice is quotidian, not because rituals are held every day (they are generally held either once or twice a year) but because they are not remarkable; they are interwoven with the fabric of everyday kinship and village relations. Children grow up familiar with the ritual, and eventually as an adult, one is chosen to take over the duties. Unlike in the urban environment, in the village becoming a shaman is not a dramatic transformation of self, marked by an initiation, but rather a gradual assumption of additional responsibility within an already familiar set of relationships. For the urban, young, academic friend who invited us, this shamanic practice is not quotidian in the way it is for village residents, but it is still a kinship resource available to him. In Katya's words, he has "his own" to turn to.

This year his family had sacrificed a sheep. One of the village attendees commented "you're lucky that we did that this year." Since I was accustomed to the rituals at Tengeri, where a sheep is always sacrificed, I asked about this. He explained that they only offer a sheep every three years. He explained the offering as a reciprocal relationship—a sheep is a request for aid from the ancestors. Although we want our ancestors to protect us (Rus. *nas zashchishchat'*), we don't want to annoy them by asking for too much help. A person has to do some things himself (Rus. *Cheloveku nuzhno samomu sdelat'*), he explained. This contrasted sharply with the way shamans at Tengeri talk about the sheep offerings. For them, every ceremony requires a sheep because their *tailgans* are intended to repair ruptured relationships, and more offerings are necessary to repair what is broken. Rupture is assumed as the basic condition of being for the patients coming to Tengeri for help.

The following account, by a young Buryat woman in her twenties named Marina, illustrates this kind of rupture, and shows, through one personal story, why people turn to an organization like Tengeri when they do not have "their own." In the 1970s Marina's grandparents moved to Ulan-Ude, where they "got jobs and built a house." Her parents did not speak Buryat at home because "there were very few Buryats in the city then. There was no one to speak Buryat to." Her family practiced neither Buddhism nor shamanic rituals, and she was raised in a household that was not so much atheist as indifferent to religion. Her older brother suffers from an unnamed mental illness, and has been institutionalized for most of her life. She became interested in shamanism because a neighbor suggested that her brother's illness might have spiritual origins, and that same neighbor led her to Tengeri. "The first thing they [the shamans] ask you," she said, "is what is your clan? Who are your ancestors? And it's embarrassing when you don't know." She was spending part of her summer doing research on census records in the national archive in an attempt to identify and recreate her family tree.

Genealogical knowledge is necessary for shamanic interventions because the shaman needs to know who, in the

spirit world, to address. The question "what is your clan?" is the first thing that shamans at Tengeri ask new clients. This is because, within a shamanic diagnostic framework, ancestors are most likely to be the cause of problems among the living, and therefore they must be identified in order to solve the problem. Most clients turn to Tengeri because they are having problems that cannot be solved by "normal" means. If an illness responds to western/Soviet medical treatment, then the patient is unlikely to turn to a shaman for treatment. A single bad event or unlucky occurrence, likewise, is not a cause for concern. People turn to shamans when illnesses do not respond to treatment, when problems multiply or persist in ways that are deemed unnatural, or when more than one family member dies in a short period of time (this particular situation has been described by many clients and shamans at Tengeri).¹⁶

There are many possible spiritual causes of illness. Some problems are caused by humans, such as *porcha* (a Russian folk-category marking a curse brought about through envy) or possession by evil spirits. These are fairly easy to treat and do not require genealogical knowledge. However, more pervasive problems, which can manifest in entire families, are sent by ancestors who are angry due to neglect, or perhaps have called one of the living to be a shaman. Neglected ancestors can make it difficult for their descendants to find work or to prosper in a business, can block attempts to find spouses or have children, can cause serious health and mental problems, and can even kill descendants who refuse to accept a shamanic calling. If the treating shaman suspects the ancestors are a cause (and generally this is the case), then, in order to determine the exact problem, the treating shaman will go into trance and contact the ancestors of the patient.

Clients waiting to see shamans in the organization's front room will often exchange advice on how to determine clan identity. Some people turn to older relatives who still have this information. One woman said, "We were so lucky, it turned out that our grandfather knew all this. We never knew, but he had been saving the genealogy just in case," referring to one of the *ug-un bichig* genealogies described by Humphrey (1971, 133-38). Both initiate shamans and clients claim that the specific talent of Bair Zhambalovich, the organization's director and head shaman, is using trance methods to verify research and identify shamanic ancestors.

Marina is not so lucky. She has pieced together some information from her parents and is trying to fill in the gaps using census records. She has time to do this because she is unemployed, something she sees as related, and a sign that she is intended to devote herself to repairing her family's spiritual fortunes. The shaman she is working with has confirmed that her brother has a calling, but her brother cannot leave the hospital in his current condition. Marina hopes that by making the appropriate offerings to the ancestors she can negotiate an improvement in his symptoms. She has now sponsored two of the three *tailgans* for her

ancestors that the treating shaman told her would be necessary. Her brother's condition improves each time a ritual is held, but her offerings have not yet produced a permanent cure and her brother remains hospitalized. Marina says that this may be because she has not yet identified which of her ancestors was a shaman, and therefore does not know with whom she must negotiate to ameliorate his symptoms. Her family has participated in the rituals, but she has been the driving force, organizing their attendance and financial contributions to the shared cost of a sheep and the other ritual supplies. She is adamant that the officiating shaman did not charge a fee for his services, only for the supplies, although a "gift" is appropriate and expected. It was clear when we spoke that she feels the weight of her brother's illness on her shoulders and thinks that her family has, as she put it, "given up."

In addition to organizing these ceremonies, Marina has been attending all the public rituals that Tengeri holds and is trying to learn as much as she can about Buryat traditions in general. Marina does not seem completely convinced that her brother's condition is caused by an unrecognized shamanic calling, and she will probably remain skeptical unless and until he recovers, but she does see her family's loss of tradition as central to their inability to cope with the situation. In addition, as she spends more time at Tengeri she has begun to feel "embarrassed" that she knows so little, and has begun trying to teach herself to speak Buryat because "one ought to know one's mother tongue."

LANGUAGE REVIVAL

Marina is not unusual among shamanic participants, initiates, or the Buryat public at large. The increasing interest in knowing her mother tongue—and embarrassment for having "lost" it—that she expresses, pervades our data. Notably, reclaiming the lost language is not an end in itself, but rather the means to very practical ends. Our data show that both the lay participants in shamanic ceremonies and the shamans themselves highly value knowledge of Buryat and that many of them are actively seeking to improve their knowledge or the knowledge of others, albeit for different reasons.

Sociolinguists working in post-Soviet Buryatia, including most notably Galina Dyrkheeva (2002, 2003), have identified a growing interest in historically Buryat religions as a positive factor in language maintenance. The argument depends on (1) a close association of the Buryat language with certain religious contexts and (2) speakers being inspired by experiences within those contexts to learn or improve their Buryat language abilities, at least within those limited domains.

The association of Buryat with Buddhist and shamanic contexts is easy to observe in Ulan-Ude. Among people who are bilingual in Russian and Buryat and can choose their medium of communication, Buryat language use is

routinely higher within religious contexts, including within religious buildings and spaces demarcated for ceremonies, and speakers often report actively trying to meet expectations to speak Buryat—whether these expectations are explicit or implicit, and whether they come from relatives, shamans, or themselves.¹⁷ The distinction between domains of use is a regular sociolinguistic phenomenon, identified as "diglossia" in a class distinction between "high" and "low" codes, or ways of speaking that are treated by speakers as bounded and discrete, such as a language, register, or dialect (Fishman 1967). We tend to treat, for instance, the domains of religion and work as separate, the former, where we might speak in a casual register or with a "home language," being more "private" and granting familial benefits, and the latter, where we might speak in a formal register or lingua franca, being more "public" and granting economic advantages or other types of socioeconomic prestige. In Buryatia, most speakers—and many scholars—have assumed that Buryat is the 'low' or informal code and Russian the 'high' code or formal code, with the choice of code depending on context. Khilkhanova (2009), for instance, suggests that codeswitching from Buryat to Russian and back is prompted by movement from familial contexts to workplace contexts and back.

By the same token, using Buryat in one context, such as shamanic ceremonies, does not entail using Buryat in another. Thus high Buryat language use in a ritual context might, in itself, mean very little for the long-term future of Buryat as a language of daily interaction. Graber's ethnographic research on language attitudes and ideologies shows, however, that the desire to speak and understand Buryat in ritual contexts directly inspires efforts to, for example, speak to elderly grandmothers for purposes of obtaining genealogical information, or understand newspaper texts about principal protector deities and place spirits. In separate research on Buryat-language media and language shift in 2008–2011, I found that of all domains of use, those with the highest observable Buryat code use were religious domains traditionally associated with pre-Soviet Buryat culture, namely Buddhism and shamanism. But *outside* of those physical spaces, these topics also sparked the greatest frustration and sadness with a felt loss of Buryat, and the greatest interest in "re"-learning or reclaiming that knowledge. Across age groups, genders, and socioeconomic class, interviewees and focus group members routinely showed greatest interest in shamanic topics and most often lamented what they felt to be their own individual linguistic inadequacies in connection with shamanism.¹⁸

The consequences of not knowing can be serious. At Tengeri's International Shamanic Conference and *Tailgan* on Olkhon, where several Buryat shamans were entering trance simultaneously, a series of young men made requests of the *ongons* who were being channeled (Figure 3). Most of them did not control Buryat sufficiently to converse, so



FIGURE 3 Shaman in trance at the annual International Shamanic Conference and *Tailgan*, Olkhon Island 2012. Photo by Roberto Quijada.

compatriots or other shamans would translate between the Russian-speaking client and the *ongon*. Dugar, a young man of about 25 who was trying to appease an especially angry *ongon*, understood little of the proceedings and struggled to meet rapid-fire demands for vodka or cigarettes, to get down or stand up, and so forth. When his translator was momentarily distracted by another shaman, Dugar was left alone briefly. He looked increasingly panicked as the *ongon* continued to make demands. “WHAT is he saying?!?” (Rus. “*On CHTO govorit?!?*”), he implored repeatedly of everyone around him, including the photographer and me (the linguistic anthropologist), who were recording the interaction. “Do YOU understand him? Please, help!” he cried,

nearly in tears. Afterward he said he felt that he had failed and had disappointed his family, who lived outside of Irkutsk, because his sister had had a series of complex health problems and marital troubles, and their parents had sent him to seek the aid of the shaman.

People who go to shamans and attend shamanic ceremonies thus have incentive to speak and understand Buryat. But do they actually use it in higher numbers, and how might this slow language attrition? Among the Buryat participants at the ceremonies we surveyed, reported use of the Buryat language was more common than in Buryatia more broadly. In this sample of Buryats, 71 percent ($n = 137$) reported speaking the Buryat language as a child, and 70

percent ($n = 134$) reported speaking the Buryat language now. As a basic percentage of Buryats who claim some knowledge of the Buryat language, this is much higher than census data indicate for both Buryatia and the Russian Federation as a whole. As noted above, only 45 percent of 2010 census respondents who claimed their nationality as Buryat claimed knowledge of the Buryat language. Of course, census data cannot capture a great deal of linguistic complexity. Yet even in more detailed sociolinguistic surveys that ask respondents about language *use* rather than knowledge, and that ask them to differentiate between social domains of use, Buryat respondents have reported using Buryat at home in rates of 5–40 percent, with numbers as high as 68 percent only among Buryat teachers (see Dyrkheeva, Darzhaeva, and Bal'zhinimaeva 2009, 86–87). In other words, Buryat participants at these shamanic ceremonies reported levels of Buryat use at home that outpace even those of Buryat educators.

Perhaps more important, our survey respondents reported a surprisingly low rate of language shift over the course of their individual lives. In total, 23 percent ($n = 45$) reported never speaking Buryat, 5 percent ($n = 10$) reported not speaking Buryat as a child but currently speaking it in adulthood, 7 percent ($n = 13$) reported speaking Buryat as a child but that they no longer speak the language, and 65 percent ($n = 124$) reported speaking Buryat both in childhood and today. Logically, speaking Buryat as a child is highly correlated with Buryat language ability as an adult ($\chi^2 = 97.38$, $p < 0.01$). But most Buryat speakers report, both anecdotally and in surveys, that their everyday use of Buryat declines after they begin school, where Russian is usually (though not always) the medium of instruction and social life. Buryat language use at home further drops off through the teen years and twenties, particularly among urban Buryats, who rarely teach their children Buryat at home. These trends over the life course make the stability that our survey respondents report in using Buryat at home (from 71 percent as children to 70 percent now) quite remarkable.

Our survey data further suggest that correlations between Buryat language use and other indices of interest in Buryat “traditional culture” change over the life course. Visiting shamans as a child was significantly associated with speaking Buryat as a child ($\chi^2 = 3.94$, $p < 0.047$) but not with contemporary Buryat language use ($\chi^2 = 0.69$, $p < 0.407$). In contrast, speaking Buryat currently was associated with having attended other ceremonies organized by Tengeri ($\chi^2 = 7.14$, $p < 0.008$), whereas speaking Buryat as a child was not ($\chi^2 = 3.03$, $p < 0.082$). These two correlations may mark the difference between people from rural areas who now live in Ulan-Ude and long-standing urban residents who are now learning Buryat as a result of their involvement with Tengeri. They may also mark differences in interest and volition across the life course. The sample size is too small to draw any definitive conclusions. We can conclude, however, that

Buryat participants at these shamanic ceremonies report higher than average use of Buryat at home, and lower than average language attrition over the life course, correlated with high levels of motivation toward Buryat cultural and linguistic revitalization in informal interviews and qualitative responses.

The shamans affiliated with Tengeri did not identify language revitalization as a goal of the organization *per se*, except insofar as it goes without saying, locally, that language revitalization is the linchpin of cultural revitalization. Yet the same shamans were consciously and enthusiastically pursuing greater fluency in Buryat, both for themselves and for their compatriots. In informal interviews, members of Tengeri reported going out of their way to use Buryat on the grounds, not only in ritual contexts but also in everyday interactions such as sharing bread and tea. While Tengeri's most prominent shamans are fluent, many of the shamans do not speak Buryat, including novice shamans from other parts of Russia, ethnic Buryats from areas that are linguistically heavily Russified, and ethnic Buryats from Buryatia who for one reason or another lost touch with rural family and did not undergo the usual learning process during summers with elderly relatives. Recapitulating the controversial student/teacher model between junior and senior shamans referenced above, one of the more fluent speakers at Tengeri commented that it was important to help teach those who wanted to learn. He carefully modeled formulaic Buryat toasts and other formal language, but just as often I witnessed him using common household expressions, in much the same way that grandparents teach young children. As a way for adults to learn and improve their Buryat language abilities, this was unusual; there are few other contexts like it.

The reasons for the shamans' attention to language are complex. As discussed above, shamans and clients alike have an immediate need to connect—either by channeling or conversing—with *ongons* who speak Buryat. Moreover, the “best” shamanic ceremonies feature remarkable verbal artistry, for which a person (assuming for a moment that it is a human performer and not an *ongon* speaking through that performer) would need to know Buryat extremely well, including multiple registers, styles, dialect differences, and archaic terms. The shamans most consistently identified as powerful and effective channel *ongons* who speak obscure, older dialects of Buryat in poetic verse. At Tengeri some of the most prominent shamans, including Bair Zhambalovich, have backgrounds in Aga, a rural steppe region in Zabaikalskii krai that is renowned among Buryats as an “ark” (Rus. *kovchëg*) of Buryat linguistic and cultural knowledge.¹⁹

Insofar as the *ongons* are supposed to speak *through* the physical being of the shaman, it is not logically essential that the shaman in his or her daily life know the *ongon*'s language, and there are occasional reports of an *ongon* inhabiting the body of someone who does not share his

or her language (or more commonly an “ancient dialect” or unfamiliar speech variety). Some of the shamans at Tengeri maintain, however, that training the vocal apparatus to pronounce the sounds of Buryat will provide an *ongon* with a more inviting host. A recently initiated shaman who has been actively trying to learn Buryat demonstrated her progress by massaging the muscles in her face, pushing her lips dramatically into huge, round “O” and “U” positions to make the sounds of Buryat that sound maximally exotic to monolingual Russian speakers. Other shamans merely smiled at the suggestion that the vocal apparatus could be trained to improve ceremonial performance. For them, bodily praxis is not the main goal of language learning. Rather, the goal is to demonstrate respect: respect for the ancestors, and respect for the place spirits, who on Buryat territory are assumed to speak Buryat. At the Olkhon *tailgan*, several participants from Tengeri cited the fact they were in the presence of a powerful deity (Bur. *burkhan*), the place spirit inhabiting Shaman’s Rock, as reason for speaking Buryat. When I had to leave the island quickly due to a death in my family in the United States, two shamans departing on the same ferry predicted that I would have no trouble speeding home via ferry, car, and airplane. The roads would be open to me, they said, because I had offered a toast in Buryat at a Tengeri event on the preceding evening. “The *burkhan* heard you,” a novice shaman explained as we made our way off the island and back to the mainland. She spoke in Russian, not yet having learned Buryat herself—which was a personal goal to which she returned often in conversation. “He heard how you respected him, how you spoke in the Buryat language, how you spoke in *his* language.”

CONCLUSIONS

As indicated by our survey data, interviews, and participant-observation, Tengeri’s ceremonies are providing a strong incentive to novice shamans and clients alike to maintain and improve their knowledge of Buryat. Their emphasis on using Buryat—as the medium of communication with ancestors, as a way of reclaiming genealogical knowledge, and as a sign of respect—appears to be a driving force of language revitalization. Furthermore, shamanic practices are effective loci of language and cultural revitalization because shamanic treatment requires genealogical and linguistic knowledge. Previously unnecessary kinds of knowledge become not merely useful, but essential, and people are therefore more likely to spend time and effort acquiring and preserving these skills and forms of knowledge. As the stories we have related here testify, illness and family bonds are powerful motivators.

The institutional form that Tengeri offers, while heavily criticized by many in Ulan-Ude, provides a physical locus for these practices, thereby enabling those Buryats who are

not embedded in “traditional” kinship networks to reconnect and recreate them. Tengeri and other shamanic institutions may also be contributing to a revaluing of “traditional” practices among the broader Buryat public simply by making these practices more visible. Buryats like Katya, who find Tengeri odd, and who would never turn to them for help, may, nevertheless, begin to place more value on the fact that they have “their own” in order to contrast themselves with the people engaging in these kinds of “nontraditional” practices. During the Soviet years, continuity with past practices was discursively constructed as “backwardness.” Revitalization projects such as Tengeri’s, even when derided as “nontraditional,” change public perceptions of the value of continuity.

Analytically, these conclusions point to the importance of distinguishing a local discourse of “traditional” vs. “nontraditional” from actual conditions of continuity and rupture, which sometimes, but not always, map onto rural/urban distinctions. While we argue that statistical research must be embedded within ethnographic context in order to be meaningful, our results indicate that quantitative methods can, at times, be a useful grounding against which to examine local discursive claims of “tradition” or “cultural revival.”

The risk of institutionalizing shamanic practice is, of course, that particular individuals become arbiters of “tradition,” thereby endangering the creative, fluid, and inspirational nature of shamanic practice. It must be noted, however, that Tengeri is not alone in its attempts to codify Buryat shamanic traditions. There is a long history of local ethnographic research (on which Tengeri and other contemporary shamans rely) and contemporary attempts by shamans to write down and codify previously fluid “traditions.” Despite these speculations it is clear that Tengeri does in fact do what it claims: “revive Buryat cultural heritage.” The implication for other populations seeking language revitalization and preservation of “traditional” forms of knowledge is that these efforts are most successful in contexts where this knowledge is necessary in order to live a happy and healthy life.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank all our interlocutors, especially the members of Tengeri for their cooperation. We would like to thank Roberto Quijada, Nikolai Tsyrempilov, Jargal Badagarov, Lianna Bagdasaryan, Alexandra Zakharova, and Valya Antropova, without whom this research would not have been completed. We would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments.

FUNDING

Research for this article was generously funded by the National Council of Eurasian and East European Research Indigenous Peoples of Russia Grant 826-17i.

NOTES

1. Names have been changed to protect confidentiality. Public figures who are cited from published sources and shamans who have given explicit consent are referred to by their real names. Both the research and this article are a collaborative project between Justine Quijada, an anthropologist of religion, and Kathryn Graber, a linguistic anthropologist. Justine Quijada has conducted about 18 months of fieldwork in Buryatia over three visits from 2004 to 2012, and Kathryn Graber has conducted 20 months of fieldwork in Buryatia between 2005 and 2012. Because we worked with the same people in the same locations in 2012, “we” is used to refer to both or either of us, as well as Roberto Quijada, the project photographer who was present at all ritual events. “I” is used in certain instances when specific interactions are described and “we” would be awkward. In these instances “I” generally refers to Justine Quijada in discussions of *tailgans* and to Kathryn Graber on the subject of language use. Eric Stephen provided the statistical analysis of survey data and wrote the sections pertaining to this material. Both Russian and Buryat were used in our fieldwork, and the members of Tengeri and ceremony participants used both languages when discussing their practices. Dialogue was in Russian unless otherwise indicated. We provide terminology in the language used most often by our interlocutors, whether Russian (Rus.) or Buryat (Bur.) as indicated.
2. Additional survey data that we collected but which does not appear in this article concern why ceremony participants said they attended and how they learned about the events. In future work, this data should allow us to retrace information networks and see the impact of different Buryat- and Russian-language media and social networks as information sources.
3. It should be noted that not everyone who visits Tengeri is ethnically Buryat. At the ceremonies we surveyed in Ulan-Ude, 70 percent of the respondents self-identified as Buryat only; 25 percent of the participants self-identify as Russian only; another 3 percent indicated other nationalities. Interestingly, only slightly over 1 percent self-identified as both Russian and Buryat, which, based on interview data, indicates that the vast majority of individuals of mixed heritage self-identify as one or the other ethnicity. Many clients and shamans at Tengeri are of mixed Russian and Buryat (or other Eurasian) backgrounds. In addition there are at least two fully ethnic Russian shamans practicing at Tengeri on a regular basis. Overall, Buryats represent just under 30 percent of the population of the Republic of Buryatia.
4. For comparative data on the level of education, urbanization, and economic development among Buryats vis-à-vis other former Soviet nationalities, see Chakars 2014, especially chapter 3; Kaiser 1994; and Schroeder 1990.
5. A much higher percentage of census respondents reported their “native language” (*rodnoi iazyk*) as Buryat—82 percent in 2010, or 234,022 respondents out of 286,839 self-identified Buryats (Rosstat 2012–13, 290). The discrepancy is due to the practice, widespread in the former Soviet Union, of considering one’s *rodnoi iazyk* to be one’s “heritage” or “ancestral” language, regardless of actual competence. Census respondents were asked, “Do you know [literally “control,” *vladet*] the Russian language?” (Yes/No) and “What other languages do you know?” with three blank spaces to write in the names of additional languages and their corresponding codes. Below this was a separate blank in which to indicate “your native language” and its corresponding code.
6. Whether or not Buryats should be considered “indigenous” is a matter of debate. We consider them to be indigenous in the sense that they are the long-standing occupants of lands that have since been brought under the political control of larger nation-states (Russia, Mongolia, and China) dominated by other ethnic groups, and that those lands, including both spiritual/ceremonial relationships to the land and a history of pastoral nomadism, have a strong relationship to their identity as a group. However, Buryats are too numerous to be considered “indigenous” under Russian law. As a consequence of Soviet nationality policies, most Buryats think of themselves as a “nationality” and associate the term “indigenous” with the “numerically small nationalities of the North,” such as the Ewenki or Chuckchi. Since the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Affairs stresses self-identification as a central feature of “indigeneity,” the fact that Buryats do not consistently self-identify as indigenous undermines our definition. In our experience, shamans and those involved in shamanism are more likely to think of themselves as “indigenous” or seek similarities between themselves and other indigenous groups than Buddhist Buryats (see Quijada 2009). There is no political leadership, such as a tribal government, that would have the authority to make such a claim on behalf of the whole population. See Graber (2012, 38–40) for further discussion of this question.
7. See also Humphrey (1971, 150), who makes a similar claim.
8. See Quijada (2011) on the process of diagnosing a shamanic calling at Tengeri. See Tkacz et al. (2002) for a detailed account of an initiation very similar to those conducted at Tengeri. The *tailgan* as a ritual form will be discussed further below.
9. “Other than human person” is a phrase coined by anthropologist Irving Hallowell in the 1950s in reference to Ojibwe cosmology, but has since been adopted more widely to refer to beings whose characteristics are not well represented by the English terms “spirit” or “deity.” When these beings are referred to as “persons,” the term is intended to signal that they have social relationships.
10. Buddhist organizations, such as the Etigelov Institute, also have to defend themselves against the accusation that they should not advertise (see Quijada 2009).
11. There is very little pan-Siberian indigenous activism, and Buryats, who, as noted above, are not considered one of the numerically small peoples of the North, do not appear to be very invested in pan-Siberian connections. Economic dislocations and tremendous distances throughout Siberia contribute to this, but Soviet nationality policies, which stressed ethnic particularism (Slezkine 1996) and a pan-Soviet identity, may also work against the articulation of a pan-Siberian identity. See Hirsch 2005 for an excellent discussion of regional vs. ethnic considerations in Soviet nationality policy.
12. It should be noted that “clan” (Rus. *rod*) is a somewhat flexible term that tends to be used to refer to kinship groups beyond the immediate family. These can range from extended family in a village to much larger and abstract territorial designations. Clans have names that are used to identify an individual to spirits during a ritual.
13. “*Ug*” is the lineage or “root.”
14. The regional location is noted because shamanic practices vary considerably from one area to another. This practice may not be standard elsewhere in Buryatia, and we do not wish to contribute to authorizing one region’s practices over another’s. The practice is merely an example of the underlying logic.
15. See, for example, Bernstein (2006), which shows an interview with a professional Buryat couple from Ulan-Ude who had traveled to Olkhon to make offerings to the husband’s clan ancestors, despite not having any remaining relatives on Olkhon.
16. See also Buyandelger (2007) and (2013) for a discussion of shamanic etiologies among Buryats in Mongolia. As the Director of the Tengeri organization studied with a Buryat shaman in Mongolia, the categorizations of illness and diagnosis are similar, despite a very different social context.
17. Some of the most detailed sociolinguistic surveys conducted by this group, including Dyrkheeva, Darzhaeva, and Bal’zhinimaeva’s (2009) survey referenced herein, distinguish Buddhist temples and sacred sites as a separate domain of use.
18. For a discussion of reactions to Buryat-language shamanic material in interviews and focus groups, see Graber 2012, 186–194.

19. Verbal artistry in the ritual language of contemporary Buryat shamans bears further analysis. Preliminarily, it should be noted that the efficacy of such poetics depends not only on the linguistic ability of the performer (whether that be the shaman or the *ongon*), but also on that of the audience.

REFERENCES

- Balogh, Matyas. 2010. "Contemporary Shamanisms in Mongolia" *Asian Ethnicity* 11, no. 2: 229–38.
- Balzer, Marjorie Mandelstam. 2005. "Whose Steeple Is Higher? Religious Competition in Siberia." *Religion, State and Society* 33, no. 1: 57–69.
- . 2011. *Shamans, Spirituality and Cultural Revitalization: Explorations in Siberia and Beyond*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Banzarov, Dorzhi. 1997. *Sobranie sochinenii* (Collected Essays). Ulan-Ude: BNTs CO RAN.
- Batomunkuev, Sergei. 2003. "Buryat Urbanization and Modernization: A Theoretical Model Based on the Example of Ulan-Ude." *Inner Asia* 5, no. 1: 3–16.
- Bernstein, Anya. 2006. *In Pursuit of the Siberian Shaman* (film). Documentary Education Resources.
- Bolotova, V.P. 2011. *Religioznaia gazeta mestnoi religioznoi organizatsii shamanov "Tengeri."* Vypusk n. 3. *Da budet slaven vash rod!* (Religious Newsletter of the Local Religious Organization "Tengeri." Issue No. 3. May your clan be blessed!).
- . 2012. *Religioznaia gazeta mestnoi religioznoi organizatsii shamanov "Tengeri."* Vypusk n. 4. *Da budet slaven vash rod!* (Religious Newsletter of the Local Religious Organization "Tengeri." Issue No. 4. May your clan be blessed!).
- Buyandelgeriyn, Manduhai. 2007. "Dealing with Uncertainty: Shamans, Marginal Capitalism, and the Remaking of History in Post-Socialist Mongolia." *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 1: 127–47.
- Buyandelger, Manduhai. 2013. *Tragic Spirits: Shamanism, Memory and Gender in Contemporary Mongolia*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Chakars, Melissa. 2014. *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia: Transformation in Buryatia*. Budapest and New York: Central European University Press.
- Conklin, Beth. 1997. "Body Paint, Feathers and VCRs: Aesthetics and Authenticity in Amazonian Activism." *American Ethnologist* 24, no. 4: 711–37.
- Dugarov, Dashinima. 2002. Foreword to *Shanar: Dedication Ritual of a Buryat Shaman in Siberia as Conducted by Bayir Rinchinov*, by Virlana Tkacz with Sayan Zhambalov and Wanda Phipps. New York: Parabola Books.
- Dyrkheeva, G.A. 2002. *Buriatskii iazyk v usloviiakh dvuiazychiia: problema funktsionirovaniia i perspektivy razvitiia* (The Buryat Language in the Conditions of Bilingualism: Problems of Functionality and Perspectives of Development). Ulan-Ude: BNTs SO RAN.
- . 2003. *Iazykovaia situatsiia i iazykovoe zakonodatel'stvo v Respublike Buriatii* (The Language Situation and Language Legislation in the Republic of Buryatia). Series: Prava cheloveka i zakonodatel'stvo o iazykakh v sub"ektakh Rossiiskoi Federatsii (Human Rights and Legislation on Languages in the Subjects of the Russian Federation). Moscow: Russian University of the Friendship of the Peoples.
- Dyrkheeva, G.A., N.B. Darzhaeva, Ts.Ts. Bal'zhinimaeva, et al. 2009. *Buriatskii iazyk v politikal'nom prostranstve (sotsiolingvoistoricheskoe issledovanie)* [The Buryat language in political-cultural context (socio-linguistic historical research)] Ulan-Ude: BNTs SO RAN.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1964. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Fishman, Joshua. 1967. "Bilingualism With and Without Diglossia; Diglossia With and Without Bilingualism." *Journal of Social Issues* 23, no. 2: 29–38.
- Gal, Susan. 1998. "Political Culture and the Making of Tradition: A Comment." *Austrian History Yearbook* 29: 249–60.
- Galdanova, G. R. 1987. *Dolamaistskie verovaniia Buriat* (Pre-Lamaist Belief System of the Buryats). Novosibirsk: Nauka—sibirskoe otdelenie.
- Gerasimova, K.M., G.R. Galdanova, and G.N. Ochirova. 2000. *Traditsionnaia kul'tura Buriat* (Traditional Culture of the Buryats). Ulan-Ude: BELIG.
- Giuliano, Elise. 2006. "Theorizing Nationalist Separatism in Russia." In *Rebounding Identities: The Politics of Identity in Russia and Ukraine*. Edited by Dominique Arel and Blair Ruble. Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press.
- Gomboev, S.Zh. 2010. *Pod vechnym sinim nebom: Sviataia neugasimaia vera Shamanizm* (Under the Eternal Blue Sky: Sacred Inextinguishable Faith Shamanism). Ulan-Ude.
- Graber, Kathryn. 2012. "Knowledge and Authority in Shift: A Linguistic Ethnography of Multilingual News Media in the Buryat Territories of Russia." PhD diss. Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan.
- Hirsch, Francine. 2005. *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Humphrey, Caroline. 1971. "Magical Drawings in the Religion of the Buryat." PhD diss. Girton College, Cambridge University.
- . 1998. *Marx Went Away but Karl Stayed Behind*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- . 2002. "Shamans in the City." Chap. 10 in *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economies After Socialism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Humphrey, Caroline, and Urgunge Onon. 1996. *Shamans and Elders: Experience, Knowledge and Power Among the Daur Mongols*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press.
- Kaiser, Robert. 1994. *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Khilkanova, Erzhen Vladimirovna. 2007. *Fakty kolektivnogo vybora iazyka i etnokul'turnaia identichnost' u sovremennykh Buriat (diskurs-analiticheskii podkhod)* (Factors of Collective Language Choice and Ethnonational Identity Among Contemporary Buryats [Discourse Analysis Approach]). Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'skopoliigraficheskii kompleks FGOU VPO VSGAKI.
- . 2009. "Fakty iazykovogo sdviga i sokhraneniia minoritarnykh iazykov: diskursnyi i sotsiolingvisticheskii analiz (na materiale iazykovoi situatsii v etnicheskoi Buriatii)" (Factors Affecting Shift and Preservation of Minority Languages: Discursive and Sociolinguistic Analysis [On Materials Pertaining to the Linguistic Situation Among Ethnic Buryats]). Doctoral dissertation, VSGAKI (Ulan-Ude and Barnaul).
- Krader, Lawrence. 1954. "Buryat Religion and Society." *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 10, no. 3: 322–51.
- Levi-Strauss, Claude. 1963. "The Effectiveness of Symbols." In *Structural Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lewis, I.M. 2003 [1971]. *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*. London: Routledge.
- Lindquist, Galina. 2005. "Healers, Leaders and Entrepreneurs: Shamanic Revival in Southern Siberia." *Culture and Religion* 6, no. 2: 263–85.
- Long, Joseph. 2008. "Libations and Ritual Offerings in Ekhril Buriat Shamanism." *Sibirica* 7, no. 2: 83–102.
- Metzo, Katherine. 2003. "Whither Peasants in Siberia? Agricultural Reform, Subsistence and Being Rural." *Culture and Agriculture* 25, no. 1: 11–25.
- Mikhailov, T.M. 1987. *Buriatskii Shamanizm: Istoriia, struktura i sotsial'nye funktsii* (Buryat Shamanism: History, Structure and Social Function). Novosibirsk: Nauka.
- . 1990. "Buryat Shamanism: History, Structure, and Social Functions." In *Shamanism: Soviet Studies of Traditional Religion in Siberia and Central Asia*. Edited by Marjorie M. Balzer. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.

- . T.M. 2004. "Shamanizm—drevniaia religiia buriat (Shamanism—Ancient Religion of the Buryats)." In *Buriaty* (The Buryats). Edited by L. L. Abaeva and N.L. Zhukovskaya. Moscow: Nauka.
- Pedersen, Morten Axel. 2011. *Not Quite Shamans: Spirit Worlds and Political Lives in Northern Mongolia*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Povinelli, Elizabeth. 2002. *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Quijada, Justine Buck. 2008. "What If We Don't Know Our Clan? The City *Tailgan* as New Ritual Form in Buriatia." *Sibirica* 7, no. 1: 1–22.
- . 2009. "Opening the Roads: History and Religion in Post-Soviet Buryatia." PhD diss. Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago.
- . 2011. "Symptoms as Signs in Buriat Shamanic Callings." In *The Healing Landscapes of Central and Southeastern Siberia*. Edited by David Anderson. Occasional Publication No. 71; Patterns of Northern Traditional Healing Series No. 1. Edmonton, Alberta: Canadian Circumpolar Institute (CCI) Press in cooperation with the Centre for the Cross-Cultural Study of Health and Healing, University of Alberta.
- Rosstat. 2004. *Vserossiiskaia perepis' naseleniia 2002 goda* (All-Russia Population Census of 2002). Available at <http://www.perepis2002.ru/index.html?id=11>, accessed May 11, 2011.
- Rosstat. 2012–13. *Itogi Vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniia 2010 goda*. Tom 4, *Natsional'snyi sostav i vladenie iazykami, grazhdanstvo* [Results of All-Russia Population Census of 2010. Volume 4, National composition and language use of citizenry]. Available at http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis_itogi1612.htm, accessed September 26, 2014.
- Rupen, Robert A. 1956. "The Buriat Intelligentsia." *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 15, no. 3: 383–98.
- Schroeder, Gertrude E. 1990. "Nationalities and the Soviet Economy." In *The Nationalities Factor in Soviet Politics and Society*. Edited by Lubomyr Hajda and Mark Beissinger. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Shaglanova, Ol'ga A. 2012. "Buriat Urban Shamanism as a Phenomenon." *Anthropology and Archeology of Eurasia* 51, no. 3: 76–88.
- Slezkine, Yuri. 1996. "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism." In *Becoming National: A Reader*. Edited by Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Taussig, Michael. 1987. *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Thomas, Nicholas, and Caroline Humphrey. 1996. "Introduction" to *Shamanism, History and The State*. Edited by Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphrey. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Tkacz, Virlana, with Sayan Zhambalov and Wanda Phipps. 2002. *Shanar: Dedication Ritual of a Buryat Shaman in Siberia as Conducted by Bayir Rinchinov*. New York: Parabola Books.
- Tugutov, I.E. 1978. "The Tailagan as a Principal Shamanistic Ritual of the Buryats." In *Shamanism in Siberia*. Edited by V. Dioszegi and M. Hoppal. Budapest: Akademiai Kiado.
- Vitebsky, Piers. 2003. "From Cosmology to Environmentalism: Shamanism as Local Knowledge in a Global Setting." In *Shamanism: A Reader*. Edited by Graham Harvey. London: Routledge.
- Zhukovskaia, N.L. 2000. "Neo-Shamanism in the Context of the Contemporary Ethno-Cultural Situation in the Republic of Buryatia." *Inner Asia* 2, no. 1: 25–36.