

obstructs the shaman's (i.e., the hero's) journey to the otherworld. At the same time he says that the staff the female demon carries may be associated with the shaman staff that becomes the shaman's mount for the journey to the otherworld. Here, I think, one would like to know how the very same character, the female demon, can be both the obstacle or enemy of the shaman and yet carry one of the shaman's essential symbols; this, it seems to me, would amount to being a demon and a shaman at the same time. Also, the shaman he mentions here is a female shaman. In fact, Heissig appears to mention only female shamans, but one wonders whether there were in fact only female shamans among the Mongols, and, if male shamans also existed, how much significance an interpretation like the one mentioned above would really carry.

Many of the essays address more literary questions, such as the formulation and transmission of motifs. This would be the title's other meaning, namely the *Wirklichkeit* of the motifs in the sense of their "real life." Heissig's familiarity with a vast amount of epics and stories allows him to trace the life and vicissitudes of certain motifs as well as the routes of their transmission by particular singers, or their non-Mongol origins and later characteristically Mongol transformations. As Heissig admits himself, however, although it may be possible to point to parallels with motifs even in Europe, it is still too early to give a convincing explanation for such parallels.

The essays were written for various occasions over a period of fifteen years (1977–1992). Some of the findings they present may therefore have been superseded by later publications. But it must be said that Heissig generally bases his pronouncements on the material available to him at the time, even if some of his suggestions may not be readily accepted. Even so, his interpretations open vistas that a purely literary and culture-immanent interpretation would not be able to offer. In this sense the volume offers a good deal of stimulation.

All essays are simply reproduced in their original form and appear to be loosely organized according to topics discussed. No cross references are added; this makes reading somewhat awkward, because for related studies the reader is referred to the original place of publication even when the essay in question is in fact included in the same volume. Since the purpose of assembling these studies in one volume was to make them easy to access, the inclusion of cross references would have made this useful and interesting volume more user-friendly.

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HUMPHREY, CAROLINE and URGUNGE ONON. *Shamans and Elders: Experience, Knowledge, and Power among the Daur Mongols*. Oxford Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. xiv + 396 pages. Maps, photographs, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$80.00; ISBN 0-19-827941-8. Paper US\$24.95; ISBN 0-19-828068-8.

This book is about the shamanism of the Daur, a Mongol people of northeast China, who some scholars believe are descendants of the Qidan (Khitan), who established the Liao kingdom in what is now northeast China around the tenth century. Humphrey's basic source materials are oral recollections of Urgunge Onon, a Daur intellectual now living in England who left his homeland in the late 1940s under the wing of Owen Lattimore. Urgunge's recollections are discussed within a careful web of texts drawn from written and oral source materials on the Altaic-speaking peoples of northern Asia. Employing theoretical tools from anthropology, cultural studies, and literary criticism, the author engages the material on many levels: as an anthropologist collaborating with an informant who is both a challenging

friend and a resource of youthful memories, as a knowledgeable interpreter of wide-ranging supporting data from several languages, as a guest in Daur villages in northern China, and as a multisided investigator on a quest that delivers personal growth. Though valuable for its detailed ethnographic accounts of Daur shamanism and culture, the book is vastly more than a straightforward ethnography.

Bravely, Humphrey leads the reader through a landscape of ideas and questions leading to general observations about northern Asian shamanism, taking the recollections of Urgunge and source materials on the Daur and other regional peoples as starting points for questions which challenge many widely held conceptions of shamanism (a term she uses with qualification). In her view, shamanism does not form a coherent, highly structured symbolic system focused on the shaman. Instead, unlike highly "centered" belief systems (such as Buddhism), shamanism offers a "dispersed" view of life in which the individual, through personal choices, constructs a "reality" predicated on those powers of nature "lying below" the cultures of many northern Asian peoples. In the traditional Daur world, "Life was a temporary union of different parts, which could easily be disordered or unbalanced." A shaman is thus seen as a specialist within a range of specialists in Daur society who deal with life problems and the non-mundane world. In analyzing the shaman's role, Humphrey suggests that cultural interpreters rethink the mind/body dualism which she finds so common in writings on shamanism. In doing so, the shaman's role as a specialist on problems involving the spirits can be more accurately conceptualized.

The text leads the reader through a world of recollections of elders and shamans, which lend insight into Daur constructs of place, life, death, the cosmos, gender, and history. In particular, the power/force/sense of balance which underlies the cosmos (*tengger*, the "sky"), is a concept developed throughout the book and explored from many perspectives. In the last chapters it is discussed in a contemporary context along with current prospects for Daur shamanism. Moreover, the use of songs, chants, folk stories, and personal narratives in the discussions of worldview are sophisticated and figure on one level as data in a discussion of the "varying patterns" of cultural knowledge obtained from oral accounts.

Discussions of history and social currents give a wider context to Daur shamanism. Topics include portraits of the Daur revolutionary, Merse, and his sister, the intriguing and powerful shamaness, Huangge. The subchapter on how were-animals (especially foxes) figure in the "crisis of modernity" in Manchuria and north China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century lends insight into lesser-known practices that differed from and competed with shamanism and Buddhism, becoming expressions of cultural anxiety. Likewise, the sections on the Chinese Niang-Niang goddess, co-opted in the Daur pantheon, involve questions of gender configuration and the eclectic propensity of the shamanic worldview. In all, Humphrey's work is an engrossing journey of interpretation through the ideas and recollections of a manifold, challenging "Other," on which readers are continuously challenged to reflect upon and mitigate for themselves.

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