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The Buryat-Mongols' Way of Being and Their National Image of the World

Abstract

The article focuses on the comparison of two main concepts in the national image of the world of the Buryat-Mongols as it applies to their way of being: the Man of the Steppes and the Man of Water and the Woods. The research is based on the theory of the well-known Russian scholar Georgii Gachev, who connects types of landscape and natural environment to national images of the world. Dwelling around Lake Baikal on the one hand, and at flat steppe territories on the other hand is reflected in two alternative ways of living, as well as images of world and forms of imagination. The author of the article analyzes the two variants of identity, which have always been under the influence of certain geographical and climate factors, economic activities, as well as cultural and historic traditions of various Buryat-Mongol ethnic subgroups.

Keywords: image of the world, landscape, nature, ethnos, nomads, imaginative writing, steppe, water.

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Introduction

Globalization brings a certain threat to humanity as a whole, as well as to ethnic groups taken separately. In a global age, the loss of national identity blurs the distinctions between ethnic groups, and as a consequence it leads to assimilation processes, which destroy identities, including their values, cultures, languages and traditions.

It is generally assumed that an individual realizes him- or herself in two ways: as a person capable of dealing with problems through individual system of personal values and as a member of society. We can say that traditional society formed semantic foundations of culture that defined ethnic identity of a particular ethnic group. Yet at the same time the background of research in the humanities concerning ethnic groups interaction and mutual involvement of diverse cultures in human history teaches us that it is worth noting the differences and even contradictions within the same ethnic group. Thus, types of individuals depend not only on the personal way of development but also on the characteristics of the historical development of the society where they live, as well as the geographical environment and the form of labor activity and economy which are typical for a certain stage of societal evolution.

The Mongolian ethnoscene has traditionally dwelled in the vast territory of Central Asia. As Liubov' Abaeva states:

Каждая этническая культура в пространстве Центральной и Восточной Азии, а также Южной Сибири, соответственно характеру хозяйственно-культурного типа органично заняла свою собственную этническую, экологическую нишу (китайский и славянский этносы – по поймам рек и водоемов, монгольские этносы – в степных районах), обеспечив тем самым свое собственное неповторимое этническое пространство культуры и этнокультурных традиций с соответствующими самосознанием и самоидентификацией¹ (Abaeva, 2011, p. 24).

The author then provides us with further clarification and a more detailed classification:

четыре большие этнотерриториальные группы: южные монголы, центральные монголы (халха), западные монголы и северные монголы (буряты).

¹ “Each ethnic culture on the territory of Central and Eastern Asia, as well as Southern Siberia, according to the very essence of its economic and cultural type naturally took up their own ethnic, ecological niche (the Chinese and Slavic ethnic groups – on floodplains of rivers and other water basins, the Mongolian ethnic groups – in the steppe regions), thus securing their own unique ethnic cultural space and ethno-cultural traditions with respective self-awareness and self-identity.” (All translations mine – I.B.).

Все группы идентифицировали себя как «Хамаг монгол», подразумевая общие этногенетические корни и истоки² (Абаева, 2011, р. 24).

The ethnic groups that found themselves to the north of the borderline were consolidated under the name of “Buryats.” As soon as the Russian–Chinese borderline was established, free movement came to an end, and since then (the process was completed in 1727), the general self-name of “Buryats” began disseminating, which became a unified ethnic self-determination, whose adherents nevertheless still considered themselves to be a part of the Mongolian meta-ethnic unity.

What is interesting about such segmentation is that the Buryats are further subdivided into a number of ethnic groups according to their location and type of settlement. Basically, however, they comprise two main ethnic groups: those who live to the West of Baikal are called Western or Cisbaikalaikal (*pribaïkalskie*) – sometimes also Northern or Irkutsk – Buryats, those who live to the East of Baikal are known as Eastern or Transbaikal (*zabaïkalskie*) Buryats. The difference between them was in housekeeping customs and cultural peculiarities, in elements of material and spiritual cultures, in rites and traditions, in dialects and speech variants. Western Buryats led a settled life and were occupied with agriculture, planting and cattle-breeding. They were under a strong influence of Russians and their culture, and some of them accepted the Russian Orthodox Church, although the majority stayed shamanists. Eastern Buryats led a nomadic and semi-nomadic way of living and were occupied with sheep- and cattle-breeding, they followed the northern variant of Buddhism (Lamaism) and Mongolian-Tibetan traditions.

Abaeva argues that this sort of segmentation coincides with the subdivision into the Man of the Steppes (Eastern Buryats) and the Man of Water and the Woods (Western Buryats), two ethnic and genetic types in terms of geographical place and economic activities.

Nomadic civilization and national images of the world

As Gennadiï Pikov has pointed out, one of relevant aspects of the current theoretical debates is rethinking such traditional concept as “civilization”:

Было сделано немало для реконструкции истории и понимания специфики многих евразийских цивилизаций. Если исходить из логики исторического процесса, под «цивилизацией» следует понимать не уровень развития того

² “Four large ethno-territorial groups: Southern Mongols, Central Mongols (Khalkha), Western Mongols and Northern Mongols (the Buryats). All these groups identified themselves as ‘Hamag Mongol,’ thereby recognizing their common ethno-genetic roots and origins.”

или иного общества, а определенный «мир» как пространственно–временной культурно–экономический континуум, у которого есть «своя собственная идея, собственные страсти, собственная жизнь, желания и чувствования и, наконец, собственная смерть»³ (Pikov, 2009; final quote after: Spengler, 1923, p. 20).

It is an assumption commonly inferred from these words that historical and geographical determinism is at play in the lifestyle and mentality which define a person as an individual and a member of a particular community in a particular area.

In the context of contemporary theories of nomadic civilization this manifests itself when the authors underline this civilization's most characteristic features and most considerable dimensions. For example, Anatoliĭ Martynov highlighted such features of nomadic civilization as cattle-breeding, floodplain and irrigated agriculture, handicrafts, monumental construction of architectural type, highly-developed arts, transportation and communications (Martynov, 2000). Iurii Khudiakov and Sergeĭ Komissarov acknowledged the importance of architecture, literacy and urban settlements (KHudiakov & Komissarov, 2002). E. Batorova and E. Mitupova believe that the nomadic civilization of Central Asia, as a *sui generis* super system comprising a number of peoples and ways of life but nevertheless forming a socio-cultural unity, has occupied a firm place in the history of mankind (Batorova & Mitupova, 2000). These views provide a useful general starting point for a definition of the nomadic civilization.

Nomads spent most of their life in constant movement in the vast, seemingly endless areas that are the steppes, which gave the reason to call this culture the “steppe culture.” One of constituents of the Central Asian civilization of the steppes was the ancient culture of the Mongolian people. Within this larger group, the Buryat nomads roamed freely from Lake Baikal to the Khalkha lands and back season by season. In various circumstances, they were under the Russian administration or the Mongol rulers' control. Nevertheless, migrations of families and even larger groups in both directions continued regardless of the changing political and state affiliation of both the people and the lands they roamed. Because of border transparency among Mongolian local territories, and then – from the early eighteenth century on – between Qing China and Russia, many Buryats moved freely between neighboring Mongolia, the Barga Mongolians' lands

³ “A lot has been done to reconstruct the history and to further the understanding of many Eurasian civilizations. If we proceed from the logic of the historical process, what should be understood by ‘civilization’ is not the level of a society's development but a certain ‘world’ as a spatial-temporal, cultural and economic continuum, which has ‘its own idea, own passions, its own life, will and feeling, its own death’” (final quote after: Spengler, 1927, p. 21).

in the east and the territories of border Cossacks. Within the administrative system set up by the Russian Empire for its nomadic subjects in Siberia, most Buryats belonged to different tribes of the Aga Steppe Duma.

For centuries, there was a certain dependence of Buryat traditional economy and lifestyle on land resources of a number of neighboring political entities. In its turn, this resulted in porous frontiers and increased “contact” functions of borderlands (Boldonova & Boronoeva, 2013, p. 9). Even today, despite the changes in the lifestyle of nomads and more fundamental shifts, including political and territorial ones, the Buryat-Mongols in the countryside still preserve the traditional ways, old customs and traditions of the nomads.

The well-known Russian scholar, philosopher, and cultural and literary expert Georgii Gachev is the author of the famous conception of the “national images of the world,” the main core of which is the unity of the local nature (space, or Cosmos), the national character (Psyche) and way of thinking (Logos), together forming the representation of the whole entity: “body-soul-mind.” The scholar believes that the nature of the landscape determines the national model of the world of those who inhabit it and reflects universal features of human experience. National images of the world are based on the universal mythological concepts of the elements: Air, Fire, Water and Earth, which are designated by the author as the material embodiment of the Logos. Put differently, the national image of the world is the implication of Nature in Culture, and in order to be able to read its ways of representation, Gachev applies a symbolic coding of the four natural elements of being. Thus, to better understand the book of the national way of being, one should read it by interpreting land, mountains, valleys, lakes or rivers and their manifestation in the arts (Gachev, 1995).

Man of the Steppes

Within the Buryat-Mongol ethnic group the more traditional and familiar subgroup was that of the nomad, or the Man of the Steppes. In contrast to the peasant, the nomad has always been in constant migration, so that his nomadic space is boundless. Consequently, the peasant’s geographical territorial idea is much more limited in contrast to the nomad’s spatial mentality. The nomad’s national character (Psyche), according to Gachev’s ideas, is determined by landscape. The nomad is the son of the free elements of the wind and the boundless steppes, whose Cosmos is thus best represented by the ever-blue sky itself, with its fair celestial spheres and planets. Moving along with their cattle, nomads explore the natural environment, identifying themselves as part of it. It is clear from

this that mentality and imagery of the nomadic folklore are determined by their economy – cattle and sheep, dairy production, and leather and fur processing. The most significant distinctive feature of a nomadic ethnos is the territory which has historically been populated by the ethnic group.

Природно-климатические условия, окружающая среда, ее ресурсы, традиционное расселение бурят-монголов определяет ценности и культурные традиции в прошлом кочевых народов. В зависимости от географической среды развивалась материальная культура народа, а от уровня его общественно-социального состояния и культура духовная⁴ (Babueva, 2004, p. 8).

The local nature or space, in other words – the vast plains and steppes have also to a considerable degree shaped a particular ethno-cultural way of perception, characterized by slowness, serenity and balance. The ideology and identity peculiar to nomadic cultures were undoubtedly also formed under the influence of the landscape and the climate of the Great Steppe. Constantly in search of better pastures for livestock, the nomads were always mobile, and consequently they were the primary communication link between different cultures of the sedentary peoples. As a result of the interaction, the agricultural civilizations had a strong impact on the culture and arts of the nomads.

Elaborating on Gachev's theory, Svetlana Garmaeva identifies the basic features of such subtype as the Man of the Steppes – a nomad and breeder, who prefers isolation, one who is predetermined by his or her way of life to exist in him or herself, shying away from visible communication, being involved only in universal, cosmic dialogues. Silent, but actively focused on him- or herself, on his or her internal world, a nomad creates an inner world in dialogue with the surrounding space, and this silent, introvert communication is basically contained in the genetic code of the Mongols, the Khakass, the Tuvinians, the Altaians, the Buryats. Garmaeva emphasizes that the nomadic civilization and its people present a distinct genetic type of man and a distinct mode of existence (Garmaeva, 2011, p. 173).

The Buryat nomads had always had ethnic ecological traditions as intrinsic part of their so-called "steppe culture." Historically, the vast territory of Central Asia seemed endless and it exerted a great impact on the mentality of the nomads and their abilities to analyze themselves as part of the Universe. The nomadic way of living required detailed knowledge of the territory and the flora and fauna of one's locality. This type of life

⁴ "The climatic conditions, the environment and its resources, the traditional settlement of the Buryat-Mongols define the nomadic values and cultural traditions as they manifested themselves in the past of nomadic nations. Depending on the geographical environment, the nation's material culture was developed, and its social status determined its spiritual culture."

presupposed a small number of migrating tribes, which added up to a small population. Travelling from one location to another, the Buryat nomads learnt to save the land and protect the environment from overuse. Rituals were performed in order to ask permission before hunting, prove respect and express admiration and gratitude to local Gods of mountains, rivers and forest. The ways of coexisting were reflected in Buryat beliefs so that they found themselves part of a natural ecosystems and the wilderness in general. From the times immemorial, the Buryats tactfully treated nature and the environment, as these were sacred and required respect. This attitude is superimposed not only on the immediate environment, but also on the entire image of the world.

All these concepts are reflected in Buryat imagination, folklore and arts. As was mentioned, the Buryats have many sacred places, treated with reverence as related to various deities, who have lived in these lands as long as a certain world order of established concepts expressed through a particular tradition exists. That this tactful attitude to sacred places has been preserved over time puts the Buryats on par with the planet's other indigenous peoples whose lifestyle is based on optimal co-existence with the environment.

Summing up the importance of a common cultural space of the steppe, taiga and forest tundra and its specific manifestation in the way of life, mentality, customs and traditions of their inhabitants, Svetlana Garmaeva writes on national types of Eurasian artistic perception:

Наконец, нас объединяют схожие типажные картины в литературе, культуре, которые определены евразийцами как человек «леса» – сеятель, пахарь; человек «степи» – номад, кочевник, скотовод; и человек «потока» – босяк, батрак. Как видим, все три типажные картины и социально, и национально близки и узнаваемы, и все они могут быть обогащающим ресурсом в понимании жизни современным читателем, представителем национального в регионе. Приобщение к таким социокультурным факторам, несомненно, придает современной методологии особую глубину содержательности и значительности. В качестве еще одной типажной картины нашего региона можно говорить об образе охотника, который так же как и перечисленные выше, сформирован и создан нашим жизненным и духовным пространством – очень богатый ресурс в своей основе, особенно в связи с острейшими проблемами экологии – души, природы, взаимоотношений человека с окружающим его миром во всех проявлениях этого мира⁵ (Garmaeva & Orus-ool, 2013, p. 147).

⁵ “Finally, we share similar typical images in literature and culture, defined by the Eurasians as the man of the ‘forest’ – a sower and plougher; the man of the ‘steppes’ – a nomad and breeder; and the man of the ‘stream’ – a tramp, a laborer. As we can see, all three typical images are both socially and nationally recognized and very close to us, and all of them can be resources in un-

Taking into consideration Gachev's mythological concepts referring to the Logos, we move to the so-called "Tengrianstvo" as a religion and a way of aesthetic comprehension of reality. Tengrianstvo is a cult of the Sky which incorporates the nomads' ideas of freedom and infinity, and the belief in an open universe encompassing all forms of being. Here the mythological concept of "air" is an imaginative representation and material embodiment of the national Buryat image of the world. Boundless steppes and high blue sky above them had aesthetic impact on the nomads, resulting in a specific interpretation of nature by people who were constantly wandering under the eternal Sky. The Central Asian natural landscapes became the very roots of Tengrianstvo – unifying aesthetic value with the philosophical level, forming the backdrop and basis of the mythological images, summarizing empirical and spiritual experience of many nomad generations.

The nomadic steppe culture of the region created a multi-valued symbol of Heaven to express a variety of meanings and intentions related to a holistic and multifaceted world. In its aesthetic interpretation of the world, the nomadic culture has created many artistic images associated with interpretations of the infinite and eternal blue sky. Margarita Gomboeva identifies history as one of the ontological foundations of Central Asian holism which finds its manifestation in culture and mythology, in other words, in emotive aspects of public consciousness (Gomboeva, 2002).

Modern Buryat literature introduces the concept of peace sought by the Man of the Steppes, which is embedded in the mentality of the traditional nomadic folk poetry and faith traditions. The poetics inherent in the folk traditions implies a further expanding and deepening of the cognitive capabilities afforded by literature. Such is the role of the image of an open and free element of the steppe; of the yurt, which has become for the Man of the Steppes the image of the universe; of the horse, whose presence introduces a poetics of movement to the idea of time and space. Finally, the image of the Sky, which in Buryat poetry has traditionally been endowed with sacred and mythological content. This content is considered from the point of view of both the people and of shamanistic and Buddhist mythology. The Mongols regard the Sky as the highest element and the absolute criterion of Truth: the Sky is felt to be a personified spiritual phenomenon governing the universe as well as man's destiny.

derstanding of life and national consciousness by modern readers from the region. Embracing these socio-cultural factors certainly adds to the relevance of modern methodology, its special content and significance. We can identify another typical image in our region – the hunter, who like the images we mentioned above, is formed and developed by our living and spiritual space, and is at its core a very rich resource, especially in view of the most dire environmental issues – ones of the soul, nature, and the relationship of man with the world around him in all its manifestations.”

For instance, in Bair Dugarov's poetry the Eternal Blue Sky is interpreted as the source of life. The Sky grants peace and happiness on earth, and because it rules the fate of people, they come to it with requests and prayers: "И попросив у неба чашу полнолуния, / Даль горизонтов окропил чистейшим лунным молоком"⁶ (Dugarov, 1989, p. 114). The described actions reflect traditional Buryat rituals – sprinkling to the eight directions is a form of prayer for preservation of the harmony of man with the universe. The image of the Sky in the Buryat poetry is interpreted as one of a benevolent God so that when people look at the sky in prayer, they turn to Him for happiness and protection.

Another case in point is the metaphoric image of the Mother in Tsyren-Dulma Dondogoy's poetry: "Мать! Великое имя земли. / Нет поэтов таких в целом мире, / Чтобы славу воздать ей могли, / На домбре или звонком хучире"⁷ (*Pesni o materi v chest' iubileia narodnogo poëta*, n.d.). Air and Earth, the natural elements of being, are applied to communicate the very depth of the national image of the world. Air, embodied as the sky, and Earth – as the land – are assumed in the world mythology to be the male and female counterparts, spouses. It is not by chance that the image of the Earth in the Buryat mythology and imaginative writing is associated with the Mother and the flourishing life.

Man of Water and the Woods

The sheer greatness of the region's chief water basin – Lake Baikal – makes it the center of earthly and spiritual attraction and bestows upon it sacred and symbolic meaning. The impact of Baikal on the lives of people in the region is manifold: it not only determines the specifics of the economic and business activities but also extends its spiritual energy to the processes of reflection, self-knowledge and aesthetic experience in art and literature. The national images of the world here are defined by the proximity to the sacred lake, and as such are dominated by the element of Water as the mythological concept.

Summing up her research as a local scholar, Liubov' Abaeva came to the conclusion that:

Бурятия – единственная на нашей планете территория и этнокультурное сообщество, где фиксируются все пять типов хозяйственной культур:
1. Охота, собирательство и рыболовство; 2. Раннее земледелие; 3. Пашенное

⁶ "And having asked the sky for a bowl of full moon, / he sprinkled the far away horizons with the purest lunar milk."

⁷ "Mother! The great name of the earth. / No poets in the whole of world, / Could pay tribute to her fame, / Playing dombra or the khuuchir."

земледелие; 4. Скотоводство; 5. Оленеводство, хотя в истории один из типов доминирует, определяя тем самым общекультурные ценности и стереотипы поведения⁸ (Abaeva, 2011, p. 24).

Following Gachev, Abaeva emphasizes that not only landscape features are of great importance but also the climate and weather conditions play a very essential role, which leads her to identify within the Mongolian ethnic group besides the Man of Steppes also another type – the Man of the Mountains (Abaeva, 2011). This idea proves that both the landscape and climatic condition are crucial dimensions of a people's way of living and the national image of the world.

In terms of environmental management and economy, Lake Baikal and the Baikal region allowed not only for the traditional forms of husbandry (cattle- or sheep-breeding) and auxiliary activities (hunting and gathering), but also provided basis for industrial fishing and seal hunting, which might seem unexpected given the stereotypes of nomadic cultures. Nevertheless, a great number of local people historically lived along the shoreline and traditionally were involved in fishing and hunting. Within the framework of Gachev's theory, the Man of Water and the Woods is the realization of the mythological concepts of Water and Earth. The traditional economy and forms of labor depend on geographical zones, and culture is in many ways a reflection of the daily routine and household duties. Proving the same idea, Fedor Kudriavtsev comes to the conclusion that fishing brought considerable revenue in these geographic conditions, causing it to become the leading sector of employment. Indeed, according to data quoted by Séségma Zhambalova, in 1884, the Olkhon local community consisted of around 1,235 individual households, among them there were only 278 people engaged in hunting, and 1,072 were fishing, which means that three fourths of the male population were fishermen (Kudriavtsev, 1940, p. 163, quoted in Zhambalova, 2004). Zhambalova points out the diversity of economic activities in the region and their correlation with the environment as a result of local peculiarities:

Ольхонские и кударинские буряты сами плели рыболовные сети, строили лодки, делали бочки и были лучшими мореплавателями и рыбаками Байкала. Буряты, проживающие на побережье Байкала, а особенно ольхонские, адаптируясь к природной среде своего обитания, создали

⁸ "Buryatia is the one and only area and ethno-cultural community on our planet which contains all five types of economic activity: 1. Hunting, gathering and fishing; 2. Early farming; 3. Plough farming; 4. Cattle- and sheep-breeding; 5. Reindeer herding, although historically one of these types usually dominates, thereby defining common cultural values and patterns of behavior."

уникальную вариацию хозяйственно-культурной деятельности кочевников-скотоводов. В этой культуре сконцентрированы главные результаты адаптации к окружающей среде, где доминанта – оз. Байкал. Позитивные результаты адаптационной деятельности в данной экологической нише детерминированы, с нашей точки зрения, степенью оптимального освоения всех ресурсов кормящего ландшафта – степи, тайги и водного бассейна. Главная особенность такой культуры жизнеобеспечения, ее экофильный характер проявляется в том, что она по возможности создает щадящий режим для хрупкой экосистемы степи⁹ (ZHambalova, 2000, p. 285).

It is clear from this that the landscape and water basin create specific image of the world. The way of being of fishermen, hunters as well as farmers is filled with inspiration, their life is connected with the water element. A man who lives nearby these vast waters, ready to listen to Baikal's tunes, the sounds of the waves and the wind, develops a distinct identity, epitomized by the figure of the Man of Water. The presence at Lake Baikal, the very involvement with it in spatial and auditory terms influences a person's understanding of the world, generates a certain set of values and preferences.

Being at the lake is experiencing a moment of intimate linkage with the sea, as Baikal is known to those who inhabit its shores, a moment when one feels its energy – it is a moment of cohabitation. The sheer vastness of water opens up a new ontological perspective, which combines the immense earth, the Cosmos, with the Man of Water, the Man of the Steppes and the man-creator. The steppe culture of the nomads is based on the image of the world of migrating people, way of inhabiting a vast territory, way of living of shepherds or breeders. The Buryat-Mongols who live by the great water created a specific culture, which is different from the steppe civilization.

Philosophical understanding and comprehension of Baikal's true being suggest an aesthetic relationship of mutual openness. We can thus refer to the important words of Martin Heidegger that hearing is one of existential categories of being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962, p. 207). Each individual at any time is always ready to listen in his or her own way and this way constitutes us. It is on the foundation of this crucial personal dimension

⁹ “The Olkhon Buryats and Kudara Buryats wove fishing nets themselves, built boats, were qualified in making barrels and were the best sailors and fishermen of Lake Baikal. The Buryats living along the shoreline of Lake Baikal, especially in the island of Olkhon, in the process of adapting to their environment, created a unique variation of the economic and cultural activities of the nomadic civilization. Concentrated in their culture are the main results of an adaptation to the environment whose dominant is Lake Baikal. From our point of view, the positive results of adaptation in this ecological niche are determined by the optimal level of assimilation of all natural resources, in other words, of the feeding landscape – the steppe, taiga and the water basin. The main feature of this culture of livelihood and its environmentally oriented character is accomplished by creating a regime of reasonable treatment of the fragile ecosystem of the steppe.”

of understanding and experiencing Baikal as space and as sound that we should examine the central economic, social and cultural position of the lake, which is the focal point of this trans-border region of Eurasia. The reflexive potential of the Man of Water and the Woods adds to our potential of comprehension of national images of the world and their significance for Eurasian existential model of being.

Lake Baikal very often becomes the object of artistic admiration and depiction. The Man of Water's way of thinking (Logos), his representation of the whole entity of "body-soul-mind," can be found in rich folklore and literature. And again, the national image of the world is the reflection of Lake Baikal's being. Creative personalities, such as poets, writers, painters and composers, produce in the context of their interactions with Lake Baikal variants of the national image of the world. Many writers call Lake Baikal a sacred lake, magnificent and unique diamond of Buryatia, a pearl of Russia and the whole planet. Lake Baikal is interpreted and imaginatively reflected upon as Logos through the symbolic codes of the national wisdom communicated in legends, fairy-tales, poems, novels, and short-stories. The fantastic beauty of Lake Baikal has always been the subject matter of creative activity (Boldonova, 2013).

Море, купаясь в лучах солнца, раздвинулось в необъятную ширь. Далеко, далеко на юго-западе, там, где бирюзовое небо опустилось на морскую гладь, пролегла ярко-синяя полосочка¹⁰ (Zhigzhitov, 1978, p. 318).

In these lines from the novel *Podlemor'e* ("By the Sea") by Mikhail Zhigzhitov, the writer's artistic reflection on a beautiful natural phenomenon reveals the secrets of the deep lake, demonstrates the richness and multifaceted character, and at the same time succinctness, of the images and thoughts evoked by the sight. The different shades of blue represent the colour of the water and the sky, thus showing simultaneously the depth of the sea, the culmination of summer, and the warmth and tenderness of nature. The smooth surface of water symbolizes peace, calm, hope for the future and in doing so, explains why the old fisherman's body and soul became younger. The concept of the sea (Baikal) reveals the depths of the lyrical image painted by the author.

Baikal symbolizes and integrates around it the Buryats as an ethnos and their lands. This idea is expressed in one of Dondok Ulzytuev's poems: "Байкал мой, природы дух, / Байкал мой, снежной Сибири глаза, / Байкал мой, народа моего светлый ум, / Байкал мой, народа моего светлая

¹⁰ "The sea, basking in the sun, spread in an immense expanse. Far, far away to the southwest, where the turquoise sky descended on the smooth sea surface, there stretched a bright blue rim."

душа”¹¹ (Ulzytuev, 1973, p. 47). The Mighty Baikal as a natural wonder, a source of physical and spiritual energy, a symbol of harmony, the centre of wisdom is the object of aesthetic reflection, of sensory responses generated in the minds of creative individuals, which find their manifestations in the form of beautiful landscape sketches.

Conclusion

In the modern context, the Man of Water is another ontological and epistemological type in the national image of the world, whose social, economic, aesthetic experience is as relevant as that of the Man of the Steppes. Due to differences in geographical, social and economic environment, the two types of individual represent the two interdependent poles within the civilization of the Steppe. Water versus the Steppe, Air and Water versus Air and Earth, represent the two-sided semantic basis of the Buryat-Mongolian ethnic group and national identity. A study of the typological features of each type has provided an opportunity to see and understand the existence of the Buryat-Mongolian ethnic group in the multifaceted, complex web of historical, socio-cultural, geopolitical aspects. Researching typological characteristics of each sub-group thus affords the possibility to take a more complex view of the Buryat ethnoses, considering the difficult dimensions of history, social reality, culture and geopolitics.

The analyzed interrelations, like that of *landscape – logos*, are of relevance for various fields and disciplines from cultural studies to anthropology, ethnography to philosophy, literary studies to history, environmental aesthetics to environmental hermeneutics – all within the frame of *nature – mental perception – aesthetic reflection*, a universal dialogue that is essential for self-understanding. Two of the most prominent variants of this dialogue are the dialogues between the *Man of the Steppe* and *Nature* on the one hand, and between the *Man of Water and the Woods* and *Nature* – on the other. These variants of the nomadic civilization possess heuristic significance in understanding ethnic, ecological, cultural traditions. Georgii Gachev's theory as methodological foundation helps demonstrate how philosophical, aesthetic dialogue with nature can enrich our knowledge about the national model of the world and our interactions with ourselves, while his mythological concepts: Air – Fire – Water – Earth suggest new ways of its understanding. Despite their differences, both the *Man of the Steppes* and the *Man of Water and the Woods* demonstrate an open position towards the environment, being able at the same time to concentrate on the

¹¹ “My Baikal – the spirit of nature, / My Baikal – Siberia's snowy eyes, / My Baikal – the bright mind of my people, / My Baikal – my people's bright soul.”

micro-cosmos within themselves and imaginatively appreciate the beauty of nature.

The contemporary view of the national image of the world among the Buryats, who have historically been not only nomads in the proper sense of the word but also fishermen and hunters, is one of the possible ways to show how to preserve historical experience and ethnic heritage in a global age.

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Buriacko-mongolska droga Źycia i narodowy obraz Źwiata

Artykuł jest poświęcony komparatystycznej analizie dwóch podstawowych konceptów (hipostaz) buriacko-mongolskiego narodowego obrazu Źwiata: człowiekowi stepów i człowiekowi wody i lasu. Analiza opiera się na teorii znanego rosyjskiego badacza Georgija Gaczewa, który postuluje istnienie wzajemnego oddziaływania między obrazami natury i narodowym obrazem Źwiata. Źycie wokół jeziora Bajkał z jednej strony i praca w bezkresnym stepie z drugiej znajdują wyraz w tych dwóch podstawowych formach istnienia, Źwiatopoglądach i formach wyobraźni. Autorka artykułu analizuje te dwie odmiany toŹsamości, które podlegają wpływowi ze strony określonych czynników geograficznych i klimatycznych, aktywności ekonomicznej oraz historyczno-kulturowej tradycji różnych buriacko-mongolskich podgrup etnicznych.

Note

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