

**SHAMANIC RITUALS AS SITES OF RELIGIO-CULTURAL REVIVAL:  
A STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC AND CULTURAL  
DIFFERENCES OF ATTENDEES AT SHAMANIC CEREMONIES IN  
BURYATIA, RUSSIA**



By

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## INTRODUCTION

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As part of an interdisciplinary research project examining indigenous religious revival in post-Soviet Russia, anthropologist of religion Justine Buck Quijada and colleagues (2012) collected ethnographic and survey data from attendees at five shamanic ceremonies in Buryatia, a republic in Southern Siberia abutting the Mongolian border that is under the subject of the Russian Federation. Close to 30% of the population of Buryatia is comprised of the republic's titular nationality—the Buryats—an indigenous population that has traditionally observed shamanism as a religio-cultural practice. As with other indigenous communities in Russia, the Buryats witnessed an aggressive attempt at the extirpation of native language, culture, and religion at the hand of the Soviet government throughout the twentieth century.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the increased autonomy that accompanied the status of Republic within the Russian Federation, many Buryats have begun the process of reviving the traditional religious and cultural practices that had been suppressed during the Soviet era. The “Local Religious Organization of Shamans, Tengeri”,<sup>1</sup> for example, is a legally recognized collective of practicing Buryat shamans located in Ulan-Ude, Buryatia's capital city. As part of their practice, the shamans who belong to Tengeri seek to utilize shamanism to not only resuscitate Buryat traditional culture but also to act as a public health service that will help militate against the spiritual ills plaguing Buryatia in the post-Soviet age (Quijada 2009).

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<sup>1</sup> Rus. *Mestnoe Religioznoe Organizatsiia Shamanov Tengeri*; henceforth: Tengeri.

Through years of ethnographic study in Ulan-Ude, Quijada (2009) followed Tengeri, examining it as a locus for the revival of traditional religious belief and national identity. Now, with the collection of survey data at Tengeri's ceremonies, ethnographic accounts may be augmented by an analysis of statistical trends found among the attendees. Of particular interest are the demographic and cultural differences between those attending the small community ceremonies (*tailgans*<sup>2</sup>) and those attending a large tourist ceremony held annually at Olkhon Island in Lake Baikal, a UNESCO World Heritage site on the western border of Buryatia.

Quijada (2008) suggests that the *tailgans* performed by Tengeri shamans deviate from "traditional" ceremonies as a result of Buryat urbanization and increased multiculturalism but, at the same time, operate as sites of traditional religious and cultural revival. Regarding the distinction made between the smaller *tailgans* and the *tailgan* of Olkhon Island, this thesis seeks to examine the demographic background and cultural behaviors of attendees to determine whether these ceremonies attract disparate groups of religious observers despite their similar cosmological goals. Given the structure of these ritual *tailgans*, it is hypothesized that individuals attending the Olkhon event are less likely to report cultural behaviors and attitudes that would index a "traditional" Buryat identity, such as knowledge of the Buryat language or a history of attendance at shamanic ceremonies.

To analyze this question, this work will place the ethnographic accounts of Quijada (2009) in conversation with statistical and psychological methods of analytic

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<sup>2</sup> While Russian words are pluralized with the suffix *-i*, the English suffix *-s* is used here for ease of reading.

inquiry. In doing so, this thesis intends to provide an exemplar of Emmons & Paloutzian's (2003:395) call for a "multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm" for the study of religion, one that values different methods of analysis as complementary and productive.

Following Vergote's (1997) assertion that a non-reductive empirical study of religion must begin with a description of the specific religious phenomenon being examined from the perspective of believers, the Introduction below begins with a brief history of Buryat shamanism, including a cosmological background of Buryat shamanic theology as well as the emergence of Tengeri as a religious organization. Once this is established, basic psychological principles from within cultural, social, and neurocognitive psychology as they apply to the academic study of shamanism will be examined. This review will be used to contextualize both Quijada's ethnographic research and also the survey data collected for this study into a psychological framework that can subsequently be called upon for analysis.

### **CONTEXTUALIZING TENERI: SHAMANISM AND/IN BURYATIA**

Although it is likely that the first inhabitants<sup>3</sup> of modern day Buryatia were the Evenki in the fifth through ninth centuries, the titular nationality of Buryatia is, eponymously, the Buryat people (Figure 1). The first recorded mention of the Buryats

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<sup>3</sup> Archaeological evidence suggests that *Homo sapiens*, likely of Yeniseian origin, first entered Siberia around 45,000 BCE (see Vajda 2013). The usage of the term "first inhabitants" here is meant only to signify those who had cultivated the land and developed a territorial association with it (see also Graber 2012).



**Figure 1:** A contemporary map of Russia, with Buryatia highlighted, inset over a map of Buryatia itself. Note Lake Baikal to the nation’s west and Mongolia to its south. Ulan-Ude and Olkhon Island, two geographic regions discussed in depth in this paper, have been added to the map. Original photo courtesy of <[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d7/Outline\\_Map\\_of\\_Buryatia\\_\(with\\_position\\_on\\_the\\_Map\\_of\\_Russia\).svg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d7/Outline_Map_of_Buryatia_(with_position_on_the_Map_of_Russia).svg)>.

is found in *The Secret History of the Mongols*, the oldest extant Mongolian-language text, written around 1240 for the royal family to commemorate the death of the founder of the Mongolian empire, Genghis Khan (Cleaves 1982). The work describes the subjugation of the “Buryiad” tribes of the Lake Baikal region—small, relatively isolated, nomadic communities with both Siberian and Mongolian ancestry—and the incorporation of their territory into the empire in 1207. For the nearly four centuries that the Buryats fell under Mongolian control, the Mongols exerted a strong cultural and political influence. As a result of the intersections between language, ethnicity,



and culture that developed over this time, the use of the term “Buryat-Mongol” as an ethnonym to describe the indigenous people<sup>4</sup> of this region is also common (Sarangerel 2014).

At the time of their conquest, Buryats lived in semi-nomadic herding tribes and engaged in ritual spiritual practices that are now referred to as “shamanism”. As will be discussed in more detail below, shamanism as an anthropological category is highly contested. While some theorists criticize the label “shamanism” as an umbrella term used by Western intellectuals to reductively amalgamate a wide variety of indigenous religio-cultural beliefs (Kehoe 2000), others have embraced shamanism as an expansive term that can be used to delineate a universal religious phenomenon found among almost every indigenous population on the globe (Eliade 1964). Regardless of the expansiveness of the category itself, most scholars agree that shamanism is deeply rooted in Siberian culture and mythology. Hoppál (2005:83), for example, considers Siberia to be the *locus classicus* of shamanic practice. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, the members of Tengeri use the term “shaman” (*bö* [m.] and *udayan* [f.]) to describe themselves professionally and are widely recognized by Buryat citizens as such (Quijada 2009). A more in depth review of Buryat shamanic cosmology and ritual practice is described in the next section.

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout this thesis, Buryats will be referred to as an indigenous community because of their long-standing occupation of and religio-spiritual relationship to the land, consistent with past ethnographic research. However, whether Buryats should be seen as “indigenous” is a matter of debate. For example, the Buryat population is too large to be considered “indigenous” under Russian law, and many Buryats do not self-identify as indigenous (Quijada 2009). See Graber (2012) for further discussion.

Around 1640, Buddhist missionaries from the Gelugpa branch of Tibetan Buddhism reached the Baikal region and were highly successful at converting Buryats, particularly those in the east who were more culturally tied to Mongolia.<sup>5</sup> In 1741, Russian Empress Elizaveta Petrovna even issued a decree (*ukuz*) granting official recognition to Buddhism, which the tsarist government viewed as a more civilized alternative to shamanic practice due to its formalized theological system and written scripture (Schorkowitz 2001; Holland 2014). As a result, Buddhism was able to become deeply ingrained in Buryat culture and is often considered part of indigenous religious belief, alongside shamanism (Cakars 2008). The ease at which Buddhist and shamanic traditions were able to concurrently thrive in Buryat society was largely facilitated by the fact that many people in Buryatia did not follow only one religion exclusively, but instead participated syncretically in several, choosing the faith that they believed will be most helpful for their current spiritual situation (Quijada 2009). This trend has continued into the present day: although it is common for Buryats to report that they identify with one specific faith (or as atheistic), very few engage with only one religious community.<sup>6</sup>

At roughly the same time that Buddhist proselytizers arrived in Buryatia, European Russians began reconnoitering Siberia, ushering a third major religion into the area: Christianity. When European Russian explorers reached the Trans-Baikal region in the early 1600s, they estimated the Buryat population to be around 30,000

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<sup>5</sup> Tibetan Buddhism had made a cultural impact on Mongolia since the capture of Tibet by the Golden Horde in the 1240s (Jagchid 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Many religious professionals in Buryatia have come to accept this religious syncretism (*sinkretizm*), and some even celebrate it. For discussion, see Quijada (2009).

people, making it one of the largest—and most militarily powerful—populations in Siberia (Cakars 2008). Russian Orthodox missionaries as well as exiled Old Believer (*Semeiskie*) dissidents both arrived in Siberia in large numbers, launching campaigns to convert Buddhist and shamanic followers to Christianity. Ultimately, Russian Christians were less successful than Buddhists, however. According to Schorkowitz (2001), this was at least partly due to the fact that missionaries did not receive sufficient support from the tsarist government because conversion to Christianity would allow Siberian natives to change tax status. As a result, proselytizing campaigns were left underfunded and sporadic.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, many Buryats also resisted conversion due to a strong, culturally constructed belief in the intersection between religious identity and ethnicity. Bawden (1985), for example, describes Buryat fears in the nineteenth century that conversion to Christianity would simultaneously also mean that one would *eo ipso* become “Russian”. Many Buryats who did convert to Christianity did so in order to receive state tax benefits and, after conversion, continued to observe Buryat traditional religious practices, much to the displeasure of Orthodox priests (Balzer 1999). Despite the proselytizing goals of the Christians and Buddhists, the two religious groups came to coexist with Buryat shamans in tenuous peace during the era of the Russian Empire (Quijada 2009).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> It was not until the late nineteenth century that Moscow took Christian proselytism seriously; however, this was pragmatically too late to reach Buryats in large numbers (Cakars 2008).

<sup>8</sup> This interfaith syncretism and coexistence is not necessarily surprising given Buryatia’s geographic positioning, according to Holland (2014), who suggests that Buryatia may be seen as a “religious borderland”—a space where divergent cultures and worldviews intersect and possibly even fuse together. Holland takes this term from Roof (1998), who discusses it much more in depth.

Ulan-Ude, the site of this study, was first settled under the name Udinskoye<sup>9</sup> in 1666 by Russian Cossacks who were exiled to Siberia. This occurred at roughly the same time that the Russian imperial government began to more formally stake a territorial claim to the Transbaikal region. Geographically, the city is situated alongside the Uda River, a right tributary of a major river of the area called the Selenga that feeds into Lake Baikal. Because of its advantageous position, the city soon became a center of Siberian trade with Mongolia and China, and by the end of the seventeenth century the Russians had taken control of the area militarily. Although this can be viewed as a first step toward Russian control in the area, the Buryats remained relatively autonomous throughout much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Cakars 2008).

In 1861, however, Tsar Aleksandr II officially abolished serfdom in Russia, which, combined with a rapid population rise in European Russia and the government's desire to develop agriculture in the eastern territories, led the Russian government to encourage Siberian immigration (Forsyth 1992). In order to do this, Moscow found it necessary to develop a system of individual property ownership in Siberia, including the Baikal the region. For the semi-nomadic Buryat tribes who maintained communally owned pastures, however, this posed serious threats to both their economy and also their societal structure (Cakars 2008). The implementation of this new agricultural system struck a deathly blow to Buryat autonomy, particularly as Russian authorities were sent into the area in 1901 to assure a smooth transition.

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<sup>9</sup> The name was changed to Udinsk around 1735, then Verkneudinsk in 1783. The final change to Ulan-Ude (Red Uda) took place in 1934 as part of a "Sovietization" movement.

Although Buryat socialists—calling for self-government, universal suffrage, and communal property ownership—revolted against increased Russian presence in 1905, the revolution was short lived and easily suppressed (Cakars 2008). Through a series of migrations throughout the early 1900s, Buryats soon became a minority ethnicity in a region they had once controlled.

With the outbreak of the Russian Civil War in 1917 and the emergence of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1922, a cultural sea change overtook Russia that heavily affected religious and cultural life. Although religion was never banned outright, the USSR became the world's first officially atheist state and took a hostile view toward religion more broadly, seeking its eradication as an ideological goal. The 1918 Decree of the Soviet People's Commissioners, for example, declared that "[t]he free performance of religious rites is granted as long as it does not disturb public order or infringe upon the rights of citizens of the Soviet Republic. In such cases, the local authorities are entitled to take the necessary measures to secure public order and safety" (translated by Pospelsovsky 1987:133, cited in Quijada 2009:56). Here, religion was still legally recognized, but broad and ambiguous language nonetheless imbued authorities with the power to suppress any religious activity deemed to be inconsistent with public order. Undergirding this hostility toward religion was the Marxist belief, prevalent among the now powerful Bolsheviks, that religion signified a primitive intellectual system founded on ignorance and fear that would naturally come to be replaced by education and socialist communitarian

ethics.<sup>10</sup> Yet although the early Soviet government advocated atheism, particularly in literary works, little was actually done to forestall shamanic, Orthodox, or Buddhist practice in Siberia during the USSR's infancy (Cakars 2008).

As part of the USSR, the Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR)<sup>11</sup> was founded in 1923. At the same time, Bolshevik leaders in Moscow authorized a policy of "nativization" (*korenizatsiia*) in which Siberian indigenous culture was celebrated and bolstered in an attempt to "create a modern socialist society where all ethnic groups would fully participate" (Cakars 2008:45). Many Buryats, particularly Buryat intellectuals, viewed this policy optimistically as a first step toward independence and potentially even a reunification with Mongolia. For the policy of *korenizatiia* to prove consistent with Soviet atheism, however, authorities only allowed for those cultural practices that were perceived to not be theological in nature, which fallaciously assumed that religion and culture could easily be divorced.

An optimistic attitude toward independence and cultural revitalization quickly waned, however, when Joseph Stalin rose to power and implemented a series of collectivization (*kollektivizatsiia*) policies during the early 1930s. Through a series of Stalinist Five Year Plans, Buryats were systematically dispossessed from both their land and property and placed into small farming communities. The Soviet government argued that collectivization would prove a vastly superior system to

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<sup>10</sup> For example, according to the 1919 Party Programme, an explicit aim of the new communist state would be "to liberate the toiling masses from religious prejudices and to organize the broadest scientific-educational and anti-religious propaganda" (translated by Corley 1996:13, cited in Quijada 2009:57).

<sup>11</sup> The term "Mongolian" was removed from the name in 1958 as part of a "Russification" movement.



**Figure 2:** “A Soviet anti-shamanic poster that encouraged ‘tribal masses’ to expel shamans from native communities.” Photo and explanation courtesy of <<http://cassian.memphis.edu/history/znmenski/znamenski%20web/chapter%209.htm>>.

nomadism or private property ownership because of its ability to “modernize the nomads’ methods, intensify their labor, condense the amount of land they used, thereby freeing up more land for cultivation, and increase the number of livestock in the Soviet Union” (Cakars 2008:52). Although some Buryats did revolt against collectivization (most notably in the Shambhala War of 1931), the Stalinist purges of 1937—where Buryat anti-revolutionary agitators, religious leaders, and advocates of reintegration to Mongolia were mercilessly slaughtered by the Soviet

government—largely rocked Buryatia into silence (Sarangerel 2014).<sup>12</sup> By 1938, 92% of people living the Buryat-Mongol ASSR were settled onto collective farms (Cakars 2008).

Most practicing shamans during the 1930s also fell victim to Stalin’s Great Purge (*Yezhovshchina*). Within the USSR, shamans were regarded as particularly dangerous, savage purveyors of cultic and primitive religious practice (Figure 2). To

<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that the victims of Stalin’s Great Purge included the party’s *supporters* in addition to its dissidents. As such, purges were not predicated on party politics but instead on the desire to make clear that all persons under the subject of the USSR must submit to the Soviet government.

that end, before the purges numerous shamans were cast out of mainstream Soviet society via deportation, denounced formally by the government, and denied basic rights such as suffrage (Pospelovsky 1987). In addition to their status as religious professionals, the Soviet government also attempted to extirpate shamans during the Stalinist period because of their ability to act as powerful sources of resistance, working to undermine Soviet governmental structures in order to preserve indigenous culture. Balzer (1983), for example, suggests that Soviet sympathizers feared shamans not only because of an ideological distrust of religious leaders but also because of the commanding ways in which shamans could cultivate communal solidarity within indigenous Siberian communities.<sup>13</sup> In the eyes of the Soviets, shamans were powerful symbols of anti-revolutionary subversion that needed to be forcefully suppressed in order for communist ideology to take hold in Siberia. As such, shamanic practice during the Soviet era was forced underground, and the few elements of Buryat culture that had been allowed into the public sphere under *korenizatsiia* were stripped of any traditional religious undertones.

Shamanism was not the only religious practice forcefully suppressed during the Stalin era. Soviet communists also effectively demolished the institutional structure of other religious communities—such as Orthodox Christianity and Buddhism—through the production of anti-religious propaganda, the forced closure of places of worship, the destruction of sacred texts, and the societal ostracism of

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<sup>13</sup> The Kazym Rebellion of 1933, where the Kanty people of Western Siberia responded violently to Soviet collectivization, is a good example of the power of shamans to encourage political mobilization (Balzer 1983).



religious professionals.<sup>14</sup> The eradication of religion was so swift and extreme that Zhukovskaya (1997:5), for example, asserts that “from the late 1930s, the Buddhist culture of Buryatia ceased to exist” (cited in Holland 2014:6).

Any formal acknowledgement of indigenous identity under *korenizatsiia* was dissolved by the post-World War II period, when the USSR began taking active steps to induct Siberian ethnic groups into Russian culture. In Buryatia, public schools were forced to stop teaching the Buryat language or Mongolian script; traditional forms of art were proscribed; and any discussion of Buryat heroes, such as the Mongol King Geser, was banned outright (Blitstein 2001; Cakars 2008). At the heart of these nationalization efforts was an attempt to downplay the ethnic and cultural similarities between Siberian indigenous communities and those of Eastern Asia in order to “Russify” the Siberian peoples. Moreover, in an attempt to prevent pan-Mongolian sentiments between Buryatia, Mongolia, and Northern China, the Buryat border was closed to travellers (Cakars 2008).<sup>15</sup>

Nonetheless, in many ways, the Soviet government viewed Buryats as a “model minority” because of their limited opposition, widespread literacy and Russian language skills, high education rates, and prevalence in professional occupations (Cakars 2008:11). This idealization of the Buryat citizen as an educated, urban professional that emerged after World War II produced a new understanding of the self and of community for many Buryats who were previously accustomed to

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<sup>14</sup> Humphrey (1998) argues that it is precisely shamanism’s lack of institutional structure that has allowed it to survive the Soviet era, as shamanic practices were therefore able to adapt to the changing social and structural conditions of modernization.

<sup>15</sup> The manufacture of military goods in Buryatia also substantially contributed to the closure of its borders (Leisse & Leisse 2007).

pastoral and nomadic lives. As such, the Buryat elite came to re-envision contemporary Buryat culture in a modernized context throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. As we will see, one of the primary concerns of contemporary shamanism surrounds emplacing traditional belief systems into a culture that was rapidly and substantially transformed by Soviet agents of urbanization and modernization.

With Stalin's death, the most violent era of the Soviet period came to a close. Although shamanism remained heavily persecuted during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras, toleration toward religion expanded. The Soviet government in the 1960s even came to recognize Buddhism as an expression of national culture for several Siberian indigenous communities, including the Buryats (Quijada 2009). Finally, the Soviet government passed the Law on Freedom of Religion in 1990, which greatly expanded religious liberty and equality. This newfound tolerance for religion piqued the interest of Buryat intellectuals, who viewed it as a foothold for the resuscitation of traditional culture at a much broader level (Bourdeaux 2000; Holland 2014).<sup>16</sup>

Following a Soviet restructuring policy during the 1980s known as *perestroika*, the USSR officially dissolved in 1991 to be replaced by the Russian Federation. The Republic of Buryatia officially became an autonomous republic of the Russian Federation in 1992, with Ulan-Ude as its capital. Today, Ulan-Ude boasts over 400,000 residents (roughly 42% of Buryatia's population), making it the third

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<sup>16</sup> However, it should also be noted that membership in the Buryat intelligentsia often fell along clan lines, and thus this community should not be read to be representative of Buryats *in toto*. For discussion, see Skrynnikova (2003).



**Figure 3:** A contemporary map of Russia where large populations of Buryats are highlighted in pink. This includes the Republic of Buryatia, the Irkutsk Oblast, the Chita Oblast, and some parts of northern Mongolia and China. Photo courtesy of <[http://www.geo.tu-freiberg.de/studenten/Baikal\\_2004/baikalexursion/history/culture/culture.htm](http://www.geo.tu-freiberg.de/studenten/Baikal_2004/baikalexursion/history/culture/culture.htm)>.

largest city in Siberia.<sup>17</sup> Buryats comprise roughly 28% of the population of Buryatia and are one of the most highly educated indigenous groups in Russia (Quijada 2011). Additionally, a sizable number of ethnic Buryats live in the adjacent Chita and Irkutsk Oblasts as well as in northern Mongolia and China (see Figure 3).<sup>18</sup>

Because Buryats responded more readily to Soviet modernization than many other communities in Siberia, there is very little ethnic violence or political strife reported in the region (Cakars 2008).<sup>19</sup> Yet, at the same time, many Buryats view the Soviet period as a time of grave societal turmoil. In a recent Buryat publication called “Traditional Culture of the Buryats”, for example, local intellectuals hoping to revitalize cultural, religious, and ethnic traditions of the Buryat community lament

<sup>17</sup> The population of Ulan-Ude skyrocketed after the erection of a stop along the Trans-Siberian Railway in the city in 1900.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the politics of border creation during the Soviet period, see Cakars (2008).

<sup>19</sup> It is for this reason that Humphrey (1995) characterizes Buryats as a “quiet” minority within Russia.

that “70 years of socialist forces transforming the ‘old world’ have brought society into a state of crisis” (Gerasimova *et. al* 2000:3, cited in Quijada 2009:77). Without longitudinal census data or ethnographic research examining cultural practice over time,<sup>20</sup> it is uncertain the full extent to which Buryat culture had been altered or eradicated. Nonetheless, there is widespread agreement among Buryats that traditional culture has been lost in the tides of Soviet oppression, and many consider its revival to be a cultural imperative.

At the same time, however, considerable debate has developed surrounding what this revival of tradition should entail, as there is widespread disagreement over what “Buryat tradition” should mean in the modern day. This discord is compounded by the fact that “Buryat” as an ethnonym and cultural identity developed only recently as a byproduct of the tumultuous history of the region and its people. As Mikhailov (1996) explains:

The ethnic and geopolitical understanding of the terms Buryat and Buryatia has arisen in the modern and contemporary periods. During the Mongolian period in our history (from the 12th to the first half of the 17th century)...[t]here was no such thing as Buryat nationhood. With the arrival of the Russians into Eastern Siberia...there was not even a concept of general Buryat self-consciousness (‘we are Buryats’)...The sense that ‘we are Buryats’ did not arise suddenly. However, over the course of 150-200 years, as a result of the formation of a completely new culture and social psychology...the ethnonym ‘Buryat’, with the active cooperation of the Russian state, became a symbol of the coming together of an entity, became a political slogan. And there followed the ‘Buryatisation’ of all tribal and territorial groups, along with the assimilation of their languages,

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<sup>20</sup> During the Soviet era, census data that revealed cultural or religious values not advocated by the government were suppressed by the state. Additionally, Western anthropologists were often proscribed from conducting ethnographic research with indigenous communities unless a government-sanctioned censor accompanied them, causing numerous methodological concerns. Given this, it is difficult to paint a complete picture of Buryat culture during (or before) the Soviet period more broadly.

way of life, consciousness etc. In other words, what was created was a completely new ethno-social organism: the Buryat people, differentiated from the Mongols...Although various tribes retained their traditions, a consciousness of the unity of the people ('we are Buryats') became an actual fact in the second half of the 19th century (Mikhailov 1996:18–19, italics omitted, cited in Skrynnikova 2003:130).

Under this interpretation, “Buryat” proves a relatively recent ethno-cultural concept, and many who identify as such are seeking to define what that label is to mean socially, particularly in light of the widespread cultural loss that resulted from Soviet oppression. It is this very cultural exploration that is being documented by Quijada in the context of Tengeri, a collective of Buryat shamans in Ulan-Ude who are actively working to revitalize and navigate Buryat traditional culture in the post-Soviet age.

## **UNDERSTANDING TENERI: BURYAT SHAMANIC COSMOLOGIES AND RELIGIO-CULTURAL REVIVAL**

The “Local Religious Organization of Shamans, Tengeri” received legal recognition as a religious organization in 2003,<sup>21</sup> though it had been operating for close to a decade prior. It is the third officially recognized shamanic organization in Buryatia, but is by far the most visible today (Quijada 2009).<sup>22</sup> Centered in Ulan-Ude, the Tengeri collective was founded by former businessman Budashab Purboevich Shiretorov and former engineer Victor Dorzhievich Tsidipov with the goal of

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<sup>21</sup> In the Russian Federation, “religious organizations” may petition to the government to be legally recognized as institutions. As of 2005, there were 177 registered religious organizations, over 100 of which are either Orthodox Christian or Buddhist in orientation (Quijada 2009). Holland (2014) notes that all religious faiths are given equal status within this policy, although the Russian Orthodox Church does retain more privileges *de facto*.

<sup>22</sup> The first shamanic group, Bo Murgel, was founded in 1992 by Nadezhda Stepanova, who has since cultivated a level of celebrity within the New Age movement as a shamanic revivalist. Today, however, the organization is much smaller than Tengeri and has fewer practicing shamans.

restoring traditional Buryat practices that had been lost during the era of Soviet oppression. In 2005, the organization comprised close to fifty members, thirteen of whom made up a core group of practicing shamans. Today, however, it has grown to over 80 members, most of whom are shamans, and affiliate offices have been constructed in the nearby Chita and Irkutsk Oblasts.<sup>23</sup> The shamans of Tengeri range in age from their early 20s to their 50s and are both male and female.

In order to more fully understand the societal role that Tengeri plays in contemporary Buryat shamanism, it is first necessary to develop a background as to what is meant by the term “shamanism” more broadly. Within religious studies, historian of religion Mircea Eliade (1964) provided perhaps the most influential and authoritative description of “shamanism” as an anthropological category. Through the collation and synthesis of numerous ethnographic studies, Eliade identified recurring patterns from within the belief systems and ritual behaviors of indigenous communities, reasoning that these cross-cultural similarities were evidence of a *universal* religious phenomenon found among all non-industrialized societies in the world. In a sweeping move, Eliade next assigned the term “shamanism”—a category previously applied only to Siberian mystical healers—to describe this seemingly ubiquitous body of practices, which he subsequently (re-)defined as any constellation of “archaic techniques of ecstasy” used to engage with the spirit world (1964:4).

Although Eliade’s work has been widely read and highly regarded, some scholars nonetheless lambaste his analysis as reductive and inappropriate due to its

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<sup>23</sup> Although the organization has grown dramatically since 2003, it has also splintered due to discord among shamans. Several of the original core shamans have left to begin their own shamanic organizations that now compete with Tengeri for clients.

application of a culturally specific term at a universal level (*cf.* Kehoe 2000). Such critiques caution against collapsing divergent indigenous practices together without acknowledging their differences, or assigning labels to these practices without meaningful reference to the terms employed by the communities themselves. However, regardless of whether one finds value in Eliade's expansive definition, the usage of the term "shaman" with regard to the religious professionals working at Tengeri is warranted, given that members of Tengeri self-identify as shamans and are widely recognized within Buryat society as such (Quijada 2009).

Buryat shamanism—as it is defined and understood by both shamans and anthropologists—encompasses of a complex interplay of mythic thought and ritual practice. For example, similar to other indigenous traditions throughout Siberia, traditional Buryat cosmology describes the universe as trifurcated into three worlds, where spirits primarily occupy the Upperworld and Lowerworld but are able to influence the lives and fortunes of humans who reside within the Middleworld (Eliade 1964; Pratt 2007). This spiritual multiverse is comprised of benevolent and malevolent gods (*tenri*), places deities (*ežens*), ancestor shamans (*ongons*), and non-human animal spirits (Pratt 2007). Many of these spirits have names and discernible personalities (Quijada 2009). For the purposes of this paper, the *ongon* spirits—ancestors who act as protectors of their lineage—are of particular importance, as they are the spirits most commonly worshipped at the ceremonies analyzed below.

One of the primary reasons that *ongon* spirits prove so influential in Buryat shamanic thought is because they are the purveyors of shamanic callings. Consistent

with Eliade (1964), all shamans who are part of Tengeri have been afflicted by debilitating ailments that could not be cured using mainstream medical treatments. After consulting with a practicing shaman, these enigmatic physical symptoms are diagnosed as signs of a shamanic calling, placed onto individuals by an ancestor spirit.<sup>24</sup> In Buryat cosmology, *ongons* mark specific individuals before birth that are destined to cultivate the ability to commune with the spirit world and become shamans.<sup>25</sup> In most cases, the *ongon* spirit (or spirits) will inflict suffering on the prospective shaman so that she or he will receive a shamanic calling; these symptoms do not respond to medical treatment and will not subside until the individual either accepts the calling or dies (Quijada 2011). Once the neophyte accepts a calling and begins the process of initiation, she or he often reports an alleviation of physical symptoms, thus reaffirming for the individual that the malady was spiritual in nature and can be further forestalled by becoming a shaman.

Receiving a calling is not only vital for one's physical health but also for the health of one's community. It is the responsibility of the human shaman to commune with deities in order to diagnose how the spirit world is influencing the human world and what offerings or treatments may be needed to mollify personal sicknesses or social ills that are spiritual in nature. In Tengeri's understanding, a shamanic calling is read as a kinship obligation to both living and dead family members: it is integral for those who are alive to have a method of communicating with and worshipping

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<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that not all unidentifiable symptoms are read as shamanic callings. Some are diagnosed, for example, as spiritual afflictions or as maladies caused by malevolent spirit possession, curses, or soul loss (Quijada 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Because of this, the shamans of Tengeri sometimes conceive of a shamanic calling as akin to a biological predisposition (Quijada 2009).



their ancestors, and it is integral for those who have passed away to be honored through prayer and ritual offerings (Quijada 2011). A proper relationship must be maintained between the humans and the spirits in order for there to be peaceful human existence (Jokic 2008).

Tengeri shamans interpret their work to be particularly critical in this historical moment. As aforementioned, shamanic practice and ancestor worship were aggressively suppressed during the Soviet era, and those at Tengeri believe that many *ongon* spirits have become enraged by the years of disregard and neglect that resulted (Quijada 2008, 2009). Tengeri shamans read the detrimental effects of both socialism and post-socialism—including widespread poverty, unemployment, and alcoholism in Buryatia—as indications that the spirits are angry and therefore causing social problems as well as blocking attempts at improvement. The members of Tengeri believe that, by rectifying the relationship between the living and spirit world through ritual communication and shamanic practice, many social problems that Buryats face will be tempered over time.

There are several ways in which shamans use ritual practice to fulfill their role of mediating the relationship between humans and spirits. For example, shamans are able to perform divinations on clients<sup>26</sup> in order to diagnose and treat spiritual maladies or personal hardships (Pratt 2007). In these rites, Buryat shamans enter into an ecstatic state in order to communicate with the spirit world and discern the cause of the illness presented. Depending on the nature of the infirmity, the shaman may

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<sup>26</sup> Some scholarship refers to those who go to shamans as “shamanists”, however this term is not uniform. The term client is used here as consistent with Quijada (2009).

need to then perform an exorcism or present ritual offerings in order to help restore the client to health.

Although Buryat shamans participate in ritual healing practices, they do not place themselves in opposition to Western (or even Eastern and Buddhist) medicine. Many clients who visit shamans for individual meetings do so after unsuccessfully seeking out other medical attention. Shamans are only able to provide assistance when the malady is spiritual in nature and do turn clients away (or refer them to doctors or Buddhist healers) when they believe that illnesses do not have spiritual etiologies (Quijada 2009). In this way, Tengeri may also be viewed as a public health service because its “mission to revive lost shamanic practices is not about maintaining cultural knowledge *per se*...but rather producing the kind of knowledge required for the healthy existence of Buryat bodies, and through these bodies, the Buryat nation” (Quijada 2009:211).

While Buryat shamans do hold private ceremonies, such as divinations, for clients in order to diagnose and treat spiritual ailments on an individual level, the most common ritual they perform is the *tailgan* (Tugutov 1978; Quijada 2008), which is studied in this paper. Past ethnographic accounts of the *tailgan* ritual present it as a ceremony in which a shaman leads a clan—a group of interrelated families that make up a community—in a communal sacrifice (usually of a sheep), which is performed to honor ancestor spirits and/or the place deities that reside in the clan’s natural surroundings (Tugutov 1978; Long 2008). According to Buryat cosmology, ancestor *ongons*—those who become the protective spirits of their progeny—are to be

worshipped in the area in which they lived (Quijada 2008). As such, space is centralized as an enchanted and necessary component of the *tailgan* ritual.

Additionally, the shamans of Tengeri also enter into altered states of consciousness (ASCs) to embody *ongon* spirits during the *tailgan* rituals, although it has been debated as to whether this is truly orthopraxic (Jokic 2008). Under the classificatory scheme developed by Price-Williams & Hughes (1994), this practice would be further subcategorized as a form of “trance possession”.

The Buryat process of entering into trance is explained in ethnographic accounts by Quijada (2009). Once the ritual sacrifice is completed, the shaman next performs a chant (*kamlanie*) calling down the spirits, after which she or he begins drumming or shaking a dragon staff<sup>27</sup> until a trance state can be induced and the *ongon* enters into the shaman’s body (see Figure 4). When this occurs, the shaman’s assistant presents ritual offerings to the embodied spirit in order to calm the deity. After the spirit has been mollified, members of the audience are able to ask questions in the Buryat language. At larger ceremonies, several shamans may enter into trance concurrently and assistants try their best to match clients with the spirit that is most relevant to their clan or question. While *ongons* do not prophesize the future, they are able to inform clients—often rather cryptically—as to whether an illness or hardship has a spiritual cause, and, if so, how that may be remedied. At the ceremony’s end,

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<sup>27</sup> Which instrument is used is based on whether the individual is a white shaman or a black shaman. A full description of the distinction is outside the scope of this paper. See Tkacz *et al.* (2002) for a discussion.



**Figure 4:** “Tengeri shamans calling down the gods (*kamlanie*) at the Spring Tailgan ceremony, Ulan-Ude May 21, 2005. These are black shamans, who drum to induce trance” (Quijada 2009:213).

the spirit will leave the human body, allowing the shaman’s soul to reenter; it is common for the shaman to be unable to recall anything that was said or done during the possession.

As Quijada (2009) notes, the shamans who work at Tengeri assert that they are reviving authentic (*nastoyashii*) and traditional (*tradtzionnii*) shamanic practices that had been suppressed during the Soviet era through *tailgans* and private ceremonies. By framing the organization as an attempt at the cultural “revival” of genuine religious practice, however, this discourse conflates the notion of “authentic” with that of “legitimate”, thereby placing a value judgment on different types of ritual practice. This is to say, among many Buryats, those rituals that are viewed as most *traditional* are also viewed as the most *legitimate*. From an analytic perspective,

however, it is important to note that all traditions are invented patterns of behavior that are only labeled “traditions” once their origins have been forgotten or reimagined in the collective conscience (Quijada 2009). As a result, debate surrounding what may be deemed authentic and traditional does not necessarily index pre-Soviet or pre-colonial histories but instead reflect a perceived cultural past from the perspective of modernity.

Nonetheless, these labels retain social significance, as local scholars and other shamans often dispute whether individuals are “real shamans” or charlatans and whether certain practices are authentic or ersatz (Quijada 2009). This persistent debate at least partly emerges from the fact that discourses on authenticity and tradition are commonly tied to a community’s sense of ethnic identity in Siberian indigenous communities.<sup>28</sup> By identifying what is truly traditional, Buryats are able to contextualize themselves within and work to restore their ethno-cultural history. This interpretation, however, also produces social tension and anxiety, as many Buryats do not feel as though they are able to adequately judge what is ‘authentic’ due to the immense loss of cultural knowledge during the Soviet period (Buyandelgeriyn 2007; Quijada 2008).

While the fine details of Buryat ritual practice are often debated, it is commonly accepted that “traditional” shamanic practices in pre-colonial Buryatia were clan-based (Tugutov 1978; Quijada 2008, 2009). Each clan was to have its own shaman who practiced alone and honored the ancestors and place spirits associated

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<sup>28</sup> One example of this contention within shamanism is noted in Lindquist (2005) regarding Tuvan communities.

with her or his own community. As such, Tengeri, an institutionalized collective of shamans that does not maintain a specific clan affiliation, drastically departs from this historic form.<sup>29</sup> Although the members of Tengeri acknowledge this historical dissonance, they argue that their shamanic organization is integral to the revival of traditional structures given the social reality of contemporary Buryatia.

Because they are centered in Ulan-Ude, a city of over 400,000 people, the shamans of Tengeri must accommodate a panoply of prospective clients instead of one specific clan. A large majority of Buryats currently living in Ulan-Ude come from families that had migrated to the area since the 1960s (Humphrey 2002), and many are unable to identify their home village or clan affiliation. Thus, Tengeri must not only hold ceremonies for a litany of clans (each of which may have regional variations in ritual practice), but they must also identify ways in which individuals can meaningfully communicate with their ancestors despite not knowing who they are. In addition, Tengeri opens its doors to individuals who do not identify as Buryat, including the notably large Russian population of Ulan-Ude, holding that the collective exists as public service for anyone living in the Buryat territory.

Hoppál (1996:1) contextualizes the issues surrounding shamanism in urban spaces into a trend he terms “post-modern shamanism”. Although the contemporary reemergence of shamanism comes as a reaction to the Soviet era, staunch changes in demography and the Soviet reverence of rationality and empiricism have influenced the ways in which shamanism is now performed, understood, and legitimated,

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<sup>29</sup> However, according to Quijada (2009:207), some shamans argue that shamanism did take an institutional form during the Mongol empire, and thus the tradition that they are attempting to restore dates back to the “golden age of shamanism” of the thirteenth century.

particularly in urban spaces. For these shamans, mythology and cosmology are downplayed in their practice, and the significance of cultural revitalization and public service is amplified (Humphrey 2002). In doing so, many arguably ‘traditional’ elements of shamanic practice are minimized in order for shamans to place themselves meaningfully in modern Buryat society.

Because of the rise in urbanization and the loss of cultural knowledge that marks modern, post-Soviet Ulan-Ude, the Tengeri shamans have refashioned the traditional *tailgan* discussed above into what Quijada (2008:3) calls a “city *tailgan*”. In the city *tailgan* ritual shrines to ancestor spirits (*oboos*) are placed in public urban spaces (such as the municipal hippodrome) as opposed to ancestral homelands. Much of the ritual performance is retained, however, including animal sacrifices, ritual offerings, and methods of entering into trance possession. Yet, by placing the *tailgan* in a city space and embodying *ongons* outside of the territory that they had inhabited, the shamans of Tengeri no longer embed sacred space into their rituals in the same ways that Buryat shamans had done in the past (see Figure 5).

While Tengeri has been criticized for this divorce between ritual practice and ritual space, Humphrey (2002:204) suggests that ‘urban shamans’ are nonetheless able to utilize ‘nontraditional’ rituals as a way to “vitalize urban places by transmogrification, re-envisioning them in relation to other spaces and times and turning them into sites of energy where social relations are refashioned”. By creating linkages between the city and the hinterland, according to Humphrey, urban shamanic



**Figure 5:** Shamans before the Blacksmith Tailgan ceremony, Ulan-Ude (2012). Note the city of Ulan-Ude in the background. Photo by Roberto Quijada.

practices thereby function as sites for the reconstruction of those social and kinship networks that have been lost to history.

As Quijada (2008) documents, these city *tailgans* are often sites of anxiety for clients who attend them, as many of Ulan-Ude's Buryat residents do not know their clan affiliation or the Buryat language, which is spoken by the deities. Because of this, assistants at the ceremonies help clients translate questions from Russian into Buryat and work to pair clients with the spirit that is most relevant to them by asking clients to try their best to recreate their lineages. In order to further assuage client anxiety surrounding the loss of clan identity, Tengeri explicitly states that the city *tailgan* is not a clan ritual but is instead grounded in a sense of community building based on municipal residency and shared space (Quijada 2008). Not only does this



help to allay concerns among Buryat clients, but it also allows for the possibility of non-Buryat clients to attend the ceremonies in Ulan-Ude, thereby fostering a multicultural religious community.

At the same time, Tengeri shamans do not wholeheartedly embrace this new form of *tailgan*. Instead, they hope that this ritual format is ephemeral and consider it a necessary change in order to cope with what they consider to be a cultural denigration left in the wake of Soviet reforms (Quijada 2008). Through education and exposure, the shamans of Tengeri hope that the clan relationships will be rebuilt and more traditional clan rituals can then be produced.

A common critique of Tengeri's city *tailgan* is that it is not a revived cultural tradition but instead a manifestation of a novel religious phenomenon: *neo-shamanism* (Zhukovskaya 2004). As Townsend (2005:4) defines it, neo-shamanism is "an eclectic collection of beliefs and activities...based on a constructed metaphorical, romanticized 'ideal' shaman concept which often differs considerably from traditional shamans". Much literature on neo-shamanism argues that it differs most from traditional shamanism in that neo-shamanism is much more democratic in nature. For example, a calling is not necessary to become a religious leader in most neo-shamanic traditions (Townsend 2005), an opinion that is notably absent in Tengeri shamanism (Quijada 2009).

At the heart of this critique of Tengeri is the idea that "post-modern shamanism"—shamanic practices that recognize and navigate changes in contemporary Buryat demography and ontology through revisions in their theology

and rituals—is not part of the evolving anthropological category “shamanism” but instead an appropriation of historical shamanic practices into an entirely novel form. As the prefix *neo-* implies, neo-shamans can be differentiated from ‘traditional shamans’ because they take traditional elements and emplace them anachronistically into modernity.

Regardless of the academic debate surrounding the use of these terms, the shamans of Tengeri take offense at the label “neo-shaman” (Quijada 2009). Consistent with numerous scholars of shamanism (Humphrey 1998, 2002; Quijada 2008), the members at Tengeri view shamanism as a fluid set of religious practices. The deities, shamans, and clients are all social actors that are affected by time and space, and so it is only logical that shamanic practice will evolve and transform to fit into the current moment. Under this interpretation, Tengeri shamans practice a form of traditional shamanism that, at the same time, acknowledges and manages the social reality of contemporary Buryatia.

A heightened awareness of the current state of affairs in Buryatia is not only reflected in Tengeri’s city *tailgans*, but also in the ways in which Tengeri constructs its ritual calendar. For example, one *tailgan* examined in this study is part of an annual celebration that takes place on Olkhon Island, a 730 square mile island in Lake Baikal on Buryatia’s western border. As the third largest lake-bound island in the world, Olkhon boasts a population of about 1,500 people as well as numerous tourist resorts. In Buryat shamanic cosmology, the large rock formation on Olkhon Island’s western coast called *Shamanskaya Scala* (or *Shamanka* for short) is considered an

*axis mundi*—a vortex that connects the three worlds that make up the cosmos—as well as the resting place of the Spirit Master of Baikal (see Figure 6).<sup>30</sup> In 2002, a Tengeri shaman went into trance by *Shamanka* and was told by the Spirit Master that he had become angered by the environmental degradation, decades of neglect, and volume of tourists who sunbathe on or around the sacred rocks. In order to atone for these wrongdoings, the Spirit Master prescribed that the shamans hold a *tailgan* once a year for the next 17 years in honor of the gods of Olkhon (*oikony noyod*).

2012, the date of this study, marks the tenth anniversary of the annual Olkhon Island ritual, now called the “International Shamanic Conference”. When Quijada



**Figure 6:** *Shamanskaya Scala*, Olkhon Island (2005). Photo by Roberto Quijada.

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<sup>30</sup> This deity is sometimes referred to as *Hoton Khan*, *Xotun Khan*, *Hoton Noën*, or *Khan Khoto Babai* (cf. Bernstein 2008 and Quijada 2009). The inconsistency in naming reflects the variability in shamanic cosmologies across Buryatia.

(2009) first attended the ceremony in 2005, there were roughly only 100 people in attendance, many of whom were directly affiliated with the organization; in contrast, the ceremony in 2012 had more than 300 attendees and was in cooperation with the administration of the Olkhon Nature Preserve to make it a large-scale, funded event. In addition to the ritual offerings and trance possessions that accompany the *tailgan*, Tengeri also imagines this event as a way for indigenous shamans from other communities to meet and share their techniques and knowledge (Quijada 2011).<sup>31</sup> As such, the Olkhon Island *tailgan* is a much more large-scale ceremony than others performed by Tengeri.

As noted above, Quijada (2008) argues that the *tailgans* performed by Tengeri—though not traditional in the most historical sense—act as sites for the revival of traditional religious, cultural, and national identity for Buryats in the post-Soviet period. While there is much literature on the use of shamanic ceremonies to revive indigenous culture (*cf.* Humphrey 2002; Quijada 2008), less is known as to the ways in which different *tailgans* operate, even within one shamanic organization. For example, do the demographics of those attending the large-scale Olkhon event differ from those attending smaller ceremonies put on by Tengeri? Can disparate reasons for attendance be identified between Olkhon and other *tailgans*?

Broadly speaking, these questions are presented in an attempt to better understand whether the *nature of the shamanic ceremony* is associated with who is drawn to it or whether it is the *ceremony itself* that draws attention. However, in order

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<sup>31</sup> Quijada (2011) notes that shamans have visited the International Shamanic Conference from California, Germany, and Inner Mongolia, and the event is getting increased attention among New Age websites internationally.

to meaningfully begin to provide answers through empirical analysis, it is also important to develop a background as to the social, cultural, and theological roles that ritual activity plays in religious belief and practice more broadly. In order to do so, a brief review of current literature from within the psychology of religion and spirituality will prove foundational, as scholars from this subfield have written prolifically on the psychological mechanisms that undergird both religious thought and also ritual behavior.

### **THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SHAMANISM: NEUROCOGNITIVE, CULTURAL, AND SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES**

Given that religion serves important functional roles for myriad people at the individual, social, and cultural levels, it is unsurprising that the field of psychology—a discipline committed to the empirical study of human thought and behavior—also boasts a long history in the academic study of religion. The American Psychological Association (APA) has even designated Division 36 of its organization to the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality, with over 1,600 registered members who are actively performing fieldwork and conducting empirical studies. According to the APA website, Division 36 primarily aims to “promote[] the application of psychological research methods and interpretive frameworks to diverse forms of religion and spirituality” (American Psychological Association 2014). While the field has historically focused on Judeo-Christian forms of religious thought (Gorush 1984), contemporary research has begun to expand into research on the social, cultural, and

neurocognitive elements of less prevalent religions, including shamanism (for review, see Krippner 2002).

Given that this thesis seeks to integrate applied statistics and psychometrics with Quijada's ongoing ethnographic fieldwork discussed in detail above, a theoretical framework of shamanic practice from both lenses will prove invaluable. Indeed, one must "demand good theory as a prerequisite for the collection of meaningful data" (Hood *et al.* 2009:482). Unfortunately, there remains a dearth of psychological studies examining Buryat shamans directly. However, cross-cultural research on shamanism as well as several general theories from within the field of the psychology of religion that have been repeatedly validated provide fertile ground for beginning to understand religion on a psychological level.

Since its inception, the psychology of religion has been a highly debated field both inside and outside the discipline. Of immediate concern for the scholars who were at the forefront of this movement during the mid-twentieth century was how to appropriately operationalize the anthropological category "religion" empirically in a way that also meaningfully reflected both the diversity of religious experience and the agency of those being studied (Hood *et al.* 2009). At the same time, these academics faced difficulty in the application of psychological theories regarding human cognition and behavior to religious phenomena without engaging in theoretical or ontological reductionism. To be sure, the field of religious studies has historically embraced many renowned scholars who have argued, for example, that religion is in itself a non-reducible, original category (Otto 1917/1958), or that religious experience

occurs prior to cognitive awareness and thus cannot be empirically analyzed (Schleiermacher 1799/1996). While these theories have themselves been critiqued from within religious studies (see for example Proudfoot 1985), they nonetheless illuminate how religious thought and action is couched in a constellation of social, cultural, and cognitive systems that all maintain experiential and ideological dimensions. Consequently, one cannot reduce religion to simple psychological concepts and principles, and thus any quantitative analysis must recognize its own methodological limits.

While earlier psychologists who studied religion—such as noted psychotherapist Sigmund Freud or behaviorist researcher Raymond Cattell—were relatively unconcerned with such issues of reductionism, instead choosing to focus exclusively on the psychological processes at play in religious thought and behavior,<sup>32</sup> contemporary empirical work places a strong emphasis on developing a deeper and more holistic understanding of the psychology of religion. This includes a heightened deference to the perspectives and perceptions of those who are studied as well as a recognition of the inherent limitations of psychometric measurement in assessing emotional and often pre-meta-cognitive forms of thought (Hood *et al.* 2009).<sup>33</sup> Much of this work is also informed by increased interactive dialogue with

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<sup>32</sup> Specifically, Freud argued that the primary object of religious belief, God, does not exist but is instead an infantile projection of the father, which he believed could be reduced to a form of neuroticism (Freud 1927/1961); Cattell, a behaviorist by training, argued that religious behaviors were little more than the manifestation of the human desire to avoid fear (Cattell 1938). For further review of reductive theories of religion, see Hood *et al.* (2009).

<sup>33</sup> Hood (2000) argues that the roots of a non-reductive and interdisciplinary paradigm for the psychological study of religion can be found in the works of William James, a celebrated scholar of religion and the third president of the American Psychological Association. James is not only credited as one of the first academics to argue for psychology as an empirical, natural science (James 1890), but

other disciplines, such as anthropology and sociology. Without question, as the psychology of religion further develops a guiding theoretical framework with which to study religious phenomena, methodological pluralism—a form of interdisciplinary research that has become increasingly common as of the late twentieth century (Roth 1987)—will undoubtedly continue to shape both the empirical techniques and also the assumptions that guide quantitative research in the field.

In addition to concerns of reductionism, it is also important to refrain from uncritically generalizing psychological principles to shamanic thought. Gorush (1984), for example, notes that an overwhelming majority of the studies conducted in the psychology of religion have exclusively investigated, either intentionally or unintentionally, Christian traditions; and Arnett (2008) has written extensively on the possible cultural biases introduced by the fact that a disproportionate number of samples used in psychological research consist of participants from educated, Western, and industrialized societies.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, anthropologist Murray Wax (1984:16) has argued that “in most non-Western societies the natives do not distinguish religion as we do”, implying that one may not be able to “unpack” religious belief from broader cultural values as easily when analyzing indigenous

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he is also famed for his seminal 1902 Gifford Lectures published under the title *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902/1985), where he analyzed religion in highly psychological terms. However, James’s views may be seen as reductive in that they attempt to break religion down to only its *functional* significance. For discussion, see Hood *et al.* (2009).

<sup>34</sup> In reviewing six top psychology journals in 2008, Arnett noted that over 95% of study samples came from educated, Western societies (although this meta-analysis was not restricted to samples used to study religious phenomena specifically).



communities as opposed to Western societies where global religious traditions are dominant.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, an indiscriminate application of psychological theories that are primarily grounded in research conducted on Christian samples from Western societies may inappropriately mischaracterize the beliefs and actions of Buryat shamans and their followers. However, a critical analysis of past research in the psychology of religion, bolstered by scholars studying shamanism specifically, is nonetheless able to shed light onto the psychology of shamanism. By employing the interdisciplinary framework advocated by both the APA and also numerous scholars, one is then able to utilize social, cultural, and neurocognitive research within the study of religion to inform the empirical analyses conducted below.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the earliest works to put forth psychological analyses of shamanism were published within Western Christian frameworks, which described shamans as charlatans and their followers as devil worshippers (Krippner 2002). Although these claims have since been largely debunked as ethnocentric and inaccurate,<sup>36</sup> they nonetheless pervaded psychological, psychiatric, and even anthropological analyses of shamans for much of the twentieth century.

During this period, many psychologists interested in shamanic practice focused exclusively on the shaman in an attempt to diagnose the pathology afflicting these spiritual leaders. Psychiatrist Julian Silverman (1967:22), for example, hypothesized that the “grossly non-reality-oriented ideation, abnormal perceptual

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<sup>35</sup> For discussion of “unpacking” as a form of cross-cultural analysis, see Heine (2012).

<sup>36</sup> For example, see Harner (1980) for a discussion of social ethics and shamanism, critiquing the notion of shamans as inherently malevolent.

experiences, profound emotional upheavals, and bizarre mannerisms” found in shamanic experiences closely parallel those of acute schizophrenics, further suggesting that the two only differ in terms of “the degree of cultural acceptance” of the disability. Other psychiatrists in the twentieth century argued that these experiences were more consistent with that of temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE) or—for Siberian shamans—possibly even a nervous disorder termed Artic Hysteria that was believed to be caused by extreme cold and a lack of solar vitamins (see Eliade 1964 for discussion).

However, scholarship began to discredit these reductive theories by the mid-twentieth century. In his prominent work on shamanism noted above, for example, Eliade (1964) asserted that ethnographic literature had demonstrated repeatedly that shamans show a sophisticated degree of dexterity, cognitive control, and linguistic mastery—even when entering into ASCs—that is strikingly inconsistent with those with epilepsy or similar disorders. Indeed, contemporary empirical research has repeatedly failed to identify any link between shamanism and psychopathology more broadly (see Winkelman 2013).

The shaman’s practice of entering into alternate states of consciousness has also garnered much academic interest outside of psychopathology, with many scholars working to understand the neurological mechanisms at play. From within the field of neuroscience, for example, Mandell (1980) identified similar theta and alpha brain wave patterns among shamans across cultures in trance states, which he held as evidence that shamanic ASCs are physiologically similar cross-culturally despite the

multifariousness of methods used to enter into them. This theory is consistent with other literature that suggests that shamanic ASCs emerge universally from “disturbances in the serotonergic and dopaminergic connections between the limbic system and the brain stem regions that enhance the integration into the frontal cortex” (Winkelman 2013:54).

Meanwhile, neuroscientific findings triggered immense philosophical and psychological interest surrounding the role of ASCs in human cognition. While some psychologists suggested that shamanic ASCs represent a contemplative, elite form of conscious thought (Wilbur 1981), other scholars, such as famed English biologist Alister Hardy (1966), more controversially proposed that shamans’ ASCs are prototypical of a gradually emerging form of advanced consciousness that will in time come to be found in the whole human species. Indeed, shamanism has provided an intriguing point of contact for many evolutionary psychologists seeking to understand the mechanisms behind alternate forms of consciousness in cognitive processing (for review see Walsh 2001).

However, these analyses of shamanic trance states prove problematic when they isolate the shaman as a solitary mystic. As noted in Quijada (2009), shamans do not go into trance alone but do so in a social context; as social actors, they are embedded in a community, and therefore it is reductive and inaccurate to study them without reference to the social and cultural context in which they enter into ASCs or practice traditional healing.

Thus, before we interrogate these more tendentious claims, it is first important to provide a broader survey of some principal theories that underscore the psychology of religion. This review will be largely informed by Hood, Hill, & Spilka's authoritative primer on the discipline. In their work, the authors synthesize theories from within the fields of cognitive, motivational, and social psychology to develop what they call a "rather 'grand' psychological theory for understanding the role of religion in human life" (Hood *et al.* 2009:12), which posits that the phenomenon of religion within human thought developed out of two intersecting human needs: the need for control and the need for meaning-making.<sup>37</sup> This is to say, human cognition is driven by the yearning to understand the natural world, control as much of one's life as possible, and create meaning from one's environment and lived experiences. In past scholarship, Hood & Belzen (2005) have further suggested that religious belief is a particularly effective meaning-making system because religion—through its comprehensiveness, accessibility, transcendence, and direct claims—is able to uniquely respond to these motivational human cognitive desires *in toto*, which helps to explain its global prevalence.

This "rather grand" theory is largely predicated on the work of Harold Kelley (1967), a leading social psychologist credited with the development of attribution theory. According to attribution theory, humans are inherently driven to make sense of their surroundings by forming causal connections—or "attributions"—in order to

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<sup>37</sup> It is important to differentiate here between "meaning-making" as a process of assigning meaning to life events and as a process of finding "global meaning", which includes broader ontological questions such as the meaning of life. While the two are not mutually exclusive, Hood *et al.* are referring to the latter. See Park (2005) for discussion of the different terms.

surmise the etiology of specific events. Fiske & Taylor (1991:20) further elaborate that “attribution theory deals with how the social perceiver uses information to arrive at causal explanations for events. It examines what information is gathered and how it is combined to form a causal judgment.” Attribution theory is consistent with past neurobiological research as well, which has found that all higher organisms employ their cognitive capacities to recognize causal relationships and utilize that information to predict the outcomes of events (Seligman 1975).

Hood *et al.* (2009) posit that this innate human drive to make causal connections is the first step in the process of creating meaning.<sup>38</sup> Following Hood and colleagues’ theory further, individuals’ inclinations to seek to understand the causal mechanisms behind actions and events are also couched in a desire for more *control* over the events and situations that affect them as well. By making sense of the world around them, individuals are better able to predict what will occur in the future, diagnose etiologies, and engage in behavior patterns that are likely to have positive outcomes. Furthermore, Hood *et al.* (2009:17) note that “the *illusion* of control will suffice” when individuals are not able to actually control a situation, suggesting that this innate human desire may be fulfilled even when the notion of power is subjective or illusory. Thus, psychological analyses need not explore the ontological reality of deities or religious beliefs, but only recognize the cognitive value that such systems of meaning-making have for those who believe in them.

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<sup>38</sup> The personal-dispositional, emotional, and situational reasons as to why people turn to religious attributions as opposed to other causal mechanisms is outside the scope of this paper. However, the reader may refer to Hood *et al.* (2009) for discussion.

While Hood and colleagues' theory does provide a framework to begin to understand why individuals come to shamans, it does not yet address Buryat shamanism's most social element: the *tailgan* ritual. Indeed, religion is manifested not only in a system of beliefs but also in *ritual behavior*. Although religion could theoretically persist solely through belief systems and therefore lack ritual behavior entirely, the fact that no scholar has yet to identify a religion that does not retain ritual elements (Pilgrim 1978) suggests that ritual is integral to—if not necessary for—religious belief.<sup>39</sup>

Hood *et al.* (2009:17-18) place ritual behavior into their theory of religion by proposing that “ritual and prayer are mechanisms for enhancing the sense of self-control and control of one's world”. This suggests that the Buryat practices of honoring the spirit ancestors through *oboos* and *tailgan* rituals are physical acts that bolster the feelings of control and mastery at the heart of individuals' motivational attractions to shamanic practice. However, this is not the only role of ritual. As noted above, shamanic practice—and indeed almost all religious behaviors—cannot be studied solely at the level of the individual, as these ceremonies are inherently social and political. As such, the ritual *tailgans* analyzed below must not be examined without meaningful interpretation of the social elements that undergird them as well.

Recognizing the social nature of ritual practice, numerous scholars of religion have studied the social and cultural psychology surrounding ritual, proposing that ritual practice allows for expressions of social support and cooperation as well as the

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<sup>39</sup> Some scholars have even suggested that religion originated in ritual (Rappaport 1999).

development of group standards (reviewed in Hood *et al.* 2009). These psychologists hold that religion fosters social unity and feelings of social belonging, which allow believers to integrate themselves into communities of shared values and ways of knowing. At the basis of much of this literature is the assumption that the need to belong to a group is a powerful human drive that leads people to develop communities, a hypothesis that is corroborated by cross-cultural research indicating that the need for social relationships is a human universal (Baumeister & Leary 1995).

Wulff (1997) further asserts that ritual behavior encourages the development of communities largely because ritual is primarily a *method of communication*. This is to say, ritual behavior—religious or not—allows individuals within a community to create social bonds, transmit valuable cultural information, and assign meaning to possibly ambiguous or uncertain events and actions. Ritual is also believed to communicate moral values, apposite social positions, and oftentimes an idealized mode of living (see Smith [1986/1992] regarding the lattermost). Furthermore, some scholars have also suggested that the regularizing order of ritual provides consistency and certainty for people, which helps to both reduce aggression and also control emotions (Wulff 1997, cited in Hood *et al.* 2009).

In addition, it is important to acknowledge that myriad religious ritual behaviors—such as prayer, meditation, or ASCs—confer upon the participants (and often observers as well) some form of physical and emotional arousal. As such, an

examination of religious ritual requires some reference to the psychological exploration of emotional states and also the physical body.

According to a social-constructionist theory of emotion, emotions should not be understood exclusively as instinctive physiological states because they are also “constructed, interpreted, and recognized according to cognitive interpretations of physiological arousal” (Hood 2009:301). While those within the social-constructionist approach debate the extent to which language and cognitive appraisal actually constitute one’s emotional experience,<sup>40</sup> evidence remains that emotional experiences entail both physiological arousal and cognitive appraisal.

This recognition that emotions are composed of both physiological changes and also interpretations of those changes greatly informs the ways in which one should approach analyzing Buryat ritual practice. As noted *supra*, Quijada (2009) holds that Tengeri shamanism may be viewed as a public health group because the collective holds as a primary goal the quell of spiritual maladies that are afflicting Buryat society. Put simply, Buryat shamans are concerned with the health and healing of Buryat bodies. This interrelationship between the mind and body in the process of healing—perhaps best conceptualized in the interdisciplinary field of somatic psychology—proves particularly important in coming to understand the psychology surrounding Buryat shamanic practice because many rituals conducted by shamans in Buryatia involve health and healing on both individual and collective levels.

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<sup>40</sup> At one extreme of this debate is noted scholar of religion Wayne Proudfoot (1985), who argues that religious experience necessarily references concepts and linguistic categories, and so interpretation is indistinguishable from the experience itself. However, recent scholarship suggests that individuals are in fact capable of differentiating between experience and interpretation (Nichols & Chemel 2006).



Numerous studies from within the psychology of religion have suggested that religious belief more broadly leads to positive physical and mental health outcomes. In one meta-analysis of over 100 studies, for example, Koenig (1998) found that close to 80% of the examined literature positively correlated religiosity with optimistic psychological outlooks, which have themselves been subsequently shown to forestall the negative psychophysiological effects of stress (Cole & Pargament 1999). In a second meta-analysis of 20 studies, Koenig & Larson (2001) also found that 95% correlated religious belief with increased social support. While this literature does intimate that religious belief provides a framework for coping and mental health, Hood *et al.* (2009:440) nonetheless caution that “[l]ifestyle issues, social networks, psychological states, religious coping, and religion’s general promotion of well-being are all important mediators between religion and mental or emotional health”. Thus, it is not religion *per se* that leads to these outcomes, but the interplay between theology and social networks underlying one’s religiosity.

Within the psychology of health and healing, the notion of coping proves particularly important for this study, as Buryat shamanic practice is positioned the beginning stages of remedying spiritual ills. In psychology, coping is defined as the conscious and active “cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Lazarus & Forkman 1984:141). Psychologist Kenneth Pargament has been integral to developing a psychological understanding for the relationship between religion and coping. Accepting the aforementioned theory that human cognition is

driven by a need for meaning-making and environmental control, Pargament (1997) argues for a two-step appraisal process of coping: a “primary appraisal” that seeks to analyze the extent to which an event, illness, or misfortune will affect the individual, and a “secondary appraisal” where the individual assesses what resources are available to overcome the situation.

However, to what extent can these comprehensive psychological theories of religion help to provide a background as to why individuals seek out shamans? This question becomes particularly pertinent when considering the fact that many of the psychological claims discussed above conceive of “religion” from within a patently Western framework that reduces religion to only its *functional* significance.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, social psychologist Michael Argyle’s (1959:15) famous statement that “a major mechanism behind religious belief is a purely cognitive desire to know”—a claim that undergirds much of Hood and colleagues’ paradigm—proves patently irrelevant when considering Buryat shamanism. Those who attend Buryat shamanic ceremonies have traditionally done so in order to fulfill kinship obligations, pray for health and success, or maintain one’s connection to the land, not primarily in order to navigate complex ontological questions about one’s place within the cosmos, a concern that is more frequently seen within Western religious traditions. Further empirical analysis is therefore needed to better understand how shamanism is understood within Buryat society.

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<sup>41</sup> This critique has most notably been championed by Talal Asad (1983) in his analysis of the works of famed American anthropologist Clifford Geertz.

In order to non-reductively analyze shamanic behaviors from within a psychological lens, Michael Winkelman, a leading contemporary researcher of shamanism, has proposed *biopsychosocial paradigm* of shamanic consciousness and healing (Winkelman 2010). Under Winkelman's interdisciplinary synthesis of shamanic practice, the shaman is contextualized within a community and analyzed as an individual with the exceptional biopsychological capacity to enter into ASCs; yet, at the same time, emphasis is placed on group rituals and the shaman's social role as a healer, mediator, and spiritual leader. Winkelman's paradigm proves particularly valuable for this empirical analysis of attendees at Buryat shamanic ceremonies, as it is the demography and belief systems of Tengeri's clients that are analyzed below, and not the neuropsychology of the shamans themselves.

Taking seriously the notion that shamanism necessarily involves social elements that manifest on the community level, academic scholarship should rightfully expand the study of shamanism to include not only the shaman as a religious professional but also the shaman's clients. When turning to the *shamanic community* as the unit of analysis, intriguing questions arise as to the reasons one has for soliciting a shaman and what psychological outcomes these religious communities have for the individual in terms of emotional, physical, and mental health.

Perhaps the best way to draw parallels between completed academic research surrounding shamanism and current work on Buryat shamanic practice in regards to these questions is to analyze cross-cultural similarities. As noted *supra*, Eliade's (1964) seminal work on shamanism argues that shamanic practice should be

considered humankind's first theological system, one that manifests universally in non-industrialized cultures across the globe. Many anthropologists, however, have criticized Eliade's understanding of shamanism to as an imperialistic Western invention, contending that the diversity of these practices and their social functions across cultures undermine any suggestion of universalism (Kehoe 2000; Francfort *et al.* 2001). While these authors do correctly problematize Eliade's methodology and reductive generalizations, contemporary cross-cultural research does suggest—albeit controversially—that some elements of shamanic practice can in fact be identified universally.

Winkelman has written prolifically on the possible cross-cultural universality of shamanism from both ethnographic and quantitative perspectives. In one study, for example, Winkelman (1986) acquired more than 100 variables relating to magico-religious activity, ritual behavior, and social contexts from a diverse range of cultural groups using a stratified subset of the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample (see also Winkelman & White 1987).<sup>42</sup> Using cluster analysis and a series of other analytic techniques, Winkelman found that, among hunter-gatherer and agricultural communities worldwide, “magico-religious practitioners constitute social universals, with magico-religious practitioners in different societies of the world constituting different examples of the same type [of practice]” (as reviewed in Winkelman 2013:52).<sup>43</sup> Subsequent analysis has further shown that these shamanic healers

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<sup>42</sup> This dataset, developed by Murdock & White (1969), includes information on 186 cultures and is representative of major geographic and cultural regions over the span of human history.

<sup>43</sup> The only exception to this was found in the Circum-Mediterranean region, which Winkelman believes is due to the lack of hunter-gather societies in the area (Winkelman 1986).

significantly differ characteristically from other religious practitioners, such as mediums, priests, and sorcerers (Winkelman 1992).

Furthermore, Winkelman contends that the independent significance of magico-religious variables when controlling for diffusion suggests that shamanic practices are likely independent in origin and not the result of a cultural practice that began with the first peoples and blossomed globally as early human societies began to migrate (Winkelman 1992). From this systematic empirical research, Winkelman argues that, while social and environmental influences alter how shamanic theologies are manifested and culturally understood throughout the world, core elements of shamanic activity—such as initiatory crises, healing powers, ecstatic states, and communication with spirits—appear universally (Winkelman 1992, 2013).

Empirical evidence for the existence of cultural shamanic universals bears important implications for how shamanism should be understood psychologically. In evolutionary psychology, for example, it is commonly held that human behaviors that appear universally are likely the result of evolutionary adaptation and should therefore be analyzed, at least partly, from the perspective of the adaptive benefit that the behavior would generate (Heine 2012). Thus, by accepting Winkelman's theory of shamanic universality, questions arise as to the adaptive benefit of shamanism as a spiritual system for a community (see Walsh 2001 for discussion).

Furthermore, according to Winkelman, shamanic ritual practices prove particularly valuable in the coping process both for their psychosocial benefits—such as group cohesion and social support—and also for their psychobiological effects.

Regarding the latter, Winkelman (2013:55) suggests that shamanic rituals “release endogenous opiates and procures psychobiological synchrony in the group...[and these] opioids stimulate the immune system; produce a sense of euphoria, certainty, and belongingness; and enhance coping skills”. What is perhaps most valuable about shamanic healing in this context is that the participant feels a sense of agency and control when taking an active role in her or his health. Winkelman (2002) goes so far as to suggest that this is why shamanism has been successful at dealing with issues of addiction, trauma, and feelings of social alienation for many followers.<sup>44</sup> Under this interpretation, Buryat shamanic practice in many ways aids with the process of coping. Those who come to shamans in Buryatia do so only when Western medicine has failed; they are hoping to make sense of their situation and treat their spiritual maladies with shamanic resources.

Utilizing this theory as an analytic lens, one can begin to develop a cursory understanding as to why individuals in Ulan-Ude are drawn to Tengeri shamanism psychologically. The shaman, as a social actor, anthropomorphizes a complex yet accessible meaning-making system that helps followers to come to terms with their social realities. For example, Buryat shamanic theologies surrounding the imbalance between the human and spirit worlds in the post-Soviet age employ causal arguments to account for the prevalence of alcohol use disorders, poverty, and unemployment that seemingly permeate many contemporary Post-socialist communities, such as

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<sup>44</sup> Winkelman cites Harner & Harner (2002) as empirical support for this claim.

Buryatia.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, theologies of soul loss or possession help explain maladies and personal misfortunes that would have otherwise appeared random or beyond the scope of Western medicine. By identifying the fountainhead of negative lived experiences, shamanic theologies afford followers both a sense of control over their lives and also specific pathways that can be taken to begin to rectify such ills. As such, Buryat shamanic cosmologies fulfill the need for control and the need for meaning-making concurrently.<sup>46</sup>

At the same time, shamanic ritual practice is an inherently social endeavor, one that allows individuals to navigate complex questions of self-identity and community within the contemporary post-Soviet landscape. Given that it is this *social element* that will be analyzed in this study, Winkelman's biopsychosocial paradigm proves immensely helpful, as it acknowledges the dynamic role that interpersonal engagement plays in the psychology of shamanism. With this in mind, one can begin to non-reductively embark on an empirical analysis of shamanic ritual.

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY**

As noted above, various authors have highlighted the benefits of methodological pluralism when seeking to understand a religious phenomenon.

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<sup>45</sup> This psychological analysis is consistent with Humphrey's (1998) concept of shamans as *bricoleurs*—spiritual leaders who help their community make sense of the changing world through evolving mythic and experiential systems.

<sup>46</sup> This interpretation should not be read as an attempt to repudiate shamanic theology outright. To be sure, it is not the role of psychological analysis to make theological claims or undermine the significance of individuals' lived experiences or belief systems. As such, the above interpretation is only meant to contextualize the religious behaviors and motivations of Tengeri's clients and not assess the validity of shamanic claims more broadly.

Following this, a statistical approach to Quijada's work provides an opportunity to greatly expand ethnographic understandings of Tengeri's clientele. Through empirical study, ethnographic arguments developed by Quijada (2008) can be tested and strengthened should we find consistent results. Additionally, various inferential modeling techniques and data mining procedures can highlight intriguing, new associations not yet examined anthropologically.

The empirical analyses conducted below seek to contrast the small *tailgans* conducted by Tengeri with the organization's large-scale *tailgan* that takes place on Olkhon Island through the use of survey data collected at these rituals in the summer of 2012. Analyses of participants based on demography, spirituality, and relationship to traditionally indexed Buryat behavior patterns will help reveal who is drawn to each of these ceremonies and for what reasons. Although the shamans of Tengeri assert these two types of ceremonies share the same cosmological goals, it is hypothesized from their divergent social functions that the *tailgans* will attract disparate groups of participants.

More specifically, we predict that those who identify strongly with traditional Buryat identity and those who are attending the ceremony for spiritual reasons will disproportionately attend the smaller *tailgans* as opposed to the Olkhon Island event. "Traditional Buryat identity" in this study is measured in two ways—one's self-identification as ethnically Buryat and one's reported engagement with traditional Buryat culture—which will also be compared to one another in order to provide a fuller and more complex picture of the ways in which Tengeri's clients navigate



identity politics and associate with a Buryat self-concept, particularly during these shamanic ceremonies. By doing so, this study aims to provide a more holistic picture as to how these *tailgans* may operate as sites of religio-cultural revival in Buryatia.

## **Methods**

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### **SAMPLE**

Data were collected by Quijada *et al.* (2012) from five ritual *tailgans* performed by Tengeri in July and early August of 2012 as part of a larger research grant provided by the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research (NCEEER). The NCEEER grant approved funding for a multifaceted research project investigating Buryat shamanic revival that included the questionnaires analyzed in this paper as well as a series of interviews by a linguistic anthropologist and the development of a photographic archive of Tengeri ceremonies by a professional photographer.

The surveys distributed as part of this collaborative project included basic demographic information, such as age, gender, and self-reported ethnicity, as well as questions regarding the respondent's relationship to Tengeri and shamanic practice more broadly. All survey questions were written in English as well as Russian and Buryat. Two students at the Buryat State University in Ulan-Ude assisted with survey translation, data collection, and data processing.

Surveys were collected at the following ceremonies:

*July 1* – A ritual *tailgan* was held outside Ulan-Ude at a hilltop shrine to make offerings to *Bukhe-Baatar*, a patron deity of “men’s energy” (*muzhskaia sila*) and the Selenga River. *Bukhe-Bataar* is associated with masculine qualities, such as physical prowess and success in sport.

*July 7* – A ritual *tailgan* held at the Tengeri Center in Ulan-Ude to worship *Losad Khan*, a water deity prayed to most often for protection and safety when engaging in fishing and similar maritime ventures.

*July 15* – A ritual *tailgan* held in a dedicated building for members of the *Darkhan* (a Buryat Blacksmith Clan), as seen in Figure 7.

*July 21* – A ritual *tailgan* held outside of the Tengeri Center in observance of *Khihaan Ulaan*, a Tengerin sky deity that is responsible for an individual’s fate. The shamans of Tengeri encourage clients to pray to *Khihaan Ulaan* for success in business, for health, and for family matters such as finding a partner or becoming pregnant.

*August 4* – The International Shamanic Conference held on Olkhon Island. During the conference, a *tailgan* was held to honor the Spirit Master of Lake Baikal, as seen in Figure 8.

Surveys were given to each adult at the ceremony; although no data was collected regarding rates of completion, anecdotal evidence from Quijada *et al.* (2012) suggests that completion rates were nearly perfect.

## MEASURES

Data collected through the self-reported surveys included basic demographic information, explanations of one's reason for attendance, and descriptions of one's association with both traditional Buryat culture and also shamanic ritual practice. Open-ended text fields accompanied several variables so that individuals could further explain their answers. These text fields were used primarily for anthropological purposes and not in statistical analysis; as a result, they are not discussed in detail below.

### *Demographic Variables*

Gender was self-reported as either male or female. Marital Status was coded as a yes/no response to the question "Are you married?". If the respondent answered yes, a follow up question asked for Spouse's Ethnicity in order to determine the prevalence of individuals in endogamous and exogamous relationships in this sample.

An ethnicity variable was also provided asking individuals whether they self-identified as ethnically Russian, Buryat, Both, or Other (where those who responded Other could write in their ethnicity). However, because of the low number of individuals who reported both Russian and Buryat ethnicities (n=5) and because of the diversity of ethnicities listed in the Other category, the ethnicity question was collapsed into two binary variables, Russian and Buryat, for statistical analysis. Those who reported both ethnic categories were coded as present for both, and thus the two variables are not mutually exclusive. Ethnicities reported in the Other category were not uniquely analyzed due to limited sample size.

Respondent Age was recorded as a four-level binned variable with the following categories: 18-23 (birth year 1988-1994; those born during the fall of the Soviet Union); 24-35 (birth year 1988-1976; those born during the late Brezhnev and early Gorbachev administrations); 36-45 (birth year 1976-1966; those born during the “Brezhnev Era”); and 46 or older (birth year 1966 or prior; those born pre-Brezhnev). By loosely grouping



**Figure 7:** Attendees at the Blacksmith Tailgan, Tengeri Center, Ulan-Ude (2012). Photo by Roberto Quijada.

ages into Soviet historical eras, we are better able to identify whether age and the ideological circumstances of one’s upbringing are at all associated with one’s decision to attend a particular shamanic ceremony.

Finally, the Location of the ritual—the outcome variable for this analysis—was recorded. Because this paper is primarily focused on the differences between the Olkhon Island ceremony (August 4) and the smaller ones, the location variable was dichotomized to reflect whether the survey was collected at Olkhon or at a smaller *tailgan*.



**Figure 8:** International Shamanic Conference and Tailgan, Olkhon Island (2012). Photo by Roberto Quijada.

### ***Attendance Choice Variables***

An open-ended question asked respondents their reasons for attending a given ceremony. Following Miles & Huberman (1994), this qualitative information was coded into quantitative variables through the generation of a provisional “start list”. Specifically, four variables of interest were identified: whether the individual attended the ceremony for spiritual/religious reasons (Spirituality); for reasons specific to the context of the ceremony (Ceremony Specific);<sup>47</sup> for reasons related to

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<sup>47</sup> The shamans of Tengeri advise people to attend a ceremony that is specific to their current concerns or aspirations. For the July 1 ceremony, this would include the health of men or a reason related to “masculine qualities”, such as success in sport; for the July 7 ceremony, any reason related to maritime ventures, such as fishing; for the July 15 ceremony, anything related to the *Darkhan* blacksmith clan; for the July 21 ceremony, prayers related to fate, such as success in business or the healthy birth of a child. Finally, for the Olkhon ceremony, this would include health, strength, and well-being as well as any mention of Olkhon as an *axis mundi* or Lake Baikal as a sacred site.

kinship (Kinship); and for reasons explicitly unrelated to the traditional theology of Buryat culture (Curiosity). Categories were not mutually exclusive. To aid definitional clarity, check-coding was also performed using two coders, who then discussed inconsistencies and confirmed a final code (Miles & Huberman 1994). Intercoder reliability (ICR) was 93.5%.

### ***Buryat Culture Variables***

In addition, respondents were asked a series of yes/no questions regarding their current or previous association with Buryat traditional culture. The intent of this group of questions, however, was not to reify the idea of what is to be appropriately defined as “traditional” in this cultural context; instead, the summation of these variables was only meant to ascertain one’s relationship to behavior patterns that are commonly seen to be markers of “tradition” *among Buryats living in Buryatia*.

Within this cluster, two questions were asked regarding Buryat language use, specifically whether or not the respondent Spoke Buryat as a child and whether or not the respondent Speaks Buryat currently. Next, five questions were asked regarding the respondent’s relationship to shamanic practice. The response to the question “Did your family engage in shamanic practices when you were growing up?” was used to index Childhood Shamanic Practice. Similarly, the response to the question “Do you attend clan *tailgans* for your family?” was used to index Family Shamanic Practice. Those who reported that they were married were additionally asked whether they attended their spouse’s clan *tailgan* (Spouse Shamanic Practice).

Finally, two questions were used to address contemporary shamanic practice. Participants were asked whether or not they had attended other Tengeri ceremonies before (Past Tengeri Attendance) as well as whether or not they had attended other ceremonies by another shaman or shamanic organization (Any Ceremony Attendance). Together, these two variables will shed light onto whether the participant had a prior connection with Tengeri or whether attendance at one of Tengeri's ceremonies proves a novel experience.

For multivariate analysis, the variables Spoke Buryat, Speaks Buryat, Childhood Shamanic Practice, Family Shamanic Practice, and Any Ceremony Attendance were summed into one composite score, a Buryat Traditionality Scale, which was used to measure one's relative association with traditional indices of Buryat cultural identity. The reliability of this scale, however, was modest (KR-20=0.62).

## **ANALYSES**

All data analysis was performed using Stata 13.1 with the exception of binary factor analysis, which was conducted using Mplus 7.11. Univariate descriptive statistics on demographic variables were first compared against the 2010 All-Russian Population Census to determine whether general differences could be detected between this sample and the Buryat population more broadly. (Although no statistical comparisons can be performed without a random and republic-wide sample,

descriptive comparisons help to contextualize the sample and discern opportunities for future research.)

At the bivariate level, Chi-Square Tests of Independence were performed to identify significant differences between each predictor variable of interest and attendance at the Olkhon Island ceremony. In addition, a correlation matrix with phi coefficients was developed to inquire into the relationships between each predictor variable in this study. Those variables that were significantly associated with attendance at Olkhon at the bivariate level were next placed into a logistic regression classification model for multivariate analysis.

However, due to concerns of multicollinearity and parsimony as well as the the *a priori* desire to develop a psychometric scale for characteristics of Buryat identity, several data reduction techniques were next performed. As noted above, the five indicators of Buryat identity were collapsed into one “Buryat Identity Scale”, with modest reliability. This scaled variable replaced the five indicators in separate multivariate models.

Additionally, because of the modest reliability of the scale, binary factor analysis (BFA) was next performed as an exploratory data mining technique. Exploratory factor analysis is commonly employed as a statistical tool to examine the ways in which the correlations of a group of variables are structured in order to help identify the number of latent constructs that underlie them (Fabrigar 1999). This is to say, by generating factor variables through BFA, analyses can be run that attempt to model the *latent factors* that undergird a theoretical construct instead of individual



*variables themselves*. By taking into account the response patterns, relative strengths, and net effects of variables to empirically identify these latent factors, this approach proves much more promising to the empirical study of unquantifiable constructs—such as cultural identity—than an analysis that would treat each variable separately. Furthermore, BFA is able to help determine the utility of a composite score to index traditional Buryat identity more broadly.

Moreover, because it is possible for individuals to attend multiple *tailgans*, and it was not feasible to attempt to assign attendees memorable unique identifiers across ceremonies, it is possible that the data contain repeat observations. As a result, bivariate and multivariate data analyses were performed using bootstrapping techniques to control for the bias that repeated observations may have in the sample (*cf.* Efron 1979; Horowitz 2001).

## **Results**

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### **UNIVARIATE ANALYSIS**

Of the 479 completed surveys, 64.7% (n=310) were completed at the Olkhon Island event and 35.3% (n=169) were completed at smaller ceremonies.<sup>48</sup> Other basic univariate statistics for each of the demographic, attendance choice, and cultural variables can be found in the first column of Table 1.

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<sup>48</sup> Specifically, 59 were collected at the July 1 ceremony; 29 at the July 7 ceremony; 49 at the July 15 ceremony; and 32 at the July 21 ceremony.

Of note, 61.0% (n=289) of the sample identified as female, which is higher than population statistics for the Republic of Buryatia, which indicate that women make up 52.4% of the republic's population and 53.0% of the population of Ulan-Ude (Federal State Statistics Service 2010). A breakdown of participants by age revealed that those ages 24-35 made up the highest age group present at the ceremonies (37.8%, n=181). Given that over half the sample was over the age of 35, however, it is interesting to note that only 57.9% (n=275) of the sample was married.<sup>49</sup>

Regarding variables related to ethnicity, most individuals attending these ceremonies identified as Russian or Buryat, which aligns with the demography of Buryatia. According to the 2010 Russian Census, 66.1% of individuals living in Buryatia identified as Russian, whereas 30.0% identified as Buryat (Federal State Statistics Service 2010); in this sample, 40.1% identified as Buryat and 52.4% identified as Russian. Thus, although there are relatively more Buryats and fewer Russians in this sample than in the republic's population more broadly, this sample is consistent with census statistics in that Buryats and Russians remain the dominant ethnic categories identified. At the same time, however, it is important to note that very few individuals in the sample (5 of the 438 who did not indicate "Other") reported that they identified with more than one ethnic category, despite the high prevalence of individuals with multiple ethnic backgrounds living in Buryatia. The

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<sup>49</sup> The average age of marriage in Ulan-Ude depends on one's gender and ethnicity. For Buryat men and women, mean ages of marriage were 28.7 and 26.5 respectively, while mean ages of marriage for all other ethnic groups in Ulan-Ude, including Russian, were 26.0 for men and 24.7 for women. These differences were shown to be statistically significant (Eremina & Kucher 2010). However, the reason our proportion of married individuals appears to be low given age trends is likely due to the fact that divorced and widowed were not listed as options.

politics of ethnic self-identification as well as the differences between self-identity and genetic ethnicity are discussed in the next section.

Questions regarding Buryat language use showed that 34.4% (n=165) of attendees had some knowledge of the Buryat language at some point in their lives. Of these 165 participants, 79.4% (n=131) both spoke Buryat as a child *and* speak Buryat today. 13 individuals began speaking Buryat in adulthood, and 21 individuals knew the Buryat language as a child but can no longer speak it. Broken down by ethnicity, 76.6% of Buryats (147 of the 192 Buryats in this sample) had some language knowledge, whereas this was true for only 7.2% of Russians (18 of the 251 Russians, only 1 of whom also identified as Buryat).

As can be seen in the first column of Table 1, respondents more frequently indicated that they had not engaged in indigenous ritual practices, such as having been to family *tailgans*, than reported that they had. Of these variables, attendance at another shamanic ceremony had the highest rate of affirmative responses, with 45.3% (n=217) responding that they had. The five variables indexing traditional Buryat culture were next summed into one composite Buryat Traditionality Scale. The mean score of this scale was 1.63 (SD=1.77, range=0-5) for the full sample; broken down further, Buryats scored an average of 3.34 (SD=1.31) whereas ethnic Russians scored an average of 0.48 (SD=0.88). Interestingly, 21.47% (n=41) of Buryats reported all 5 behaviors, while only 3.14% (n=6) reported none. Among Russians, 66.93% (n=168) reported no behaviors, and less than 4% (n=8) reported 3 or more.

## **BIVARIATE ANALYSIS**

Bivariate Chi-Square Tests of Independence comparing presence at Olkhon Island with each demographic, attendance choice, and cultural variable are found in Table 1. Significant differences were not found for gender, age group, or marital status. Regarding ethnicity, as predicted, significantly more Buryats attended the smaller ceremonies and significantly more Russians attended the large-scale Olkhon Island event. Clients who attended the ceremony for spiritual, kinship, or ceremony-specific reasons were much more likely to attend a small ceremony, whereas those who attended out of curiosity disproportionately attended Olkhon. Furthermore, those who scored positively on each of the indicators of indigenous Buryat culture attended smaller ceremonies in higher numbers than the Olkhon Island event.

As predicted, the phi coefficients displayed in Table 2 reveal high levels of association between each of the 5 cultural indicators of Buryat identity that were used to create the composite scale. Each indicator was also positively associated with self-identifying as ethnically Buryat and negatively associated with self-identifying as ethnically Russian. Russians were also significantly less likely to attend a *tailgan* for spiritual, kinship, or ceremony specific reasons, but were more likely to attend out of curiosity; opposite associations were found between these variables and the Buryat ethnicity variable.

In addition, several associations between demographic variables were also identified. For example, men, individuals who were older, and individuals who spoke

**Table 1: Bivariate Chi-Square Tests of Independence for Each Predictor Variable against Location of Ceremony Attendance**

	<u>Total Sample</u>		<u>Small Rituals</u>		<u>Olkhon</u>		<u>Chi Square Test</u>		
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>X<sup>2</sup></u>	<u>d.f.</u>	<u>p</u>
<i>Sex: Female</i>	289	60.97	92	55.76	197	63.75	2.89	1	0.089
<i>Age</i>	--	--	--	--	--	--	1.42	3	0.701
18-23	48	10.02	18	10.65	30	9.68	--	--	--
24-35	181	37.79	59	34.91	122	39.35	--	--	--
36-45	107	22.34	42	24.85	65	20.97	--	--	--
46+	143	29.85	50	29.59	93	30.00	--	--	--
<i>Russian</i>	251	52.40	45	26.63	206	66.45	69.55	1	<b>0.000</b>
<i>Buryat</i>	192	40.08	121	71.60	71	22.90	107.98	1	<b>0.000</b>
<i>Married</i>	271	57.42	105	62.50	166	54.61	2.76	1	0.132
<i>Spoke Buryat</i>	152	31.73	98	57.99	54	17.42	83.10	1	<b>0.000</b>
<i>Speaks Buryat</i>	144	30.06	95	56.21	49	15.81	84.93	1	<b>0.000</b>
<i>Any Ceremony Attendance</i>	217	45.30	104	61.54	113	36.45	27.78	1	<b>0.000</b>
<i>Childhood Shamanic Practice</i>	110	23.01	62	36.90	48	15.48	28.22	1	<b>0.000</b>
<i>Family Shamanic Practice</i>	158	32.99	94	55.62	64	20.65	60.53	1	<b>0.000</b>
<i>Spouse Shamanic Practice</i>	73	24.41	50	43.48	23	12.50	36.80	1	<b>0.000</b>
<i>Tengeri Attendance</i>	156	32.57	108	63.91	48	15.48	11.68	1	<b>0.000</b>
<i>Spiritual</i>	207	43.22	127	75.15	80	25.81	108.51	1	<b>0.000</b>
<i>Ceremony Specific</i>	74	15.45	57	33.73	17	5.48	66.80	1	<b>0.000</b>
<i>Kinship</i>	87	18.16	59	34.91	28	9.03	49.28	1	<b>0.000</b>
<i>Curiosity</i>	231	48.23	14	8.28	217	70.00	166.84	1	<b>0.000</b>

X<sup>2</sup>=Chi-Square value, d.f.=degrees of freedom, p=bootstrapped p-value. Those p-values significant at p<0.05 are highlighted in bold.

Buryat as a child were more likely to be married.<sup>50</sup> Those who were married were also less likely to attend a ceremony out of curiosity and more likely to have attended a previous ceremony performed by Tengeri, though neither of these variables differed with regard to age. Finally, men were more likely to indicate a ceremony specific reason for their attendance than women.

Two-sided, two-sample t-tests were also run to compare scores on the Buryat Traditionality Scale with each of the demographic and attendance choice variables.<sup>51</sup> As is noted in Table 2, Buryats scored significantly higher on this index than non-Buryats (3.35 compared to 0.48 respectively;  $t=-28.47$ ,  $p<0.00$ ). Higher scores were also listed for those who had previously attended Tengeri, those who came for spiritual reasons, those who came for ceremony specific reasons, and those who came for kinship reasons; lower scores were reported for those who were Russian and those attending Tengeri out of curiosity. No significant differences were identified with regard to gender, marital status, or age when analyzing this scale.

These bivariate results help to contextualize the sample as well as the variables' relationships to one another. Specifically, strong correlations between several variables of interest generated concern with regard to multicollinearity in

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<sup>50</sup> Because of the ordinal categorical nature of the age variable, Chi-Square Tests of Independence were run in place of phi correlations when this item was included in bivariate analysis. And due to the polytomous nature of the age variable, a series of *post-hoc* tests using a Bonferroni adjustment *alpha* level were subsequently performed after the Chi-Square analysis. Regarding marriage, these *post-hoc* tests revealed significant differences only between the lowest age group (18-23) and all other age groups. This is to say, those under 23 were significantly less likely to be married than any other age group in this sample, which is consistent with the data provided by Eremina & Kucher (2010) discussed *supra*.

<sup>51</sup> T-tests were not performed between this scale and the culture variables used to create it given their inherent relationship. Additionally, due to the nature of the age variable, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was instead used when comparing age to this scale.

**Table 2: Summary of Bivariate Predictor Variable Correlations, Including Phi Coefficient Correlation Matrix**

	Sex (Female)	Married	Spoke Buryat	Speak Buryat	Any Ceremony	Childhood Practice	Family Practice	Tengeri Attendance	Russian	Buryat	Spiritual	Ceremony Specific	Kinship	Curious
Sex (Female)	<b>-0.110</b>													
Married		<b>0.095</b>												
Spoke Buryat			<b>0.835</b>											
Speak Buryat				<b>0.353</b>										
Any Ceremony					<b>0.382</b>									
Childhood Practice						<b>0.403</b>								
Family Practice							<b>0.512</b>							
Tengeri Attendance								<b>0.442</b>						
Russian									<b>0.506</b>					
Buryat										<b>0.545</b>				
Spiritual											<b>0.621</b>			
Ceremony Specific												<b>0.471</b>		
Kinship													<b>0.550</b>	
Curious														<b>0.401</b>
Age	5.508	<b>60.139</b>	3.747	7.3036	2.403	4.101	3.863	2.244	6.173	1.411	2.158	1.938	5.459	2.252
Buryat Scale														
Negative Response	1.70	1.50	--	--	--	--	--	0.88	2.89	0.48	0.90	1.35	1.42	2.51
Positive Response	1.57	1.72	--	--	--	--	--	3.16	0.48	3.35	2.58	2.87	2.78	0.68
t-statistic	0.780	-1.309	--	--	--	--	--	<b>-16.439</b>	<b>20.241</b>	<b>28.466</b>	<b>11.652</b>	<b>-6.300</b>	<b>-7.634</b>	<b>13.109</b>

Within the matrix, Phi Coefficients are listed in each cell. Those cells highlighted in gray include Phi Coefficients of variables used to create the Buryat Traditionality Scale. Below the matrix, the F-statistic values for a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) using the age variable are shown. Finally, for the Buryat Traditionality Scale, two-sided two-sample t-tests were performed; mean values of this scale for negative and positive responses to each predictor variable are listed, as well as the t-statistic for the overall test. Those tests that were significant at  $p < 0.05$  when bootstrapped are highlighted in bold.

multivariate modeling. As a result, post-estimation diagnostics were run on all multivariate analyses to determine the variance inflation factor (VIF) values for each item included in analysis to determine whether multicollinearity was present among the regressors.

## **MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS**

Variables significant at the bivariate level were next placed into logistic regression classification models for multivariate analysis.<sup>52</sup> This approach was chosen because multivariate models are able to determine whether each variable of interest would remain independently correlated with one's attendance choice when accounting for other variables simultaneously. In addition, the overall *predicted* probability of one's attendance at Olkhon Island may be determined from one's pattern of responses. Using a cutoff point of 50% for the predicted probability of attending Olkhon, we are able to compare predicted ceremony choice with observed ceremony choice and thereby generate a classification table that can identify the number of cases that were correctly and incorrectly predicted.

As can be seen in Table 3, eight multivariate models were run in total. Models 1 and 2 examined each of the significant cultural and attendance choice variables; Model 2 also included both ethnicity variables in order to compare the two models to

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<sup>52</sup> The only exception to this is the Spouse Shamanic Practice variable because all single people would not have valid information for this variable, thereby drastically limiting the sample size of the multivariate model.



determine if ethnicity could be seen to confound any of the identified relationships.<sup>53</sup> In Models 3 through 5, the five cultural indices were replaced with their composite score as captured by the Buryat Traditionality Scale. Again, analyses were run first without the ethnicity variables (Model 3) and then again with the ethnicity variables (Model 4) to identify potential issues of confounding. Furthermore, a statistical interaction term between the Traditionality Scale and the Buryat ethnicity variable was used to investigate the non-additive, *combined* effect of Buryat self-identification and high scores on traditional indices of Buryat culture together (Model 5).

As noted *supra*, exploratory BFA was also performed on the five indicators of traditional Buryat identity to determine the empirical validity of the composite score. Exploratory BFA revealed that the variables of interest best fit into *two* separate factors (Chi-Square Test Model Fit Value=1.112, d.f=1,  $p<0.292$ ). The geomin rotated loadings of these factors showed significance in Factor 1 for the Spoke Buryat and Speaks Buryat variables, whereas significance for Factor 2 was found for Childhood Shamanic Practice, Family Shamanic Practice, and Any Ceremony Attendance. Heuristically, then, Factor 1 can be said to reflect linguistic components of Buryat traditional culture whereas Factor 2 can be said to reflect behavioral elements.

However, these two factors were highly correlated ( $r=0.921$ ,  $p<0.000$ ), and thus there was insufficient variation between the variables for them to both be placed

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<sup>53</sup> Despite the strong, negative correlation between the Russian and Buryat ethnicity variables at the bivariate level, VIF values did not indicate evidence of multicollinearity after being placed into any model together.

into a model together.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the fact that only two items loaded significantly onto Factor 1 presented further conceptual problems, as current literature suggests that at least three to five items should significantly load onto each reported factor (MacCallum 1990).

As a result, exploratory BFA was performed a second time with the restriction that only one factor be generated. Each of the five variables loaded significantly onto this single factor, suggesting that it also adequately captured an underlying construct found in all variables.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, because BFA takes response patterns into account when generating values for each individual, the factor variable contains significantly more variability than a composite score and therefore can produce more nuanced findings. A scatterplot illustrating this increased variability can be found in Figure 9. Given the utility of this factor variable, three new models (6 through 8) were next generated, replicating Models 3 through 5 but with the factor score used to predict Olkhon attendance in place of the composite score.

As shown in Table 3, individuals who attended a ceremony by Tengeri before were about 70% less likely to attend Olkhon Island in each of the eight models. Similarly, individuals who reported that they attended a Tengeri *tailgan* for a reason specific to the ceremony were between 75 and 80% less likely to attend Olkhon, depending on the model. In contrast, those who reported that they attended out of

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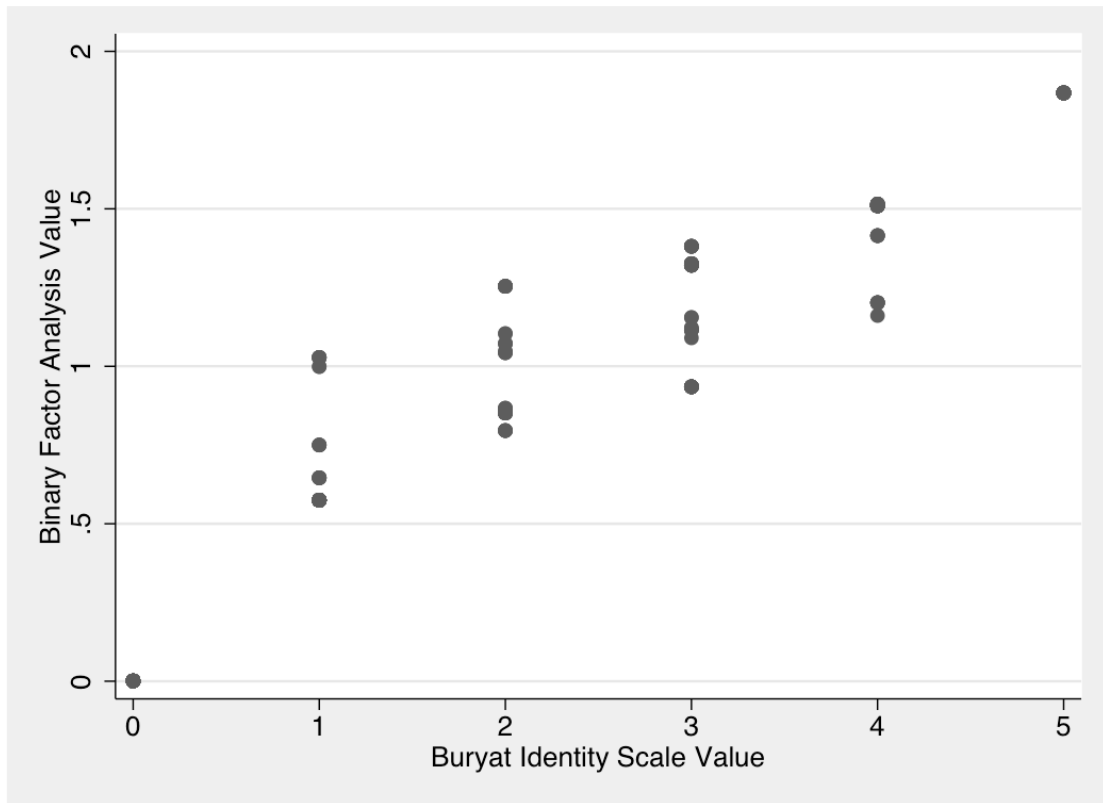
<sup>54</sup> Variance inflation factors (VIFs) rose to as high as 21.14 in a multivariate model, which is significantly higher than even a liberal threshold of 10 (see Menard 1995). Multivariate modeling where one factor was included at a time was considered, but ultimately abandoned because both factors are needed in order to fully capture the components that underlie Buryat traditional identity.

<sup>55</sup> The geomin rotated loadings of this factor were as follows: 0.983 for Spoke Buryat, 0.978 for Speak Buryat, 0.697 for Any Ceremony Attendance, 0.728 for Childhood Shamanic Practice, and 0.861 for Family Shamanic Practice. Each of these loadings were significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 3: Multivariate Logistic Regression Classification Models with Attendance at Olkhon as Outcome**

	No Data Reduction			Data Reduction: Cultural Index			Data Reduction: 1 Factor BFA		
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)	Model (5)	Model (6)	Model (7)	Model (8)	
Past Tenggeri Attendance	0.30 (0.11)***	0.31 (0.12)**	0.33 (0.12)**	0.34 (0.11)***	0.33 (0.11)***	0.39 (0.12)**	0.35 (0.12)**	0.35 (0.12)**	
Spirituality	0.66 (0.24)	0.69 (0.27)	0.61 (0.21)	0.64 (0.22)	0.64 (0.23)	0.62 (0.20)	0.65 (0.22)	0.65 (0.22)	
Kinship	1.08 (0.39)	1.15 (0.44)	1.22 (0.43)	1.29 (0.47)	1.30 (0.45)	1.21 (0.44)	1.29 (0.49)	1.28 (0.48)	
Ceremony Specific	0.24 (0.09)***	0.21 (0.09)***	0.23 (0.10)***	0.21 (0.08)***	0.20 (0.08)***	0.23 (0.09)***	0.21 (0.09)***	0.21 (0.09)***	
Curiosity	9.48 (4.66)***	8.81 (4.08)***	8.46 (3.90)***	7.71 (3.53)***	7.95 (03.56)***	8.27 (3.65)***	7.74 (3.34)***	8.05 (3.45)***	
Spoke Buryat	0.48 (0.21)	0.55 (0.29)							
Speak Buryat	0.76 (0.36)	1.00 (0.51)							
Any Ceremony Attendance	1.32 (0.47)	1.47 (0.57)							
Childhood Shamanic Practice	1.07 (0.39)	1.14 (0.45)							
Family Shamanic Practice	1.57 (0.60)	1.97 (0.81)							
Buryat Traditionality Scale			0.92 (0.09)	1.09 (0.13)	1.18 (0.25)				
Buryat		0.28 (0.17)*		0.25 (0.14)*	0.30 (0.21)		0.28 (0.15)*	0.30 (0.17)*	
Russian		0.65 (0.38)		0.57 (0.31)	0.57 (0.31)		0.56 (0.29)	0.55 (0.27)	
Traditionality Scale - Buryat Ethnicity Interaction					0.88 (0.22)				
BFA Factor Variable						0.71 (0.20)		1.35 (0.60)	
BFA Factor - Buryat Ethnicity Interaction								0.65 (0.40)	
Constant	2.16 (0.82)*	3.54 (2.33)	2.53 (0.93)*	4.70 (2.88)*	4.40 (2.86)*	2.22 (0.73)*	5.06 (3.01)**	5.39 (3.16)**	
Pseudo R2	0.391	0.401	0.376	0.387	0.388	0.379	0.388	0.389	
% Correctly Classified	80.75%	80.75%	80.13%	80.13%	80.33%	80.17%	80.38%	80.79%	

Odds Ratio (Bootstrapped Standard Error). \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ . All p-values were also bootstrapped.



**Figure 9:** This scatterplot of the Buryat Traditionality Scale and the BFA Factor Score helps to visualize the increased variability found in the factor score.

curiosity were between 7 and 9 times more likely to attend Olkhon. In four of the five models where the ethnicity variables were included, Buryats were more likely to have attended the small rituals, whereas no differences were found with regard to Russian ethnicity.<sup>56</sup> In contrast, attendance for reasons related to kinship or spirituality did not predict one’s attendance choice in any model. Additionally, no significant differences were found for either the factor variable, the composite score variable, or any of the five ‘tradition’ variables when analyzed separately.

Finally, each of the 8 models accounted for somewhere between 38 and 40

<sup>56</sup> Because of concerns of multicollinearity, each model that included ethnicity was also run with *only* the Russian variable, as opposed to both Russian and Buryat. The Russian ethnicity variable, however, remained insignificant in all models.

percent of the variance found in the sample. Furthermore, each model was able to correctly classify around 80% of attendees; post-estimation classification statistics suggested that the models predicted false positives and false negatives with relatively even frequency.

## **Discussion**

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The overall aim of this study was to examine a broad range of demographic and cultural data on attendees at different shamanic ceremonies performed by Tengeri in an attempt to better understand how these *tailgans* operate as site of religio-cultural revival. Given that this sample also provides an almost complete picture of those in Buryatia who attended a Tengeri *tailgan* during the summer 2012 season, some general comparisons may also be made between the descriptive statistics of this sample and national census data (although more advanced modeling cannot be completed without a random and republic-wide sample).

However, at the same time, this study examines the demographic and cultural patterns of only a small—and likely non-random—subset of the Buryat population. Following Quijada's (2008) claim that Tengeri shamans have reimagined the 'traditional' Buryat *tailgan* so that it may be situated into a post-Soviet, urbanized space, it is likely that those who choose to attend these ceremonies are, on average, less connected to 'traditional' Buryat culture more broadly. While empirical data does not yet exist to test this hypothesis, ethnographic work strongly supports this claim (Quijada *et al.* 2013). The descriptive statistics garnered from this study, therefore,

should not be read as indicators of indigenous religio-cultural revival across Buryatia on a wider scale, as it is likely that this sample comprises individuals in Buryatia who are disproportionately interested in such a revival and also lack other more ‘traditional’ structural mechanisms—such as clan affiliations or similar social networks—with which to engage with Buryat culture.

## **DISCUSSION OF DEMOGRAPHIC AND CULTURAL TRENDS**

To begin with analyses of the demographic variables, descriptive and inferential statistics looking at gender prove particularly noteworthy. For example, women comprised roughly 61% of this sample, although national census data shows that women make up just over 52% of Buryatia’s population (Federal State Statistics Service 2010). The high prevalence of women in this study is consistent with past sociological research on the relationship between gender and religiosity in Russia (although most of these studies exclusively explore more dominant religious communities such as Orthodox Christians and Muslims). For example, in a cross-cultural study of gender differences in religious belief, Stark (2002) found that 68% of women in Russia professed that they were religious, but this was true for only 46% of men (cited in Krindatch 2006). Similarly, statistics from 1994 indicate that women—across all ages—converted to a theological belief system at higher rates than men in the early post-Soviet era (Greeley 1994).<sup>57</sup> While future empirical study

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<sup>57</sup> However, these trends stand in contrast to more recent empirical research by Holland (2014), which has found that, while Buryat men and women living in Buryatia did not significantly differ in regards to self-proclaimed religiosity, Buryat men reported higher rates of attendance at religious services. However, this attendance included Buddhist and Orthodox services in addition to shamanic ones.

with a more diverse sample of women in Buryatia is needed to determine whether the higher prevalence of women at Tengeri is due to a broader, gendered interest in shamanic practice, past ethnographic research on gender roles in Buryat culture does suggest that one may have expected women to solicit Buryat shamans in higher numbers.

The results of the bivariate analyses of gender and the cultural or attendance choice variables are also important to mention given the ways gender is constructed in Buryat culture. Although research focusing on sex and gender in Buryatia is strikingly limited (as noted by Ortiz-Echevarria 2010), it is commonly acknowledged that gender inequality was—and continues to be—pervasive in Buryat society. Nikolaeva (2009) states, for example, that traditional Buryat culture was largely characterized by patriarchal and agnatic relationships that fostered staunch gender divisions between women and men (see also Krader 1954). Indeed, the primary social functions of women in traditional Buryat society were those of marriage and reproduction, and as a result women were largely consigned to domestic labor.<sup>58</sup> According to Gal & Kligman (2000), the strict gender boundaries confining women to the private sphere were significantly disrupted during the Soviet period so that women could also see themselves as active allies of the Soviet state. However, current ethnographic research nonetheless indicates that many Buryats continue to

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Furthermore, Holland's empirical analyses come from a convenience sample, and the author cautions against assuming his results are representative of Buryatia as a whole.

<sup>58</sup> However, Safonova & Sántha (2007:6) argue that, among the Evenki of eastern Buryatia, "the division of tasks between the genders serves not the establishment of a hierarchy but a horizontal interdependency". If this claim could also be said to apply to Buryats in Buryatia, it may undermine the notion that Buryat culture remains patriarchal in the modern era.

support the notion of ‘proper’ gender roles,<sup>59</sup> although this is less common in contemporary urban spaces such as Ulan-Ude (Ortiz-Echevarria 2010).

Moreover, past literature has further found that gender roles and patriarchal systems of gender inequality have also been embedded into Buryat shamanic practice for both the shamans and their clients (Buyandelgeriyn 2013). With regard to the latter, women in traditional Buryat culture often take responsibility for the health and well being of their families, and as such seek out shamans more often than men to pray on behalf of loved ones or to commemorate their deceased ancestors. In addition, women pray more often than men for significant developmental milestones in their lives relating to kinship, such as marriage and pregnancy.<sup>60</sup> Accordingly, it is of note that women did not differ significantly from men in stating that they attended a Tengeri ceremony for reasons related to either spirituality or kinship. This statistical insignificance holds even when subsetting the sample to only Buryats.

In contrast, women were *less likely* than men to attend a Tengeri ritual for a reason that was specific to that ceremony. However, this discrepancy is likely due to the fact that one ceremony was conducted to honor *Bukhe-Bataar*, a patron deity of masculinity, and another to *Losad Khan*, a water deity who watches over fishermen and other maritime positions commonly reserved for men. Women in this sample were also less likely to be married. Because the survey design was not structured to allow for identification of relationships between respondents, no data is available as

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<sup>59</sup> Numerous ethnographers have noted the ways in which gender roles play a part in maintaining social harmony. For review, see Ortiz-Echevarria (2010).

<sup>60</sup> It is also the case that women take much less active roles in Buryat shamanic rituals. This is often due to concerns of impurity as a result of menses. An example of gender divisions can be seen in Figure 7 above, where women are standing outside where the ceremony is taking place behind a fence.



to whether married individuals' spouses were also attending a given ceremony concurrently. However, it is possible that many men who came to Tengeri may have done so at the behest of their partners, and thus women—both married and single—were overall more drawn to Tengeri. Finally, no gender differences were found between those attending the small *tailgans* and those attending Olkhon Island. Thus, while additional research is needed to more fully capture the gender dynamics at play among clients at these rituals, this study does suggest that women and men do not significantly differ with regard to what *types* of religious structures they seek from within Tengeri.

In addition to gender, it is interesting to point out that age also did not correlate with attendance choice. Because this survey only included adults and because the age question did not request a numeric age but instead an age *category*, one cannot compare the descriptive statistics of this sample to the median or mean ages listed in the most recent Russian census of Buryatia. Nonetheless, the statistical nonsignificance of age in this study is considerable given the dearth of scholarship surrounding how older generations of Buryats navigate religious belief systems in the post-Soviet period. Both Rogers (2009) and Young (1997), for example, suggest that generation may have a considerable and under-estimated impact on rates of reported religious practice, in that elders traditionally take on more religious responsibilities. More specifically, older generations of Buryats are expected to be the keepers of genealogical knowledge and moderators of religious faith within their family according to traditional teachings. However, at the same time, older individuals alive

today were also born during the Soviet era and educated through Soviet atheistic pedagogies that may have profoundly influenced their understandings of and relationships to religious practice.

Given this almost paradoxical positioning, cultural and behavioral differences across age groups prove a particularly compelling point of analysis. When comparing the age bins against the Buryat culture index, those who were older did score slightly higher—though insignificantly so—on the Buryat culture index than did the overall sample (1.89 for the 46+ cohort compared to 1.63 for the full sample).<sup>61</sup> This result suggests that older generations in this sample are no more or less likely than other age groups to participate in Buryat traditional culture.

While the oldest age group scored highest on this composite score of cultural traditionality, it is the *youngest* age group that scored the second highest (mean=1.63). This result is in line with research from the early post-Soviet age, which has found that religious belief follows a “U” shape pattern such that affirmative responses to questions on religiosity are highest for the youngest (18-24) and oldest (65+) generations (Greeley 1994). This research also found that, during this period, having “always” believed in religion significantly decreased with age, but all age groups under 65 were equally likely to profess a religious belief at the time of the study. However, Greeley’s (1994) sample is saturated with ethnic Russians and Christian believers, and so these results may not necessarily be generalizable to shamanic clients in Buryatia. Nonetheless, the close scores between the oldest age bin

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<sup>61</sup> When subsetted to only Buryats, a significant relationship was found ( $F=3.38$ ,  $p<0.020$ ). However, a Bonferroni *post-hoc* test found a significant difference only between age group 24-35 and the oldest age group, 46+. More research is needed to account for this discrepancy.

and the youngest—*i.e.*, those born during the fall of Soviet socialism and the rise of the Russian Federation—may indicate that this “U” pattern holds for indigenous religious revival as well.

The high rate of consistent religious practice among older generations found in Greeley (1994), however, stands in contrast with the fact that age groups in this sample did not differ with regard to childhood shamanic practice or family shamanic practice, even when looking exclusively at a Buryat subsample. While these items do not necessarily map onto a client’s past religious adherence, the above results may be read to suggest that individuals in this sample, including older generations, are coming to Tengeri with little prior engagement with traditional Buryat religio-cultural practice more broadly (*cf.* Quijada 2008, 2009).

Furthermore, the lack of an association between age and *tailgan* attendance for kinship reasons in Table 2 may be read to suggest that elders do not act as sources of genealogical knowledge or arbiter’s of familial religious practice to the same extent today. Empirical support for this claim may also emerge from the fact that older individuals are no more likely to attend the smaller, more clan-based rituals than younger people in this sample. Many of the smaller rituals in this study—such as the *tailgan* celebrating the *Darkhan* clan—are more strongly built on honoring kinship relationships and obligations than is the Olkhon Island event. Statistical nonsignificance thus implies that the *type* of ceremony being performed again does not appear to play a major role in one’s attendance choice for any one age group more than another.

The final demographic variable analyzed in this study was marital status. Interestingly, 88.2% (n=224) of married respondents in this sample were in an endogamous relationship, with Buryats and Russians marrying endogamously at roughly equal rates. This is consistent with past literature on Buryatia suggesting that Buryats are choosing to marry from within their own ethnic group much more frequently today than during the Soviet era (Leisse & Leisse 2007). At the same time, however, Humphrey's (1994) claim that Buryat women are more socially pressured to marry endogamously than Buryat men is not supported by this sample, in that no relationship was found between gender and spouse's ethnicity when subsetting to only married Buryats.

As noted *supra*, the five items relating to traditional Buryat practice were highly correlated with one another, but not correlated with any of the demographic variables. While many of these relationships were hypothesized, the two variables related to language use did produce interesting additional findings. For example, given that Buryat traditional culture includes the "identification of women with mastery of language and intelligence" (Humphrey 1994:70), the fact that no gender differences were reported with regard to indigenous language use is striking, particularly since there remains no relationship when subsetting to only Buryats.

Additionally, the high correlation between Buryat language knowledge as a child and current Buryat language knowledge—both for the full sample and for the subset of just ethnic Buryats—is of note in its own right. Indeed, the decline in indigenous language use is a significant source of anxiety for many interested in

reviving Buryat culture (Graber 2012; Quijada 2013). A primary factor that contributes to this anxiety is the loss of the polyvalence of the Buryat language. Skrynnikova (2003:134), for example, argues that “the inadequate universality of the Buryat literary language, which was based on only one dialect” along with the “inability of the language’s basic vocabulary to adapt to new forms of social existence” presents problems for scholars and activists seeking its return to mainstream culture.

Within the Buryat subsample, 71.4% (n=137) of individuals spoke Buryat as a child and 69.8% (n=134) speak Buryat today. These numbers are striking in light of recent studies suggesting that only 2.4% of Ulan-Ude residents use Buryat at work or at school and that less than 40% use Buryat in the home (Khikhanova 2007; Dyrkheeva *et al.* 2009, both cited in Quijada *et al.* 2013).<sup>62</sup> Although the language questions in this study did not address the depth of one’s knowledge of Buryat or in what capacities individuals use the language, the fact that clients at Tengeri report language use at almost twice the rate of ethnic Buryats living in Buryatia does signal that these ceremonies are spaces where indigenous culture is being revived.<sup>63</sup> Whether individuals with knowledge of the Buryat language are drawn to Tengeri or whether Tengeri inculcates an interest in the Buryat language among clients who

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<sup>62</sup> More consistent with our results, the 2002 All-Russian Census—the most recent census to release language data—published that 72.3% of ethnic Buryats in Buryatia reported at least *some* Buryat language skills (Rosstat 2004, cited in Quijada *et al.* 2013). These numbers also compare with those reported in Leisse & Leisse (2007) among highly educated Buryats. However, numerous methodological issues sully Rosstat’s results (see Graber 2012 for discussion). The data by Dyrkheeva *et al.* (2009) is likely much more accurate and thus reported above.

<sup>63</sup> For the connection between language use and cultural identity among Buryats, see Skrynnikova (2003).

attend the collective's *tailgans* requires further research, although preliminary ethnographic research suggests that the latter is more prevalent (Quijada *et al.* 2012).

The strong relationship between the two language variables in this study also reveals a surprisingly low rate of language attrition. Of the 165 ethnic Buryats who reported language use at some point in their lives, 86.2% (n=131) stated that they both spoke Buryat as a child and also continue to speak it today. Furthermore, several individuals in this study reported language *acquisition*. This is of particular interest given that current ethnographic research indicates that Buryat language use declines with age, as many begin to transfer into Russian when entering school or the professional sphere (Quijada *et al.* 2013). The stability of respondent language use and the small but notable number of individuals who have acquired Buryat as adults thus further bolsters Quijada's (2009) claim that Tengeri *tailgans* are spaces in which Buryat cultural identity is navigated and reinvigorated through shamanic practice.<sup>64</sup>

Finally, almost half the sample examined here claimed to have come to a ceremony out of curiosity. A large percentage (87.5%) of these people also identified themselves as ethnically Russian or "Other", whereas only 15.1% of Buryats indicated curiosity as a reason for attendance. Furthermore, only 32.6% of the sample—and 64.1% of the Buryat subsample—reported having attended a ceremony by Tengeri before. Without longitudinal analysis, one is unable to identify whether those who came to Tengeri for the first time in the summer of 2012 have continued to

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<sup>64</sup> It should be noted that the shamans of Tengeri do not consider language revival to be a principal goal of their organization *per se*. Nonetheless, the shamans themselves do pursue fluency in Buryat in order to communicate with *ongon* spirits, and Buryat language skills are advantageous for clients who wish to interact with their ancestors (Quijada *et al.* 2013).

engage with shamanic rituals and/or traditional Buryat culture. Nevertheless, these numbers, when read together, seem to suggest that Tengeri ceremonies act as sites for the revitalization of Buryat culture for only a religiously inclined and ethnically Buryat subset of Tengeri's clientele. In order to better determine the validity of this claim, however, one must turn next to the results of multivariate models, which allow for an examination of the *individual effects* of each of these demographic, cultural, and attendance choice variables when analyzed concurrently.

## **DISCUSSION OF MULTIVARIATE MODELS**

As noted in the Results section, past experience with Tengeri; attendance for a reason specific to the ceremony; and attendance out of curiosity each showed independent statistical significance in all eight multivariate models. These findings are not surprising when considering the nature of the Olkhon Island ceremony. For example, given the large number of tourists at Lake Baikal and the international esteem that the attendant Shamanic Conference has garnered, it follows that the space in which the Olkhon Island *tailgan* was performed proved much more accessible to individuals who did not actively seek out Tengeri as a religio-spiritual service. Attendees in this demographic would logically have not encountered Tengeri previously, nor would they have received much prior exposure to Buryat shamanic practice. Indeed, at the bivariate level, 70% (n=217) of individuals who attended the Olkhon Island event reported curiosity as a reason for attendance, which supports this assumption.

However, at the same time, the written responses for many who indicated attendance out of curiosity at Olkhon included such reasons as ‘I am interested in the culture’ or ‘to watch shamans’. Thus, the curiosity variable in these models should not necessarily be read as indexing a voyeuristic or detached relationship to the ritual more broadly. It is possible that, for some of these clients, this exposure to shamanic practice may have piqued their interest and led them to return or further explore Buryat customs in other ways.<sup>65</sup> Without longitudinal data, we are unable to determine whether the ‘curiosity’ expressed in 2012 has meaningfully continued into today.

Given the nature of the Olkhon event, it is also unsurprising that individuals who came to Tengeri for a reason specific to a ceremony had a lower probability of attending Olkhon. However, it is noteworthy that this significance still held after subsetting for individuals who did not report attendance out of curiosity. Nonetheless, attendance for a ceremony specific reason was low overall (15.5% of the total sample), and only 26.5% of those who reported a spiritual or religious reason for attendance chose a ceremony for its structural features. This result seems to indicate that those who are engaging with Tengeri at a religio-spiritual level are frequently not coming to Tengeri’s *tailgans* for the specific *ongon* spirits or clan groups being honored. Ethnographic work by Quijada *et al.* (2012) suggests that this is more likely due to a general unawareness among Tengeri’s clientele as to the structural differences between a given ceremony; however, the significant differences at the

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<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, a variable was not included asking clients whether they were a tourist or from the area. Thus, it was impossible to subset down to only those who *could* meaningfully begin to engage with Buryat traditional practice in Buryatia after the event.



multivariate level does signal that those going to Tengeri recognize the overt disparities between the Olkhon Island ceremony and the smaller ceremonies held in Ulan-Ude, even if differences are not well known between the smaller ceremonies themselves.

It is interesting to note that attendance for kinship or spiritual reasons did not significantly differ between the two ceremony types. However, the kinship variable was constructed conservatively to only include those responses where one's relationship to family was explicitly noted, such as 'to pray for the health of my child' or 'my husband is participating'. Theoretically, many who come to a *tailgan* 'to pray' will also honor their ancestors in the process, which may be seen as a kinship obligation. Thus, attendance for reasons of kinship only *as defined* here occurs in equal probability at both ceremonies. In contrast, the spiritual motivation variable was specified much more expansively, encompassing any indications of prayer, meditative reflection, worship, or participation. The nonsignificance of this variable at the multivariate level indicates that there exist subsets of clients at both ceremonies who have come to Tengeri for reasons related to religious practice.

Read together, these variables seem to suggest that the Olkhon Island event retains a much more bifurcated clientele than the smaller rituals. At Olkhon, one will find a significantly larger number of individuals who have never been to Tengeri before as well as individuals approaching these ceremonies out of curiosity. However, Olkhon Island is also comprised of clients who are coming for spiritual or kinship reasons at relatively equal levels as the smaller ceremonies, when controlling for

other factors. Thus, Olkhon is at once a meaningful religious ceremony for some and an intriguing curio to begin to wade into the waters of traditional Buryat culture for others. This striking dichotomy, which has also been noted ethnographically by Quijada *et al.* (2012), provides fertile ground for future research.

Furthermore, in each of the eight models that were run, the five Buryat traditionality variables were included in some capacity—either as independent constructs, collapsed into one composite scale, or restructured as a factor score. Despite the diverse methodological approaches used to place these variables into models, no multivariate regression showed statistical significance for this set of variables. In stark contrast, self-identification as ethnically Buryat significantly increased one’s probability of having attended a smaller ceremony in four of the five models in which it was included. These disparate findings cannot be read as the result of confounding or multicollinearity, as models were run with and without the ethnicity variables as well as with and without an interaction term. Thus, there appears to exist a great disparity between Buryat ethnicity and the variables that indicate one’s relationship to a Buryat identity. In order to fully understand this disparity, however, it is necessary to first develop a stronger understanding as to how ethnicity and ethnic self-identification function in contemporary Buryat society.

## **A NOTE ON ETHNICITY**

At the study’s origin, it was hypothesized that the five ‘traditionality’ items and also the summed Buryat scale would be highly correlated with the Buryat

ethnicity variable (which was confirmed, as discussed *supra*). Underlying this hypothesis was the assumption that one's ethnic self-identification and the cultural practices one chooses to participate in are both manifestations of a latent construct: one's connection to a Buryat self-concept. If this assumption were true, it would stand to reason that statistical findings would be consistent between the two, given that they are highly correlated and measure the same underlying concept. The fact that disparate findings were reported between the ethnicity and cultural variables is compelling, particularly if we consider that ethnic self-identification within Buryatia, as within any multicultural society, is layered with both social and political significance (Cheshko 2000; Skrynnikova 2003). Given the complexity of identity politics in Russia—particularly surrounding the intersections between ethnicity, race, and nationhood (Lemon 2002)—it is therefore integral to first provide a theoretical framework for how ethnicity (*etnichnost*) is understood and navigated in contemporary Buryatia before interpreting the results of our models.

To begin, Sokolovski (1999) notes that there exist three primary approaches to the study of ethnic phenomena: *primordialism*, *instrumentalism*, and *constructivism*. Although a full review of literature surrounding conceptions of ethnicity is outside the scope of this paper, suffice to say that ethnic categories in Russia have been heavily informed by ethnographic theory predicated on the primordialist paradigm. Even though the term “primordialism” did not develop as a cohesive framework for the study of ethnicity from within the Western tradition until its application by famed American anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973), its origins can be traced in academic

scholarship to at least as far back as the nineteenth century, where it was central to the European romanticist and positivist intellectual movements (Tishkov 1997; Sokolovski 1999).

The application of a primordialist approach to the ethnographic study of ethnicity in Russia was arguably first laid out by the eminent Russian anthropologist Sergei Shirokogorov (1923), who is best known for developing the concept of “ethnos” (*ethnos*). As Shirokogorov defines it, an ethnos is conceived of as “a group of people, speaking one and the same language and admitting common origin, characterized by a set of customs and a lifestyle preserved and sanctified by tradition, which distinguishes it from other [groups] of the same kind” (translated in Sokolovski 1999:5). According to Shirokogorov and his followers, numerous distinguishable ethnoi fleck the Russian landscape, each with their own territories and cultural value systems.

Primordialist understandings of ethnicity in Russia have been largely influenced by—and have in turn reciprocally influenced—Soviet ideology. As noted in the Introduction of this paper, the Soviet government adopted a policy of *korenizatsiia*, or indigenization, during its infancy, which aimed to promote native culture and language under the assumption that true socialist unity could only be established through a recognition and celebration of diversity (Slezkine 1994; Martin 2001). Indeed, the very creation of an ASSR system—almost paradoxical given the anti-federalist nature of Marxist-Leninist ideology—was predicated on the belief that ethno-territorial autonomy would prove politically essential for the cooperation of the

diverse communities living within Soviet borders (Gellner *et al.* 1975). However, by conflating ethnicity and nationality, the former became both intrinsically linked to geography and also a much more static category, given that one would be assigned a nationality at birth.<sup>66</sup> As such, Slezkine (1994:444) claims that, by the mid-twentieth century in Russia, “individual ethnicity had become a biological category impervious to cultural, linguistic, or geographic change”.

It is in this political and social atmosphere that Shirokogorov coined the term “ethnos”. Much like the borders of a republic, ethoi were seen to have clear and unequivocal divisions that would fit together like a cultural jigsaw puzzle to make up the totality of the Soviet People (*Sovetskii narod*). Within each ethnos, individuals were believed to be connected by an affective and almost ineffable common mentality, manifested through territory, language, and social customs in ways that allow for recognizable distinctions to be made between different groups (Sokolovski 1999). Throughout the twentieth century, Soviet ethnographers worked tirelessly to map Russia’s myriad ethnoi as well as their inceptions (ethnogeneses) and breakdowns as though they were themselves living organisms (Hirsch 2005).<sup>67;68</sup>

At the same time, however, this popular emphasis on ethnos spawned an identity crisis for many ethnic Russians, particularly in the aftermath of Moscow’s

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<sup>66</sup> A significant example of this can be seen in the development of a “nationality” category in Soviet passports. Although one’s location of residence could be changed, one’s nationality was determined by birth and fixed (see Slezkine 1994:444 for discussion). For a broader examination of “nationality” as a placeholder for race/ethnicity in Russia, see Lemon (2002).

<sup>67</sup> The idea of an ethnos as analogous to an organism was most seriously developed by Gumilev (1989). See Sokolovski (1999) for discussion.

<sup>68</sup> This is true as well for the post-*perestroika* period, where ethnography was used in the search for new social and political identities (Tishkov 1997).

*korenizatsiia* policy. This is to say, the ethnonym Russian during the Soviet period became a “politically empty category”—an ethnicity that was at once the dominant ethno-political force in the USSR and also a disenfranchised and stateless community (Slezkine 1994:135).<sup>69</sup> After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the idea of a singular ‘Soviet People’ transcending all ethnic categories and uniting the farrago of ethno-national identities similarly collapsed as a meaningful political ideology, further compounding the liminality of “Russian” as an ethnic designation.

By the late 1990s, the lack of a coherent understanding of the Russian self-concept proved a site of tension for many European Russians, so much so that Boris Yeltsin, the first president of the Russian Federation, even organized a national essay competition to define a ‘Russian idea’ (*rossiiskaya ideya*), which he hoped would allay the social discomfort felt by ethnic Russians (Rutland 2010).<sup>70</sup> One such answer—most notably advocated by Nationalities Minister Valentin Zorin between 2001 and 2004—was to try to detach ethnicity from territory so that it may instead be understood “as the personal choice of an individual rather than an objective, ascribed characteristics, defined according to criteria laid down by the state” (Rutland 2010:126).

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<sup>69</sup> However, it is important to note the linguistic distinction between *russky* (an ethnic designation) and *rossiiskiy* (a citizenship designation), both of which are translated as “Russian”. The conflation of these terms in English leads to a much less nuanced understanding of the subtle differences between the two. As such, Sokolovski (1999) suggests that the word “Rossian” be used when referring to the latter. However, this is not uniform.

<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately, this search for a Russian identity produced some alarmist and supremacist ideologies, which, along with Moscow’s lack of a coherent non-discrimination policy, contribute to racial tensions as well as the further marginalization of internal minorities in many areas of Russia. See Osipov (2010) for discussion.

Such a move would have brought Russia's popular understanding of ethnicity much more in line with the *constructivist* framework that dominates contemporary Western anthropological discourse. This paradigm holds that ethnic categories, as well as the boundaries between them, are socially constructed, negotiated, and maintained through institutions and social practices. Indeed, constructivism may be seen as the polar opposite of primitivism along the spectrum of anthropological analyses of ethnicity, one that seriously critiques primordialism as founded upon vacuous and unsound theoretical principles (Tishkov 1997). In Russia, such an individuation of ethnicity was envisioned as a way to allow people more fluidity and flexibility in *self-identification*, which is itself a major feature of modernity that drastically departs from the primordialist model. This would also help reduce the social tensions surrounding the reality that around 10 million indigenous peoples claim residency outside their titular republics or that over 40 recognized ethnic communities lack a republic where they may be considered *titular* (Rutland 2010).

However, Rutland also argues that this Western constructivist view of ethnicity as partly voluntaristic has not strongly taken hold within Russia; instead, the theory of *ethnos* remains the dominant theoretical framework to understand ethnicity for many ethnographers as well as the Russian citizenry more broadly. Thus, the dual specters of *korenizatsiia* and *ethnos* continue to haunt the Russian state, as exemplified by the myriad ethno-territorial arguments employed by titular nationalities to seek broader autonomy or independence, sometimes even violently so (Slezkine 1994; Rutland 2010).

Although some ethno-political tensions and independence movements do exist in Buryatia (Zhukovskaya 1997), the republic remains remarkably peaceful when compared to others within the Russian Federation, which is frequently noted and extolled by those living within Buryatia's borders (Cakars 2008; Quijada 2009). Nonetheless, ethnic self-identification does appear to map to some extent to one's sense of self. For example, when a group of college students at the Buryat State University in Ulan-Ude were asked whether their value system came from Buryat, Russian, Western, or individual values, significantly more Buryats reported Buryat values, whereas significantly more Russians living in Buryatia reported Russian values (with very few reporting Western or individual values in both ethnic groups). Similarly, Buryats reported that they felt more connected to Buryatia while Russians felt more connected to the Russian Federation; however, both groups reported an equally close connection to their hometown as well as a general dissatisfaction toward the Buryat political system (Leisse & Leisse 2007). Although this is a non-random sample of highly educated individuals that may not be representative of the entire population of Buryatia, these results suggest that there exists a relationship between one's reported ethnicity and one's feelings toward Buryat culture or the Republic of Buryatia more broadly.

In spite of—or perhaps because of—the dominance of a primordialist concept of ethnicity in Russia, citizens must make highly politicized considerations as to how they self-identify. For example, the ethnographic work conducted as part of Quijada *et al.*'s (2012) interdisciplinary research suggests that many people who attended the



ceremonies have genealogical linkages (sometimes very recently so) to both Russians and Buryats, but yet only just over one percent of respondents reported that they were “Both Buryat and Russian”.<sup>71</sup> While it would be inappropriate for scholarship to reassign ethnic identities based on genealogical or genetic pedigrees, these inconsistencies nonetheless reflect important elements regarding how ethnicity is conceptualized and negotiated in Buryatia today, particularly for people with multi-ethnic backgrounds where ethnicity may be more fluid. Although this thesis does not attempt to directly address what factors contribute to an individual’s choice of ethnic self-identification,<sup>72</sup> this theoretical review does help to contextualize the ethnicity variables as a reflection of one’s relationship to Buryat culture and the republic more so than a direct mapping of one’s ethnic pedigree.

However, the five variables developed to map one’s association with Buryat traditionality and the Buryat ethnicity variable displayed drastically inconsistent results in the multivariate models. As seen in Models 1 and 2, none of these five variables significantly predicted whether an individual was present at Olkhon Island or at a small ritual. Furthermore, Models 3 through 5 revealed that this was also the case when we instead consider the number of traditionality variables on which one responded affirmatively (i.e. a single scale variable), and Models 6 through 8 show

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<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, the prevalence of self-identified Russians in a sample of individuals engaging in Buryat cultural practice indicates either an increased interest on the part of European Russians in indigenous religion or that many people who identified as Russian nonetheless have strong cultural and/or ethnic ties to Buryats. Although Metzko (2008) does suggest that ethnic Russians are seeking out shamans in higher numbers, the latter would be more consistent with ongoing ethnographic research as part of this project.

<sup>72</sup> Some of the factors that are suggested to drive self-identity include language use (Yalaeva 1999) and “ethnic self-consciousness” (Chimitdorzhiev 1996, cited in Skrynnikova 2003:128). Also see Leach *et al.* (2008) for a comprehensive review on the psychology of self-identification.

the same result when generating a factor score from the variables. As such, it appears that individuals at both of these types of ceremonies have relatively similar relationships to traditional Buryat culture when controlling for other variables.

From these results, it may be argued that it is *ethnic self-identification* that predicts one's ceremony choice and not necessarily the *behavior patterns* that index one's relationship to traditional culture.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, the individuals that make up this sample are themselves not strongly embedded into Buryat culture, particularly given that the mean value for the scale was 1.63 and over 40% of the sample reported a score of zero. As such, it is possible that these results emerge because the Buryats in this sample (as well as the possibly large number of clients who self-identified as Russian but have strong ethnic and cultural ties to Buryats) represent a small subset of the Buryat population, one that lacks a strong connection to traditional culture.<sup>74</sup> For these Buryats, it is not so much the depth of one's background in Buryat culture but instead the desire to cultivate a self-concept consistent with one's ethnic self-identity that proves a pivotal factor in choosing to attend a given Tengeri ceremony. This hypothesis is further bolstered by the statistical nonsignificance of any interaction term, which suggests that Buryats who score highly on the Traditionality composite scale or the factor score do not have divergent motivations from those Buryats who score low on the scales. However, more research is clearly needed to contextualize our findings, given the complexity of identity politics in Russia.

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<sup>73</sup> The reference to ethnic self-identification here is only meant to include Buryat ethnic self-identification, as the Russian ethnicity variable was insignificant in all models.

<sup>74</sup> This is suggested by Quijada *et al.* (2013). However, data is needed to compare respondents' Traditionality scores to Buryatia residents who are not attending Tengeri ceremonies in order to test this hypothesis empirically.

## LIMITATIONS, STRENGTHS, AND FUTURE STUDY

Despite the expansiveness of this study, several limitations need to be acknowledged. To begin, because these surveys were collected at religious services, there were numerous practical and ethical limitations as to survey design and the method of survey collection. While longer surveys with more developed questions would have aided empirical analysis, concerns that survey fatigue would be more immediate—given that individuals were present to participate in a religious ritual and not an ethnographic study—limited the number of items asked of respondents. Furthermore, the nature of the *tailgans* as well as ethical considerations restricted the possibility for Quijada and colleagues to identify the number of individuals who refused to participate in the study; while anecdotal evidence does suggest that almost all individuals did complete a survey, the possibility of non-response bias or self-selection bias nonetheless exists.

In addition, several weaknesses can be identified from within the survey design itself. For example, individuals were not asked whether they were tourists or residents of Buryatia. The response to this question would have proved particularly helpful in analyzing the sample coming from Olkhon Island. Ideally, it would be possible to subset out those individuals who have no connection to Buryat culture or Buryatia more broadly, given that this study intends to inquire into religious revival for those who both *are already interested* or *could become meaningfully interested* in

Buryat shamanic practice.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, respondents were not asked whether they were aware of the deities being honored at a given ceremony. Without this data, we are unable to delve deeper into questions regarding how one came to decide which ceremony to attend.

Individuals were also able to attend more than one event, but it was not pragmatically feasible for unique identifiers to be assigned so that statistical analyses could control for repeat observations. Although bootstrapping techniques do help militate against possible biases, a dataset that identifies any repeated observations would produce more accurate results.

Furthermore, the creation of the Buryat Traditionality Scale could have been improved through the addition of more variables regarding behavior patterns commonly perceived among Buryats to be ‘traditional’. This scale could also have been substituted for more empirically supported measures, such as the Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS) or the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R), in the surveys (see Yoon 2011). However, the implementation of these measures would have been difficult given the aforementioned desire for brevity. Questions regarding ethnic identity could also have been expanded to include one’s pedigree in addition to self-identification. In doing so, comparisons could then be made between endonymous self-designation and one’s genealogical background, which could

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<sup>75</sup> Although it is possible for the curiosity variable to be used as a proxy for identifying tourists, empirical interest in clients who are just becoming interested in Buryat shamanism—*i.e.*, those who reported curiosity at this event but subsequently continued to become involved with traditional Buryat culture—made such an approach untenable.

provide a clearer picture as to the politics of ethnic self-identification within this community.

Finally, this study was limited with regard to the types of research questions that could be reasonably addressed. Similar to the datasets of Buryats used by Holland (2014) and Leisse & Leisse (2007), this study was comprised of a non-random sample of the Buryat population and so results could not be generalized to individuals outside of this sample. In order to best respond to Quijada's (2008) claim that Tengeri ceremonies act as sites of religio-cultural revival, quantitative analysis would require data that included a reference group against which Tengeri's clients could be compared. Short of this, results may only be read as indicators of *a priori* hypotheses, a method of validation that could easily be sullied by confirmation bias.

However, these limitations were offset by several strengths. For example, this is the first empirical study of clients at shamanic ceremonies in Buryatia, and the use of both descriptive and inferential statistics is able to greatly bolster ethnographic work being conducted on these communities. Indeed, theoretical arguments are more strongly formed when built upon a plurality of methodological approaches. Furthermore, the high response rate of this study allowed for basic demographic comparisons to be made between those attending Tengeri and the 2010 Russian Census. This proves particularly notable, given that very little national data is collected on ethnic Buryats or followers of shamanism because of the small sample size (*cf.* Filatov & Lunkin 2006).

In addition to support for current ethnographic work on Buryat shamanism, empirical study is also able to shed light onto statistical trends that may not have been previously identified. Because of this, numerous directions for future anthropological research may be derived from the results of this study. As noted above, little work has been conducted with regard to the age or gender dynamics at play at these ceremonies, although several intriguing findings (and non-findings) were identified using these demographic variables at the bivariate level. Furthermore, future research is needed to examine the disparities that emerged between the ethnicity and traditional culture variables, as these results seem to indicate that one's ethnic self-identity does not necessarily map onto one's relationship to traditional Buryat culture. This investigation would greatly contribute to the prolific contemporary work being conducted on the functional significance of ethnicity in post-Soviet Russia from within other disciplines as well.

Given that this study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the demographic and cultural differences between those attending the Olkhon Island event and the small ceremonies, the results of the multivariate models open several additional opportunities for future research. For example, one could next analyze more specifically *how* those variables that were significant at the multivariate level—including past Tengeri attendance, attendance for ceremony specific reasons, Buryat ethnic self-identification, or attendance out of curiosity—contribute to one's attendance choice. Moreover, additional measures of respondents' relationships to traditional Buryat identity could improve discussion as to how one's lived

experiences or affiliation with a Buryat self-concept contribute to one's decision to attend a ceremony put on by Tengeri. Subsetting this data to include only ethnic Buryats could also provide interesting comparative analyses as well.

Finally, much more work is available with regard to the psychology of shamanism in Buryatia. Currently, little is known as to exactly how each component of Winkelman's biopsychosocial framework applies—if at all—to Buryat shamans or whether profound differences would emerge when contrasting Tengeri shamans from more 'traditional' clan shamans. As more research is done on the motivational, cognitive, and cultural elements of shamanic practice, this non-reductive psychological theory will provide invaluable guidance.

Furthermore, an increased emphasis on the psychological study of shamanic practice would prove fruitful from a theoretical standpoint as well. As Wulff (2000) notes, "the study of phenomenon such as mysticism, if done openly, fundamentally challenges the methods and assumptions of empirical psychology" (quoted from Hood *et al.* 2009:481). As such, the psychological study of shamanism supplies exciting new opportunities for both the generation of ethnographic knowledge and also for fundamentally reflecting upon the psychological foundations of humanity's understanding of itself.

## **Conclusion**

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During the summer of 2012, anthropologist of religion Justine Quijada and her colleagues collected ethnographic and survey data at five shamanic ceremonies led by

a religious organization in Buryatia named Tengeri. The goal of this interdisciplinary research was to examine—through both quantitative and qualitative lenses—the ways in which these rituals provide a space for individuals in Buryatia to engage with the elements of traditional Buryat culture that had been suppressed during the Soviet period. This work represents the first attempt to place these various methodological approaches in conversation with one another to provide a more holistic understanding of why individuals choose to attend Tengeri’s ceremonies.

In line with the ethnographic fieldwork analyzed by Quijada, it was found that individuals who attend these ceremonies report behavior patterns consistent with traditional Buryat culture—such as Buryat language use and past shamanic practice—at much higher rates than the population of Buryatia more broadly. Additionally, significant cultural differences were identified between individuals who attended Tengeri’s small ceremonies and those who attended the organization’s large ceremony on Olkhon Island. Moreover, statistical analyses revealed a striking contrast with regard to attendance choice between self-reported ethnicity and previous participation in Buryat culture. As such, the data mining techniques and empirical analyses used in this work not only bolster the ethnographic hypotheses developed by Quijada and colleagues but also identify areas for future academic research.



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