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**BELIEF NARRATIVES RELATING TO THE SUPERNATURAL  
IN THE NOMADIC PASTORALIST CONTEXT OF ENCOUNTERS  
(on the Social Network Material of a Tyvan-Speaking Group)**

Master's Thesis

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*To the authors of the narratives included in this work*

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## *Transliteration*

Аа	<i>a</i>	Рр	<i>r</i>
Бб	<i>b</i>	Сс	<i>s</i>
Вв	<i>v</i>	Тт	<i>t</i>
Гг	<i>g</i>	Уу	<i>u</i>
Дд	<i>d</i>	Үү	<i>ü</i>
Жж	<i>zh</i>	Фф	<i>f</i>
Зз	<i>z</i>	Хх	<i>kh</i>
Ии	<i>i</i>	Цц	<i>ts</i>
Йй	<i>y</i>	Чч	<i>ch</i>
Кк	<i>k</i>	Шш	<i>sh</i>
Лл	<i>l</i>	Щщ	<i>shch</i>
Мм	<i>m</i>	Ъъ	<i>‘</i>
Нн	<i>n</i>	Ыы	<i>y</i>
Ңң	<i>ng</i>	Ьь	<i>‘</i>
Оо	<i>o</i>	Ээ	<i>e</i>
Өө	<i>ö</i>	Юю	<i>yu</i>
Пп	<i>p</i>	Яя	<i>ya</i>

This table represents transliteration for Tyvan and Russian terms included in this work. The Tyvan alphabet is written in Cyrillic and contains three additional letters to the Russian alphabet. I have transliterated these letters (ө, ң, and ү) as *ö*, *ng*, and *ü* respectively.

# Introduction

This work is a study of the stories Tyvan speakers from South Siberia, Russia, discuss in social networks in relation to encounters identified by them as beyond the normal. Tyvan does not contain a direct counterpart for the English word ‘supernatural’. The closest term is *anaa eves* (Kratkii ... 1994: 336), ‘not normal, mundane’. What counts as supernatural for Tyvan speakers may therefore differ to some extent from the understanding of this term in the Western cultural context. In relation to the experiences and phenomena referred to in these stories, I will use the word ‘supernatural’ as an analytical term. Tyvans themselves use *korgunchug chugaalar*, which could be translated as ‘fearsome stories’ with the implicit meaning ‘fearsome *because true*’. The point of telling such stories is in the narrator’s claim that they really happened, and in the audience’s involvement in the discussion either to authenticate them as true or discard as fake; this stresses their dialectical, conversational mode (Dégh 2001). It is the narrator’s and the audience’s belief that comes to the fore in dealing with such stories. In this relation, I find it possible to refer to them using the academic construct *belief narratives*.

Such stories, importantly, may not represent the factual truth; dealing with belief narratives as the object of study, we do not consider them from the point of the truth-value. Matthew Kapstein (2000), in his discussion of Tibetan historic narratives (the historicity of which is closely related to belief), argues that:

in a certain sense [...] truth to be essentially irrelevant here, that the open-ended potentialities for artful interpretation render myth unfalsifiable. The myths that a given community considers authoritative need not be thought to be true in the sense that they convey demonstrably true “factual” information: mythic matters seem to be more subtle than the facts of the matter, so that the truth in myth may be expressed allegorically, metaphorically or approximatively [...].

(ibid.: 141–142)

Belief narratives thus “need not be thought to be true”, they must be *believable* for the given community’s members. Belief narratives are a local understanding of truth, and the understanding in itself is something unfalsifiable. As the understanding may change, so the narratives are not frozen and static. The purpose of this work, in this connection, will be to address Tyvan belief narratives as a dynamic expression.

**Material.** The research material is narratives discussed in a Tyvan speaking public group within the Russian social network *Vkontakte* (briefly, *VK*). The narratives are *written texts* posted by group members within two years of the group's communication (2018–2020), and are open for comment. To illustrate my findings, I have included in this work nine narratives that relate encounters with the supernatural in the nomadic pastoralist context distinctive for the region. Most narratives are personal experience accounts (“memorates” to use von Sydow’s term).

**Context.** These narratives emerged in the context of written communication (posts, comments) in the Tyvan-speaking *VK* public group. There is more than one Tyvan-speaking *VK* group targeting an audience that is looking for discussions of this kind of narratives. Each group has slightly different features: for instance, in one group it is the group’s administrator who creates the majority of the content by posting relevant texts from Tyvan-language analogue sources (printed folklore collections, ethnographies, etc.); the other group has a revivalist direction and adheres to its own standards of communication. I focused on the largest and most active group. **The audience** consists of the people who have access to these narratives: the group’s members (approximately 33,000) and guests (Tyvan-speaking *VK* users).

**The choice of research material.** The idea to work with material available remotely was initially a pragmatic decision from my side in the face of the approximately five-thousand kilometres between Tartu in Estonia, and Tyva in South Siberia. The choice of the region is connected to my family background and work experience. Tyva is my home region, where I worked for over 10 years, having the chance to see it from the inside. This has influenced my motivation to study indigenous tradition in a changing world using the example of the region I know best.

**Connection between narrative and place.** Reading these stories, I was surprised by their heterogeneity and multiplicity. Slowly, story after story, I realised that there were patterns reflecting the connection between narrative and place. Tyvan nomadic pastoralist and settled environments differ, to a varying extent, in the supernatural beings inhabiting them, the ways these beings interact with the human community, and the ways narrators relate encounters with them. This difference might reflect the indigenous society’s experience in handling a double system of values – indigenous and non-indigenous. A careful description of belief narratives could contribute to the understanding of deeper effects of changes on indigenous lives, brought about by

external transformative agencies. Hence my focus on the connection between belief narrative and place.

Depending on the place, encounters with the supernatural may be structured, and narrated, differently. For instance, narratives about encounters with the supernatural in the nomadic pastoralist context (Tyv. *ködee*) revolve around the motif of reciprocity. The concept of reciprocity proves to be central to the livelihood of the nomadic pastoralist community. For this reason, master spirits *cher eezi* (with whom the locals maintain reciprocal relationships through ritual offerings) have a dominant role here. In the settled environment, on the other hand, the core motif is non-belonging, and the dominant category of spirits is hostile strangers. I would like to note that my understanding of Tyvan belief narratives has benefited from a character of my observation: discussions in social networks are capable of attracting different groups of narrators and audience, and thus of accumulating different narratives so that I was able to have a more or less whole picture of the genre. This has allowed me to make a comparative analysis of narratives about the supernatural in the nomadic pastoralist and settled contexts.

For the totality of ways in which place affects human beings I will use the term ‘**environment**’ in Tim Ingold’s sense as “the relational contexts of the perceiver’s involvement in the world” (Ingold 2002 [2000]: 21). This definition implies that environment cannot be a *neutral* entity, it is always *one’s* environment (ibid.). The human being and his or her environment do not exist apart from each other, they emerge in a process of mutual interaction. From this perspective, belief is also never neutral, abstract, or general – it is personal, it always belongs to someone, it is situated, it is specific to one’s environment.

Thinking of the connection between narrative and place, a question may arise about transition from the physical experiencing of one’s environment to imaginary. Here I find useful Tim Ingold’s concept of the *organism-person*, which reconciles the body/mind dichotomy. According to this concept, the human being appears “not as a composite entity made up of separable but complementary parts, such as body, mind and culture, but rather as a singular locus of creative growth within a continually unfolding field of relationships” (ibid.: 4–5). In addition, environment in Ingold’s sense seems to refer to more than (only) the objective physical components of one’s environment.

**The research focus.** Tyvan belief narratives in social media have not been addressed in regional folklore studies; this lends a descriptive character to my work. I had a dilemma about whether to describe these narratives as a repertoire of stories or to describe them as communication. Considering that the topic was about the supernatural, I could not help being curious about the encounters themselves and, for this reason, my thesis will focus on the repertoire — *what kinds of narrative about encounters with the supernatural do Tyvan speakers discuss in social networks, and what can these narratives tell us about the society that has produced them?* I will focus on belief narratives related to the nomadic pastoralist context of encounters. This group of narratives includes two major sub-groups: (a) narratives about encounters with master spirits (see Chapter 2), and (b) narratives about encounters with wandering and placeless spirits (see Chapter 3). The number of narratives about encounters with the dead in the nomadic pastoralist context was insignificant (this could be a characteristic trait of Tyvan belief narratives); for this reason I will not include the dead-related narratives in this work.

**About the written form of the narratives.** These narratives imply a transition from oral narrative to written and edited (or not) text. A few authors in this group refer to written sources such as newspapers and published folklore collections. For the most part, however, members of this particular group post either personal experience accounts or ‘friend-of-a-friend’ stories transmitted orally. Despite their written form, during my observation I perceived them as *told* stories. In the context of spontaneous online communication, the narrators and their audience obviously strike a balance between the oral and the written, and this could be an important moment in discussing these narratives as communication.

**About the online context of communication.** The narratives might differ as *told* in the ‘traditional’ context of oral storytelling and as *written* in online communication. Furthermore, some narratives seem to be emerging in close connection with the online, and largely anonymous, context of communication. However, I have observed Tyvan belief narratives only in their online written context. This work, therefore, cannot be a comparative study of Tyvan belief narratives in the “traditional” oral vs online written contexts.

**The structure of the work.** Chapter 1. “Nomadic Pastoralist Context” provides general information on the region in three parts.



Part 1.1. Geographical situation: Climate gives brief characteristics of Tyva as a mountainous region with harsh climatic conditions. Part 1.2. Historical setting depicts the historical development of the region with a focus on nomadic pastoralism as the dominant cultural–economic form. Part 1.3. The nomadic pastoralist context discusses the notions of traditional consciousness and ethnic constants (Lurie 2004) and introduces the analytical construct ‘Tyvan traditional environment’.

Chapter 2. “*Cher eezi*” includes six narratives about encounters with zoomorphic and anthropomorphic *cher eezi* – a category of supernatural land owners, master spirits. The chapter has five parts: A brief Introduction provides general data on origins of the local beliefs connected to master spirits and introduces Tyvan terms related to them. Part 2.2. focusses on the key features in representations of master spirits. Part 2.3. discusses the description of the anthropomorphic *cher eezi* as a persistent element in Tyvan folk narrative prose. Part 2.4. focusses on the local representations of zoomorphic guises of *cher eezi*, and identifies the fuzziness of boundaries between the categories of *cher eezi* and evil spirits in Tyvan belief narratives. The Conclusion outlines the main points discussed in the chapter.

Chapter 3. “The Wild Things of the Land” includes three narratives about encounters with wandering and placeless spirits. Through images of supernatural entities and, in one instance, of the place of the encounter, the chapter discusses the category of non-belonging in Tyvan tradition. This chapter consists of five parts. Part 3.2. The wildmen tradition: A hominid or a demon? introduces a narrative which obviously belongs to the wildmen tradition of Central Asia and Siberia. It outlines basic moments in the development of the wildmen tradition in the region and, considering that the narrative is a personal experience account, it focuses on the emic perspective on the encounter. Part 3.3. Placeless spirits is based on a narrative that describes an encounter with an evil spirit in the Tyvan traditional dwelling, the yurt. First, based on ethnographic evidence, I discuss the yurt as a place for encounters with the supernatural; then, on the basis of the shaman’s incantation (inserted in the narrative) I analyse the description of the encountered being. Part 3.4. “I am still wondering about this ...”: Unexplainable things is based on a short narrative about an encounter with a supernatural entity of unexplainable origin where I focus on the functional role of

unexplainability in defining the category of non-belonging. The Conclusion provides a brief reiteration of the finding related to the category of placeless spirit.

Finally, in the Conclusion to the thesis I discuss the main findings of my research on Tyvan belief narratives as discussed in the Tyvan-speaking *VK* public group. The list of References includes the sources I used in my work.

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# 1. Nomadic pastoralist context

## 1.1. Geographical situation. Climate

Tyva is a mountainous country situated on the Sayan-Altai uplands in the centre of the Asian continent at a considerable distance (up to 3,000 km) from oceans and seas. The majority of its territory is formed of mountain ridges, uplands (2500–3500 m above sea level) and intermountain basins (520–1200 m above sea level). In Tyva, there are about 45 mountain peaks over 3,000 m high, with the highest point being 3976 m (Möngün Taiga).

The ridges run in three dominant directions – north-east, west-north-west, and sub-lateral; they form two arcs – the Western and Eastern Sayan Mountains to the north forming one, and the Tannu-Ola Ridge and the Sangilen upland in south Tyva forming the other. The largest intermountain basins are the Tyvan (central Tyva), Todja (north-east), and Ubsunur (south) depressions. Tyva has many lakes and rivers. One of the longest and largest rivers in Russia the Yenisei originates here, running over 200 km within the territory of Tyva.

The climate in Tyva is continental (in its ultracontinental variation), with high atmospheric pressure (up to 1042 mb in winter), average yearly temperature 5–7°C below zero, a considerable annual temperature range (over 100°C), and low annual precipitation (150–200 mm) unevenly distributed throughout the year, with the concentrated rainfall in mid-July–August (Arakchaa 2015; Sarbaa 2015).

## 1.2. Historical setting

The geographical location and climate of the region determined the development of nomadic pastoralism in Tyva. Alternation of mountain ridges and intermountain basins forms the most characteristic feature of the local landscape, with the basins and treeless

slopes serving as pasture areas, while mountain rivers and streams keep herds supplied with water.

Semi-nomadic forms of pastoralism in South Siberia date back to the middle of the first millennium BCE (Gryaznov 1955, 1957; in Vainshtein 1972 [1980]: 51), with increasing mobility of semi-nomads by the end of the millennium. There was totally nomadic pastoralism in the steppe zone by the middle of the first millennium CE, during the ancient Turkic period. The conquest of the territory of Tyva by the Uighurs in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and by the Kyrgyz in the 9<sup>th</sup> century did not bring changes to the economic life of the local tribes. Nomadic pastoralism continued to flourish in the region throughout the Mongol era, which began from Genghis Khan's conquest of Tyva in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, and during the period of Manchu Qing dynasty rule up to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Vainshtein 1972 [1980]: 47–54). In literature on the history of economic forms in the region this long period is called “traditional”, with its upper chronological boundaries established as the 1940s (Sambuu and Titlyanova 2014).

From the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Tyva was the north-westernmost territory ruled by the Manchu Qing dynasty and, in geopolitical and cultural terms, was part of Inner Asia – a vast area between China and Russia, with nomadic pastoralism being central to all local economies across it (Humphrey and Sneath, 1999). In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the pastoral lifestyles of the people of Tyva could be categorised in three economic–cultural types: (1) the pastoralists of the steppe zone, (2) the hunters and reindeer-herders of the taiga zone, and (3) the pastoralist hunters of the taiga-steppe zone (Vainshtein [1972] 1980). The majority of population belonged to the first category:

This was the largest population group in Tuva, inhabiting its central, southern, and western regions. Pastoralists constituted an absolute majority (95 per cent) of the group customarily known as the Western Tuvians [...]. Their economy was based on the pasturing of herds (including cattle, sheep and goats, horses and camels), with “vertical” seasonal shifts; this was supplemented in some cases by cultivation of land with the help of irrigation, and by occasional hunting, fishing, and gathering. The principal dwelling was a lattice-framed yurt made of felt. Clothing was made chiefly out of dressed skins from domestic animals, felt, and cloth. These and a few other cultural and economic features were also characteristic of those sections of the Buryats, Mongols, Kirghiz, Khakass, and other pastoral peoples inhabiting the highland-steppe regions.

(Humphrey 1980: 49, in introduction to Vainshtein [1972] 1980)

To better describe the pastoral economy, and society, of that period, David Sneath (1999), in his study of pastoralism of Mongolia – in geographical and cultural proximity to Tyva – introduces two typical poles in the ideal spectrum of local households: at one end were those operating in the “yield-focused” (or “specialist”) mode, while at the other households operating in the “subsistence” mode. The “specialist” mode was based

upon the ownership of large number of animals by a single agency – usually a noble family, ecclesiastic institution, local government office, or a rich commoner. [...] Production was oriented towards gaining the maximum return on the herd-wealth that was kept in this way, the subordinate herders having contractual obligations to supply a certain quota of produce and retaining only the surplus for themselves.

(Sneath 1999: 225–226)

The subsistence mode, at the other end of the spectrum,

was oriented towards satisfying domestic requirements, and as such was characterised by each pastoral family owning and herding relatively small numbers of several species of domestic livestock. The various species provided different necessities for the pastoralist: sheep and goats for meat and winter clothing, cattle for milk, horses for riding and camels for transportation. As these were privately owned livestock, not herded for others under contractual obligation, the produce went directly to the working household.

(ibid.)

This patterns had been characteristic of the region for quite a long period, allowing us to speak of “a remarkable historical continuity, despite repeated invasions from outside, in the types of economic exploitation of the different ecological zones of Tuva” (Humphrey 1980: 54).

The first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a period of transformative processes throughout Inner Asia, leading to cultural divergence among local societies and giving rise to three distinct areas: China, Mongolia, and Russia (Humphrey 1999: 19–21). Tyva entered the Russian orbit of influence, and in the 1920s–1950s made a leap from a patriarchal nomadic society with a shamanistic-Buddhist worldview, to a settled and secular socialist society. Local pastoral households were united into collective and state-owned farms operating within the centralised economy. The system was based on large state-owned farms with their own infrastructure, leading to every settlement in rural Tyva having two parallel structures – the state farm as the main power, and the local

municipality as a nominal structure conceptualised as an infrastructural ‘addition’ to the state farm.

This system collapsed in the 1990s with the fall of the Soviet Union. State farms disintegrated through the introduction of the so-called contract system and, then, through privatisation leaving local municipalities to become the chief decision-makers in places.

Today the pastoral system in Tyva is dominated by individual households, or small groups of them, supported in competition by a system of subsidies from municipal, regional, and federal budgets. The terms “nomadism” and “nomadic pastoralism”, partially due to their initial ambiguity, find themselves less applicable to characterise the techniques of pastoralism in the region. Instead, the term “mobile pastoralism” has been justified as providing the relevant analytical framework (Humphrey and Sneath, 1999).

As for the year 2020, the rural population in Tyva make up 45.7 percent (*Respublika Tyva ... 2020*: 19). This number does not give a clear understanding of how many households in Tyva are engaged in local forms of mobile pastoralism. However, white mushroom-like yurts, herds grazing in the steppe or mountain slopes, and horsemen still shape visual images of the Tyvan landscape.

The common mobility pattern for many people in the region includes movement within the city–village–*ködee* circle as a locus for the extended family’s life, where the village and city provide access to public services (schooling, healthcare, and the labour market), and *ködee* is needed for local households to maintain subsistence in the socio-economically challenging context of post-socialist Tyva. Mobile pastoralism remains central to Tyvan sociocultural and economic reality.

### 1.3. Tyvan traditional environment

The character of transformations in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century makes it possible to state that Tyvan nomadic pastoralism had ceased to exist in its traditional form by 1953, the year by which sedentarisation and collectivisation in Tyva had been completed

(Dongak 2011). This has had an effect on the entirety of Tyvan society, for, according to the 1931 census, the overwhelming majority of the local population (88.2 percent) were nomadic pastoralists (Vainshtein [1972] 1980: 44). In this relation, I would like to bring to the reader's attention the following question: What happens to traditional representations in the face of the rapid and forced disappearance of, or major changes to, traditional practices?

To answer to this question, I need to discuss such notions as the *traditional consciousness* of the local actors and so-called *ethnic constants* (Lurie 2004). According to his definition:

[t]raditional consciousness is a system based on the ethnic worldview, transmitted in the process of socialisation. This system includes representations of behavioural priorities, norms, and models in specific situations. Describing these representations, it is possible, in turn, to describe the cultural tradition inherent to an ethnic group or to its part in the given period of time.

(ibid.: 297; my translation)

And,

[e]thnic constants are unconscious complexes formed in the process of adaptation of human community (ethnic group) to the surrounding natural–social environment; in the culture of ethnic group, these complexes play the role of the main mechanisms responsible for the psychological adaptation of the ethnic group to the environment. [...] All unconscious representations included in the system of ethnic constants define, in one or another way, the character of human interactions with the world. The system of such constants is the prism through which the human being looks at the world.

(ibid.; my translation)

To compare these two notions, traditional consciousness is more dynamic and temporal, while ethnic constants are atemporal and less dynamic. If one system is rapidly replaced by the other (for example the nomadic system by the sedentary), ethnic constants do not change as rapidly as the systems.

Encounters with the supernatural, as happened in *ködee*, reflect centuries-old Tyvan representations of the nomadic pastoralist landscape and of relationships embedded in it. Supernatural beings encountered in the taiga or in the steppe tend to manifest themselves in a structured way – in contrast to those encountered in the local decades-old settled environment. This might indicate that Tyvan society, once beyond the well-established mobile pastoralist paradigm, experiences the adversities of unstructured

existence in place and time. In belief narratives about encounters with the supernatural in the village or the city, this is translated through chaotic manifestations of supernatural entities and a diminished reciprocity between humans and supernatural beings, which disempowers human actors and enforces the agency of evil spirits. As a result of this, in the Tyvan village or city, the supernatural, as well as life itself, might be increasingly perceived as uncontrollable and thus hostile.

In order to understand new motifs in Tyvan belief narratives, attention should be first addressed to traditional motifs. In the Tyvan context, both the new and the old folklore motifs can be addressed in terms of a synchronic study. The old patterns can be studied based not only on the material of earlier collections and ethnographies – all nine narratives included in my thesis represent a living tradition. Through the analysis of these narratives, I will discuss representations of place and the social relationships embedded in it. In order to refer to these two as a whole, I will use the analytical construct ‘Tyvan traditional environment’.

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## 2. *Cher eezi*

### Narratives

<1><sup>1</sup>

Long ago, my classmate's father was a hunter. My friend used to tell us about his/her<sup>2</sup> father's encounters while hunting. I will write one [of the stories] to get you interested.

Once the hunter was hunting, and he had no success [lit. *things were not arranged*]. He shot no animal and ran out of provisions. When it got late he started on his way back home. That was a long distance to pass. When the night fell, there was a yurt<sup>3</sup> right in his way. Going up [the taiga<sup>4</sup>] to hunt and passing by this neighbourhood, he saw no signs of *aals*<sup>5</sup>. Puzzled about this, he nevertheless entered the yurt, having decided to spend the night here. When he came in, the female owner was sitting alone, with her meals just cooked and ready. He ate from that yurt and said that he was going to spend the night there; he took the saddle off his horse, tied the horse out to graze, and lied to sleep in the yurt. The next morning he got up when the sun was high enough. He was flabbergasted. No yurt, he had been sleeping in the open air, his horse was grazing not far away.

<2><sup>6</sup>

Hello, admin, anon[ymously]. I, too, will write [about] one occurrence that happened. It was last year, [we] were at [our] *aal*. It was the goat kidding season, spring. Having cleaned the corrals by 12 noon, we were playing cards, [when my elder] brother who was herding the sheep phoned up [and said that] a goat kidded, somebody [needed to] come and take [the kid, which] was OK, completely dry. [My] younger brother, [then] in first grade, took the *incheek*<sup>7</sup> and went to the

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<sup>1</sup> Posted on January 21, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> There is no gender in the Tyvan language.

<sup>3</sup> A traditional mobile dwelling of nomadic pastoralists in Central Asia and Mongolia; a tent made of a wooden carcass and a felt cover. According to Tatarintsev (2008), Tyv. noun *ög* has an opaque etymology, probably its semantics is close to 'something rounded, curved; braided, gathered together' (ibid.: 355).

<sup>4</sup> *Taiga* – mountains covered with coniferous forests.

<sup>5</sup> *Aal* – a nomadic household in its totality (humans and animals in the household's seasonal camping area); has a common Turkic origin with the semantics probably developed from 'pens/constructions for keeping animals' to a 'community' having these pens/constructions (Tatarintsev 2000: 35–36).

<sup>6</sup> Posted on January 12, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> *Incheek* – a herder's bag to transport newborn lambs and kids from the pasture.

sheep. [He] showed up after about 30 minutes, took the kid out [of the *incheek*]. Indeed, [it was] a dry and even full-bellied baby goat – as if it was born much earlier, but not tagged, however. Puzzled, we were making jokes [about this]; in the evening all six of us went to the corral and started looking for a nanny goat with blood in the rear. [We] were looking the entire evening – nothing. [We] sent [our younger] brother to bring us the baby goat. Our idea was to put the baby goat in the corral and let it find its mother. Not fully into [our plan], the child put [the baby goat] near the kidding pens [within the corral] and walked away. After a while, [we] asked him where was the baby goat – [he] then answered, in peace and calm, that [he] had already let it go [within the corral]. Now that baby goat vanished, too. [We] kept on looking till dark and got exhausted; then, feeling sorry for getting the well-fed sheep countless times in and out the corral, we went home. A funny thing was that all baby goats were tagged, and there was no nanny goat with blood in the rear. After [my] grandmother said: “Haven’t you brought this place’s owner, [my] son”, intended this to be a joke, the folks did not sleep the whole night, thinking of this. Thus the night passed; with us checking on the corral. In the morning [we] looked around the corral – nothing indeed. [My] grandmother might have been right, our [younger] brother might have brought [our] *kyshtag*<sup>8</sup>’s owner. After we lost that baby goat in the corrals, the goats kidded much, with no break, up to five or six [kids] a day. [Our] baby goats have multiplied. If not interesting, I would ask you to skip.

<3><sup>9</sup>

Hello, everybody, I will write what my grandmother used to tell [us]. Long ago she had a sister, she says, very pretty, with a clean-cut appearance, the *aal*’s lads all found her nice. One day her sister went to herd the sheep, it was summer time, she had to bring her sheep back at seven o’clock. My grandmother saw how her sister was coming back with her sheep. After she had come home, something strange was about her, as if she had changed, [she was] very joyful. Around 3 o’clock [a.m.] her sister went out. Because [my grandmother] wanted to relieve herself, she went out after her and found her standing by the corral and having an excited conversation with something. When my grandmother looked there, she saw nothing. My grandmother said nothing to their mother. Next morning [her sister] went again, quite early, to herd the sheep. She was herding the sheep every day, coming back late in the night and saying that she had a boyfriend. [When asked] to introduce [him], she used to say “Yes, yes, I will”, but kept on not bringing him. Then, furthermore, her pregnancy became visible. Their parents started getting angry. Then, when the time came, her sister gave birth to her child. Something was strange about her child, [it] used to play in the night and was afraid of the daylight. It turned out that the poor girl got pregnant from the lord of the taiga, she

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<sup>8</sup> *Kyshtag* – a winter camp.

<sup>9</sup> Posted on October 23, 2019.

herself being unaware. Her baby died at the age of 5 months. Neither did her sister live long after her child. Look what can happen sometimes [Look, it also can happen in this way sometimes].

<4><sup>10</sup>

Admin, anonymously, please.

My father was a hunter. [Earlier that day] *daaiym*<sup>11</sup> had come, he tagged along [with the hunters to hunt]. The hunters left for the taiga. Because [*daaiym*] did not used to go hunting, they all were looking after him very well, they say. After six nights, *daaiym* showed up at our house. [He] was greatly distressed, hungry and thirsty, pitiful. When he started telling [we learnt that] he got lost and slept four nights on the larch, trying to find the way out. He took the route for the river, and that was how he came here. The very same day my father with his friends came down from the taiga, very angry. All the hunters had not been hunting and had been looking for their lost companion. *Daaiym* was an investigation officer [with the rank of] *major* at that time. Since he went home [after the happening], it had been a while. His son died of drowning. He himself got beaten by guys, one of them turned out to be a state attorney's son. [He] got fired. It seems, there was no other way. Having started drinking, grieving, and losing his way, he became useless even to his wife. In that way he divorced and [gradually] ended up being homeless in the city. [We his] relatives failed to change things. Having lived that way over years, he vanished, no one heard of him. As my father told [us] later, when [*daaiym*] got lost in the taiga, he survived because he had met the lady of the taiga<sup>12</sup>. [She] kept him warm, fed with her livestock<sup>13</sup>, let him sleep by her side – this was how things were going. When he told her that he was homesick, she said: “During three years do not tell anyone that you met me”. After having kept it in secret for one year, the man told his wife about the encounter. And exactly after this his life went into bankruptcy. He told about his failure even to my father after 15 years. In such a situation the man comes back with success<sup>14</sup>, the only thing required is not to tell people about the Tandy's lord/owner, they say. Well, my readers, was it interesting?

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<sup>10</sup> Posted on September 29, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> A maternal uncle.

<sup>12</sup> In the original: *taiga eezi kadyń kys*.

<sup>13</sup> In the original: *aŋ-menji* (collective noun) – [one's] wild animals. In the English version I have used 'livestock' because the lady of the taiga gave or shared what *belonged* to her. In the sense that these animals were 'wild' for human beings and 'tamed' for her.

<sup>14</sup> In the original: *olchalıy* ('with *olcha*'); *olcha* 'finding', 'profit', 'luck'. According to Tatarintsev, it is a Middle Ages mongolism, which had the meaning 'a trophy' (2008: 287).

<5><sup>15</sup>

Hello, everybody.

Let me tell you about one man from our village who happened to encounter a *diireng*<sup>16</sup>.

Some people's young handsome son used to herd his sheep in the steppe.

Hard-working [because he was a] son of herdsmen, after having finished the eighth grade, he left school to help his parents. It was when he turned 18, with his flesh-blood having grown to manhood. [He was] sociable, loved singing and performing *khöömei-sīgīt*<sup>17</sup>. While herding the sheep, he would burst into song. He was singing and performing *sīgīt*, and [that is why] one female *diireng* fell for him. In the beginning that *diireng* used to appear as a white hare. The boy used to just look at the hare, he didn't harm it. Over time, it began to appear as a cute girl on a white horse. The boy fell for that cute girl. Singing together, always being together – that's how they were now. [They] already became close, like a husband and wife. The boy [was] cheerful, delighted; he hid this from his folk. His folk noticed [something strange about] their son, [he] was singing, longing for someone, riding to the steppe. They, too, invited a powerful shaman and showed [him] their son. The shaman said: "I'll whisper this only in your son's ear, then he will decide on his own what to do". After having drummed for 2-3 days-nights, the shaman whispered [something] in the boy's ear and left, they say. The boy's face got wan and drawn, [he] lost weight, suffered much, they say. Gradually, the boy got back to normal, met a very good girl, got children. Over some years, his livestock had increased in number, [he] became a very wealthy man. [One doesn't know] why he told his secret to his wife, unable to resist temptation. How he met the *diireng*, how he sent it away with the help of a trick, he disclosed everything. The wife heard this, got jealous of that *diireng* and started behaving badly, they say. That girl, his wife, started pitching him out, calling that female *diireng* back, and picking quarrels. The *diireng*, sent away with difficulty, now found [the way back to] that man and came. [The *diireng*] mounted him behind herself on her horse and took away. His folk were looking for him and finally found him, the poor guy laid in the steppe, his horse's head already veered off. His wife got poor, their children all died, his people [children] came to the end. His wife, wandering around [with no yurt, children and livestock], also trotted away.

Therefore, the things not intended for telling – it's better not to tell, keep this in mind, my people.

Admin, anonymously.

<6><sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Posted on 16, September 2019.

<sup>16</sup> *Diireng* – an evil spirit, shape-shifter.

<sup>17</sup> *khöömei-sīgīt* – *khöömei* and *sīgīt* are variants of overtone singing, a Tyvan traditional vocal art.

<sup>18</sup> Posted on September 13, 2019.

In the 1970-80s, a male owner of one *ködee*<sup>19</sup> *aal* died. His widow was a young girl in her twenties. After having had all his *khonuk*<sup>20</sup> and other necessary things done, [his folk], worried about that girl, said: “How are you going to sit alone at the *aal*, let us move you to village closer to us”. But the girl did not agree at all. They obeyed thinking that there was no good in exercising power over a person in grief, and got one of her husband’s younger brothers with family moved in closer to their widowed daughter-in-law’s *aal* to help and support her. One night the lad went out to relieve himself and heard strange voices in his sister-in-law’s yurt. He came closer and heard his sister-in-law saying: “I’ve been missing you very much, please caress me more”. Confused, the lad could not find a place to hide his head and just rushed into his yurt. He was sitting, with these thoughts in his mind, and getting angry, it hadn’t been a year since his brother died... The following night he was also spying on the neighbouring yurt and heard a couple having sex. Wondering who was coming here, he started to wait. After a while, the door opened and a guy came out and left with no hurry the *aal*’s territory. When [the brother-in-law] followed after him, the guy turned back in the moonlight... it was his deceased brother. Almost having lost his mind, the lad ran back to his yurt just alive.

Then, after having discussed this with his wife, they went to the village and told everything to their folk, but were called crazy and given no attention. Several days after this, the girl came on horseback to the village. She went straight to the local shop and bought a piece of brown silk, cigarettes, and men’s pants. When asked, what she was going to do with this, she said: “To cover my husband’s *ton*<sup>21</sup>”, – and went out with no sign of confusion. The rumour spread fast in the small village. The strange news instantaneously reached the relatives of the deceased young man. They thought that this was becoming too peculiar. At that time there was a very powerful shaman lady in Mōnggün Taiga<sup>22</sup>, they did their best to invite her, and came to their daughter-in-law’s household. The girl was very happy to see her father- and mother-in-law and started cooking. She was telling them that her husband had gone on a morning hunt and, as far as it had been a while, he must have been lucky. It was getting late, they lit a [kerosene] lamp and were talking. Suddenly they heard the noise of a horse’s hooves and their deceased son came in. His mother lost consciousness. Our shaman sprang to her feet and started beating [him] with a red-handled whip. When the boy turned away and fell down, the shaman covered the boy very quickly with a white *kadak*<sup>23</sup> and opened back. A being with a horrifying appearance turned to them, screamed and jumped out. When the young girl, after she had lost her beloved friend, began to cry days and nights at the grave, the boy, owner of that place, took pity on the poor girl and, having turned to her husband, visited her every night. The scariest thing was that the girl got pregnant. Our shaman, after having been drumming,

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<sup>19</sup> *Ködee* – nomadic pastoralist countryside.

<sup>20</sup> *Khonuk* – 24 hours; in the religious meaning: mourning rituals conducted on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> days after death.

<sup>21</sup> *Ton* – a coat; Tyvan traditional dress.

<sup>22</sup> Mōnggün Taiga – mountains (with the highest point in East Siberia) and a district in western Tyva.

<sup>23</sup> *Kadak* – a ritual scarf.

burning juniper-*aidys*<sup>24</sup> and singing for three days and two nights, on the third night was taken over. She managed to turn herself into the baby inside the bride girl and pushed away the *shulbus*<sup>25</sup> from inside the girl into her own body. When her time to be born came, they say, she was reborn as also an outstanding girl. Have mercy, have mercy, let the bad go away, the good arrive here ...

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<sup>24</sup> *Aidys* – incense, juniper powder.

<sup>25</sup> *Shulbus* – anevil spirit.

## 2.1. Introduction

This chapter includes six narratives about encounters with zoomorphic and anthropomorphic *cher eezi* – a supernatural owner of the land, the master spirit.

The spirits inhabiting the mountains and forest are referred to as ‘owners’ *ee ~ ii*, a term common to all Turkic languages (Dyrenkova 2012: 132). The elements of nature – water bodies, mountains and forest – occupy the central place in the religious worldview and folklore of all Turkic ethnic groups of the Altai-Sayan upland (ibid.: 131), tracing back to the cult of nature among the ancient Turks: the term *ydyq jer-suv* ‘sacred earth-water’ is mentioned in the oldest epigraphic Turkic language of the Orkhon-Yenisei runic inscriptions (*inter alia*: Radloff 1884, I: 131; Radloff, Melioranskii 1897: 19–27; in Dyrenkova 2012: 131). Among the Altaians, neighbours of the Tyvans, this term has developed into *jer-su*, a category of spirits, along with the term *Altai*, which references the spirit masters of the mountains (Anokhin 1924: 14; Radloff 1893–1911, III: 334–335; Radloff 1868: 139; in Dyrenkova 2012: 131); at the same time, in Central Asian Kazakh and Kirghiz folklore, *jer-su* has transformed into a category of evil spirit (ibid.).

In the introduction to a bilingual Tyvan–Russian academic edition of Tyvan folk narrative prose (*Mify ...*, 2010), Alekseev et al. mention that:

[t]he representations of master spirits of nature (*eezi*) as of inhabitants of the middle, earthly, world, to whom sacrifices were given and rituals addressed (*dagyyry*), were extremely wide-spread among the Tyvans. Hence the popularity of mythological motifs about the encounter of a hunter, a tale-teller (*toolchu*), a throat-singer (*xöömeizhi*), and an *igil*-player (*igilchi*) with a [female] nature spirit [...].

(ibid.: 24; my translation)

Encounters with *cher eezi* (Tyv., lit. the ‘owner of the land’, or the ‘owner of the place’) is one of the most frequent motifs among the belief narratives discussed by Tyvan-speakers in the VK public group whose communication I have observed to complete this work. Supernatural beings – owners of the place are referred to in these narratives as *taiga eezi* ‘the lord, master, owner of the taiga’, *cher eezi* ‘owner of the place/land’, *dag*

*eezi* ‘owner of the mountain’, *sug eezi* ‘owner of the water body’ (also, for encounters that take place in a settled environment *bazhyng eezi* ‘owner of the house/apartment/flat’, ‘landlord’).

## 2.2. Key features in representations of *cher eezi*

Based on her analysis of published sources and fieldwork material collected in the late 1920s–1941 in South Siberia and Central Asia, prominent Turkologist and ethnographer Nadezhda P. Dyrenkova, has formulated the key features in representations of supernatural owners – spirits of nature among Turkic-speaking peoples of South Siberia:

1. there is no differentiation between evil and good spirits; their attitude towards a human is reciprocal. A clear differentiation (into evil and good spirits), in cases when it is observed, is the result of a slow and gradual transformation; in the majority of cases this process produced a more distinctive category of evil spirit;
2. the image of these spirits is realistic; the owners of mountains and forests are conceived of as quite concrete beings;
3. and there are immediate and close relationships between man and these spirits (2012: 132–133).

All three features are typical of the representations of *cher eezi* in the belief narratives that I observed between 2018 and 2020 in the communication of the Tyvan-speaking VK group. The first feature is particularly characteristic: *cher eezi* is simultaneously good and evil. This defines the core message of these narratives – the goodness or evilness of *cher eezi* is the responsibility of the human character who must follow rules and norms to maintain balance in his environment.

The Tyvan belief narratives that I have studied reveal **gender-specific patterns** of reciprocity between the owner of the place and the human character.

The narratives with a male human character often have the motif of a taboo against talking about the encounter. The male human character is given the choice of following



or not following the taboo. Through his own behaviour, he can therefore define the character of the consequences of the encounter, and for this reason he is held responsible for whatever happens to him and his family after the encounter with *cher eezi*. This is made explicit in *evaluation* – one of elements of the narrative structure (Labov and Waletzky 1967; Nicolaisen 1987; Tangherlini 1990). The motif of the taboo implies the active agency of the male human character in handling the outcomes of his encounter with the master spirit. In contrast, narratives with a female human character do not include the taboo motif.

Hunters and herdsmen encounter *cher eezi* during their daily activities somewhere in the taiga or the steppe. In this, the narratives which I have observed follow **the “old” patterns** known from folklore material recorded in the earlier periods (cf. texts 51 and 52 in the above mentioned edition – *Mify ...* 2010: 124–127). This is not surprising, for people in the Tyvan countryside are still engaged in a lifestyle that has retained much from the older times, that is, they keep on moving with their herds between seasonal camps and they keep on hunting. The changes brought about by modern times are reflected in **recent variations**. Thus, for instance, not a herder or hunter, but rather a car passenger sees a *cher eezi* when the car passes a mountainous area in the early morning. Or, in one story, a male and a female *cher eezi* (when the common pattern is an encounter with a *cher eezi* of the opposite sex and not with a couple) are encountered not in the wild but in the settled environment – in the backyard of a village house. These new narratives, in contrast with the “old” ones, do not develop into a story of relationships between *cher eezi* and the human character. However, ordinarily there are a number of distinctive stages to these stories: (1) the portrayal of the human character; (2) the first encounter and the portrayal of the *cher eezi*; (3, 4) partnership and separation; (5, 6) the post-encounter strategy of the male human character, or of the family of the female character, and the consequences (death/wealthy life). The new mobility and the new environment make only stage (2) of the encounter possible.

## 2.3. “It was a man in Tyvan clothes ...”:

### The portrayal of the anthropomorphic *cher eezi*

In the narratives about encounters with an implicitly present motif of sexuality, the anthropomorphic *cher eezi*, when described, is often a physically attractive female or male in fine traditional-style clothes (identified by the narrator as ‘Tyvan’ *tyva kheptig* or ‘ancient Tyvan’ *shaandagy tyva kheptig*), often appearing on horseback on a beast of ‘sky colour’ *deer öjnüg*, white or grey; and, sometimes, ‘radiating a soft light’ *chyryp turar*.

Such a description is a persistent element in the local lore on encounters of this type (i.e. encounters with the *cher eezi*, revealing the motif of sexuality) and dates centuries back. We find it for example in the epic cycle *Kezer-Mergen* (Tyvan version of the Tibetan epic *Gesar* – a central epic text in the region), in its first part<sup>26</sup> describing the birth and childhood of Kezer-Mergen, a cultural hero in Tyvan folklore:

The queen [after having seen a giant bird in the sky, with the light radiating from it] was returning home from the pastures when she saw one-and-a-half fathoms apart footprints on the newly fallen light snow. Puzzled, the queen followed the footprints and, after a while, found that they lead to a cave. The queen peered into the cave and saw a swarthy young man in fine clothes – in tiger-patterned boots, a tiger-patterned dress, and tiger-patterned headgear – sitting there at his golden *shiree*<sup>27</sup> with his golden bowl on it. She entered; they exchanged greetings and spent the night together as a married couple, well. That *oran eezi* [‘owner of the land’] young man in fine clothes is the father of Achyty Kezer-Mergen king.

(Achyty *Kezer-Mergen* ... 1995: 17; my translation)<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> In a variant of the first part of the epic, recorded in 1953 from Bayan Balbyr, a prominent storyteller from eastern Tyva (Kuular 1995: 11).

<sup>27</sup> A low table.

<sup>28</sup> Compare the description of this encounter in the Mongolian version of 1716:

On the night of the eighth day of that month, when Gegghe Amurchila was on her way home after gathering fuel, she encountered a huge man, at whose sight she fainted in fright. At the crack of dawn, after lying on the ground for a while, she recovered her senses and headed home. A light snow had fallen, but she retraced her route. In doing so, she noticed that someone else had been striding on the path, leaving footprints one-and-a-half fathoms apart.

Compare this to one of the narratives I have observed in the VK group:

The phantoms [*khei chüveler*] seen as spreading the light are *cher eeleri* [‘owners of the land/ place’]. A woman had only daughters. She had no sons. Once, walking by the place near a spring, she saw a light-emitting man in very nice clothes sitting there; he had a smile on his face. Around a year after she had encountered that handsome man, she got a healthy well-built baby boy.

There is a remarkable similarity between the two encounters despite the difference in genre. There might have been a significant circulation of motifs between the epic and local belief narratives all along the period of their co-existence: such interinfluence between myth, tale, legend, and epic has been noted as typical for Tyvan folklore (Alekseev et al. 2010: 20). Also, the difference in genre might be from the analytical perspective only: from the emic perspective, the *Kezer-Mergen* cycle is a *toozhu* – historical or, rather, *historicized* (Tangherlini 1990: 379, in relation to legend) prose narrative despite the abundance of supernatural motifs in the text (Kuular 1995: 7).

## 2.4. Zoomorphic guises of *cher eezi*

In some narratives, *cher eezi* appears as a hare (in <5>) or a goat kid (in <2>). Thus, in text <5> the female spirit *diireng* is a shape-shifter: during first encounters with the human character, *diireng* appears as a white hare and only after some period manifests herself as a beautiful young girl on a white horse. Anthropologist Anett Oelschlaegel, during her fieldwork in western Tyva in 2004, recorded from a 54-years old male shaman the following text about master spirits of Möngün Taiga<sup>29</sup> and Ak Bashtyg Mountain<sup>30</sup>:

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‘What sort of far-stepping man has been here?’ she asked herself, and followed his footprints. The trail led to a cave in an enormous rock. Gegshe Amurchila peered into the cave and saw a man sitting on a golden chair. He held a banner, variegated like a tiger, and wore a dress and boots of a similar kind. The man sitting on this golden chair, which was supported by a toadstool, was wiping the hoar frost off his beard and saying, ‘Tonight I have really exerted myself to the utmost’. At this, Gegshe Amurchila was frightened and hurriedly returned home.

(De Rachewiltz and Narangoa 2017: 32)

<sup>29</sup> A mountain ridge in western Tyva.

<sup>30</sup> A mountain in Möngün Taiga.

I first met the female spirit master of the Möngün Taiga when I was 16 years old. She was a little girl riding a little rabbit. The rabbit had a harness, reins, and a saddle made of silver. The girl was pretty, wearing silver and gold clothes. We talked to each other. Moving closer to the *ovaa*, she said: ‘I am the master of the Möngün Taiga.’ A couple of years later, when I first consecrated the *ovaa* of the Möngün Taiga, I met her again. We asked each other: ‘How are you?’ Then we went our separate ways. The spirit master of the Möngün Taiga can present itself as an adult or a child. She often meets the master of Ak Bashtyg at the large *ovaa* of the Ak Bashtyg Mountain. I first met the master of the Ak Bashtyg Mountain in June 2004. The master of the Ak Bashtyg Mountain is a Tyvan man dressed in Tyvan clothes, carrying a knife and a lighter. We take care of him by bringing the first part of our meals to his *ovaa*, because this spirit master feeds us [...].

(Oelschlaegel 2016: 82)

In narrative <5> and this one from Anett Oelschlaegel’s material, the hare/rabbit is a female spirit appearing to male human characters of approximately the same age (18 and 16 years old); in her anthropomorphic guise she is a cute young girl. The difference is that in narrative <5> the spirit is referred to by the term *diireng* – an evil female spirit, despite the similarity of her functions with those of the *cher eezi*.

The image of the **hare** as related to the supernatural is known in many cultures across the world (Boyle 1973). Thus, the ancient Chinese “considered the hare to be a telluric genius” (ibid.: 319); in East Asian folklore, the hare is a companion of the Moon goddess; in Nordic tradition the hare is known as the witch’s helper or the witch herself in the shape of a hare (Nildin-Wall and Wall 1993), and so on. In different cultures, the hare symbolises fertility, feminine origin, longevity, and female deities (apart from its trickster character, also a widely-spread folklore motif (Berezkin 2014)). In these Tyvan belief narratives, the hare associated with either the supernatural owner of place or the female evil spirit might therefore indicate a continuity of folk representations in the living narrative tradition of the region.

In narrative <2> the owner of the place takes the shape of a goat kid. The image of the **goat** is closely related to an initially female and predominantly evil spirit *albasty* (as an academic term for this category of spirits common to a number of traditions), or *albys* (in Tyvan tradition). *Albasty* can be zoomorphic or anthropomorphic. When the latter, it is often a naked and hairy woman with huge pendulous breasts that she throws over her shoulders (Dyrenkova 2012: 231). Zoomorphic guises of this evil spirit are thought of as goats or dogs, often with red colouring in their coat and, again, pendulous breasts (ibid.). The anthropomorphic representations of *albasty/albys* are based on

exaggerated female traits (long hair, pendulous breasts, nudity) so that its zoomorphic guises as the goat or the dog is just another image for the same idea, for in folklore of many peoples these animals were associated with the idea of fertility (ibid.: 239).

Additionally, comparing to neighbouring peoples, goat-rearing is/was more characteristic of Tyvan pastoralism because “[a] distinctive feature of the Tuvinian herd was the comparatively high percentage of goats [...]. Other nomadic pastoral peoples of Central Asia kept proportionally fewer goats, and some [...] kept hardly any” (Vainshtein [1972] 1980: 61). The goat-motif in narrative <2> is, therefore, very “Tyvan”.

Narrative <5> and <2> with zoomorphic supernatural beings reveal the fuzziness of boundaries between the categories of *cher eezi* and the evil spirit. This speaks of the persistence of the earlier representations of these spirits (as simultaneously good and evil) in contemporary Tyvan belief narratives.

## 2.5. Conclusion

This chapter focused on Tyvan belief narratives about encounters with the supernatural in the nomadic pastoralist context. To refer to this context as distinct from rural and urban contexts of encounters, I use the term ‘Tyvan traditional environment’ – an analytical construct based on the notions of traditional consciousness and ethnic constants to identify an environment that has retained some important features of Tyvan material and immaterial culture as a living tradition.

Supernatural beings encountered in the Tyvan traditional environment tend to manifest themselves in a structured way:

1. In this environment, human encounters with the supernatural are often defined by a geography of local traditional activities (hunting and herding) rather than by a chaotic manifestation in space.
2. Narratives about the encounters with master spirits, based on the implicit motif of sexuality, reveal a traditional sequence with the following distinct stages: (1) the portrayal of the human character; (2) the first encounter and the portrayal of the

*cher eezi*; (3, 4) partnership and separation; (5, 6) the human character's post-encounter strategy and the consequences of the encounter. The new mobility and the new environment make only stage (2) of the encounter possible.

3. This sequence of distinct stages reveals gender-specific patterns through the introduction of the motif of taboo (against talking about the encounter) in narratives with the male human character. The motif of taboo implies the male human character has an active agency.
4. Narratives of encounters with master spirits communicate the idea of reciprocity as a concept central to the Tyvan traditional environment.
5. Analysis of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic guises of master spirits reveal that both the form and the content of representations of the supernatural have a remarkable stability.

### 3. The Wild Things of the Land

#### Narratives

<7><sup>31</sup>

Hello, admin and readers.

I shall try to write something I experienced myself. Then I was only 22. My parents are herders. It was summer time. After sheep shearing, two weeks had to pass, the third week they used to go from summer pastures to the *sovkhoz* to get sheep washed.<sup>32</sup> I and my older brother were left at the *aal*. As for my brother, he has been disabled since childhood, mentally impaired. One night, when we were going to bed, our dogs started barking madly. It was an extremely dark night, but you have your cows outside. The dogs were barking right at the door of the *yurt*. A good thing – having grabbed a rifle, we two poor brothers went out.

We went outside, there was our hut not far from the yurt. Close to it, quite a big fire was burning. We were very scared. Especially when my poor brother said it was an *aza*. A thought came to my mind that such people by their nature can see. I fired with my rifle in the direction of the fire. Then we rushed back into the yurt jostling one another. The dogs calmed down now. After having waited with impatience for the dawn to come, we went near the hut and found no signs of the fire. I am still wondering about it. Hide me, admin, *ye*.

<8><sup>33</sup>

Well, I too, who believe in *aza-chetker* and the other world, will write one [story])).

[It was] long ago, maybe in the years 1994–96. I used to spend my summer holidays in the taiga at my grandfather's *aal* enjoying my leisure time, the fresh air, and helping there. At [our] *aal*, there were my grandfather, g[rand]mother, then we children from about three or four relatives. There were children in the neighbour *aals* as well, [it was] a very interesting time. One evening, at twilight, when we were about to get the *aal* chores done, it started raining. Our grandmother said:

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<sup>31</sup> Posted on January 12, 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Refers to the veterinary practice of sheep dipping in water containing insecticides and fungicide in a permanent in-ground concrete structure.

<sup>33</sup> Posted on January 17, 2019.

“Get in the yurt, you’ll get wet. Close the *düündük*<sup>34</sup>”, she herself was still doing stuff with my [elder] brother and grandfather in the corral. With my elder sister we started closing the *düündük*. Our younger sister, well, she entered the yurt; suddenly [she] screamed. It suddenly stopped raining. [I] with my sister got frightened and screamed, too, with no understanding of what happened, and rushed into the yurt. Our [younger] sister was sitting on her knees in front of the stove staring at the *dör*<sup>35</sup>, voiceless. “What has happened to you? Stand up, hurry! It is getting dark, sit on the bed” – this is what was my elder sister saying to her when our folks came from the corral. Since that day our younger sister had a fever and nightmares, crying in a thin voice and aiming for the door. The following morning, we sent a message to her parents in the village and they brought a shaman. The poor invited shaman did his work; then, with all people’s attention on him, [he] burst into a poem-like recitation with his eyes closed. I will try to write it down, from what I can remember:

...[One who has] both eyes full of blood,  
 [with its] intestines falling loose,  
 holding [its own] rot trapped.  
 In the twilight appearing in human guise,  
 [whose] split hoof is invisible for a layman,  
 with no openings for [its] mouth-nose,  
 with no fate of breaking its fast,  
 overwhelmed with hunger, full with anger.  
 Floating by the air,  
 Roaming the land and spying for a human place [*ödek*<sup>36</sup>],  
 From rain water sprinkled by the *denger*<sup>37</sup>  
 Escaped, the *chetker-aza*<sup>38</sup> –  
 A wild *puk*<sup>39</sup> has touched [her]!  
 [Struggling] to follow the *albys* summoning [her],  
 The female child’s *sünezin-kut*<sup>40</sup>,  
 [thanks to] being tiny-minuscule,  
 has [fortunately] clung onto her alive  
 and remained [with her], lucky she is!”

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<sup>34</sup> The smoke hole in the central part of the yurt roof.

<sup>35</sup> The floor of the yurt is divided into four parts: a part closest to the entrance, then female (to right), male (to left), and *dör* at the upper part of the circle.

<sup>36</sup> Here: the immediate territory of the nomadic pastoralist household.

<sup>37</sup> The sacred sky.

<sup>38</sup> Denominations of evil spirit.

<sup>39</sup> A denomination of evil spirit.

<sup>40</sup> *Sünezin* can be approximately translated as the ‘soul’. *Kut* conveys the idea of the immaterial essence of the living being’s well-being.



While he spoke he sprinkled white milk, cleansed her with the juniper smoke, whipping, and offering [for superiour entities] the best parts of the food all day long. Then our sister broke out in a cold sweat and fell asleep. [She] slept for two-three nights and days. [After she] recovered, only then we started asking her.

When our sister ran inside [the yurt], something grey and crooked was sitting on the *dör* with its back to her. When it suddenly turned to her, [she] made one more step to look closer [at it] in the half-darkness of the yurt; she then felt as if it touched her face (leant on it) and jumped out through the *dündik*, but we two outside saw nothing... It was strange! When she described that crooked *aza*, it was similar to what the shaman was describing... I and my [older] sister recently recounting it together have written down the words from that shaman's incantation. To my mind, the shaman they invited must have been knowledgeable, but I do not remember his name, neither know I whether he is still alive or not. [I have nobody] to ask [about him], my old folk themselves mounted their horses in the years 2000 and 2002. This does scare me!

<9><sup>41</sup>

One more story, girls). I will scare you a bit.

It was long ago in the 1990s, in early autumn. My older sister and I were at the *aal*. My grandmother had been invited by her friend, an old lady, and as it turned out they had a chat over a small drink. Having waited for her in vain, we decided to bring her back home and went in the night. That *aal* was far away. In the early morning between three and four o'clock we were walking in silence and looking around. It was close to the morning twilight. While walking, I felt like there was some uncomfortably weird agitation on my right side. I kept on walking paying little attention to it, but was a bit afraid to look there, even though tempted to do so. I even started hearing a noise. My sister, being hard of hearing, kept walking unaware; usually she was easily scared. Then, feeling it coming closer, I looked at it. My face flamed hot, I felt like an electric shock passed down my spine, I couldn't say a word. Frightened, I jumped to the other side of my sister and took her hand. In ten metres, something black was following us moving along *caragana* bushes. It had been a while, it didn't go away, stopped when we stopped, and when we moved on, it also started moving. Now from time to time it began to roar like a *sarlyk*<sup>42</sup>. We kept on walking discussing how to get safely to a neighbouring *aal*, and praying. When I asked my sister what it was, she also did not know. We both clearly saw [it], it also seemed to see us. I kept on looking [at the creature] attentively, then in some place the bushes became thin, and when it stood there, it seemed to me like a hummel *sarlyk*. I started calming down slowly, thinking that it was a stray *sarlyk*. When I

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<sup>41</sup> Posted on September 8, 2019.

<sup>42</sup> The domestic yak. "These domestic yaks are the direct descendants of the wild Tibetan yak. In all probability the yak (*sarlyk*) was domesticated in Tibet and came to Tyva and the Altai in ancient times via Mongolia. [...] Apart from Tuvinians, other Central Asian and Southern Siberian peoples who herd yaks are the Altaians, the northern Khalkha Mongols, and the Tibetans of the Alashan Mountains [...]" (Vainshtein [1972] 1980: 78).

shouted in my sister's ear that it was a *sarlyk*, she hit me [on my back]. When I looked at her astonished, she said: "Don't be stupid, stop talking and move fast, don't look to the side". I got then really frightened, just about to cry. After some time, we saw the neighbouring *aal*, I brightened up and trotted along very fast. At some moment I looked to my side, our *sarlyk* was also running. My heart was about to burst, I was just paralysed from fear. It wasn't a *sarlyk*, I didn't know what it was, it looked like a very tall man wearing a fur coat inside out, its face-head<sup>43</sup> unclear, all covered with hair, I couldn't see its eyes-ears, very frightening. [My] flesh-skin became cold, [my] bones-limbs felt like cotton. It seemed I was about to lose consciousness. All of a sudden my sister hit me [again], and I came to my senses and just ran to that *aal*. So did it. When I was running in [the territory of the *aal*] giving no attention even to that *aal*'s ferocious dogs, the *aal*'s male owner (the old man used to shamanise) was already meeting us. Shouting: "Hurry up, come in the yurt", he stayed outside whipping. Their dogs weren't even barking, just howling in a thin voice, and crawling. [The old man] ran inside [the yurt] soon after us. Frightened, we all couldn't even speak. Scolding us, he kept on whipping and burning juniper. We all had been sitting calmed down until the dawn came. Only then the old man started talking. "From so far off, how aren't you afraid of going together with it, you girls, he said with astonishment. "You went out at the wrong hour<sup>44</sup> in the night and [that is why] you met *khei chüve*, now if you do not have a sleep for a bit before getting up, it will be forever following you", he said. He laid the bedding, told us to have a sleep and went out. I couldn't sleep at all, laying with my eyes open, now it was 5 o'clock, the *aal* we were going to was still far away, the time to milk cows was also coming, [but] we couldn't go back either, we were trying to bring our grandmother back home because she used to fall down in a faint. What if she lost consciousness in other people's *aal*, [she] used to not recover in 2-3 days. In one moment, I heard the old man shamanising outside, even spitting at his dog for some reason. Then [he] came in and said not to go out of the *yurt* until the sun was high enough. [When I] told him where we were going, [he] didn't let [us go] there. [I] have made [it] go far enough, you can go now, my daughters", he said and saw us off. His children brought us on horseback [to our *aal*]. All that day, I was feeling weakness in my arms-legs, I couldn't help thinking of that shaggy thing. Because of it, I started seeing things from time to time. Then, having got seriously ill, I recovered and happened to lose my ability to see. Now I just hear, not very often. My mother has been to shamans countless times, with no results. [The shamans said] if you are not initiated, you'll get ill. Being afraid of seeing such thing, I haven't agreed. Now I have an illness for my entire life. In such a way I learned that one cannot thoughtlessly go out in any time one wants.

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<sup>43</sup> The word pairs in this text (*arni-bazhi* – face-head, *karak-kulaa* – eyes-ears, *e't-kezhim* – flesh-skin, and *söök-dayam* – bones-limbs) acquire some poetical sound in translation, while in the original they can be part of ordinary language.

<sup>44</sup> The "wrong hour" (or "wrong time") is a popular concept in Tyvan beliefs.

### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter includes three narratives about encounters with wandering and placeless spirits – supernatural strangers and marginals in the nomadic-pastoralist landscape dominated by different *cher eeleri*. All three narratives are first-hand accounts. I have selected these particular narratives for their complete and complex character. Apart from their ethnopoetic prominence (which I do not analyse in this work), these narratives expose, through images of supernatural entities, different types of non-belonging in the Tyvan tradition.

### 3.2. The wildmen tradition: A hominid or a demon?

Narrative <9> about a suspense-style encounter with a creature “looking like a very tall man wearing a fur coat inside out, its face-head unclear, all covered with hair [...]” is clearly part of the wildmen tradition in the folklore of Central Asian and South Siberian peoples. In their article (2017) on the development of this motif across Central Asia, Sabira Ståhlberg and Ingvar Svanberg draw the boundaries of its diffusion as the follows:

Central Asian wildmen traditions can be divided into two main lines: Mongolia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, which as well as Chinese Central Asia seem to belong to the same tradition. This line is close to Tibetan and Chinese wildmen beliefs. Tajikistan and the Pamir Mountains belong to another cultural area, which is connected to Iranian and Indian folklore.

(Ståhlberg and Svanberg 2017: 1)

Mongolians call this being *almas*, the Kazak and Kyrgyz *kiik adam* or *kiyik kishi*, and the people inhabiting the Pamir *zhabayi kishi* (ibid.), last three terms carrying the meaning ‘wild man’, ‘animal-man’ (cf. the Tyvan word *kizhi* ‘man’, ‘human being’). Ståhlberg and Svanberg provide an overview of historical sources referring to mysterious hominids in the foreigners’ vocabulary, or full-fledged evil spirits with both human and animal traits from the emic perspective. Thus, according to historical records,

Johannes Schiltberger is considered to be the first Westerner who reported on wildmen in Central Asia. Schiltberger was taken prisoner during the battle of Nikopol (now in Bulgaria) in 1396, and later served as a slave soldier to several Turkish and Mongol chiefs. Passing great mountains (supposed by modern researchers to be Tianshan) on his journey through Central Asia, he heard about ‘savages’ who roamed the mountains like wild animals.

(ibid.: 2)

According to more recent ethnographic data,

[t]he *almas* is known mostly among different Mongolian peoples. There are data from Mongolia, the Altai and Tianshan Mountains, Xinjiang, Gansu and Qinghai in China, and the Tuva Republic in Siberia, as well as among Kalmyks (now in Kalmykia by the Caspian Sea). In its modern form, which prevails in reports since the end of the nineteenth century, *almas* is usually described as a tall, hairy, human-like creature which eats small mammals and wild plants and roams mainly during the night. It uses primitive tools, but does not know any language. [...] Information on *almas* shows great regional variation and is often contradictory.

(ibid.: 3)

It is tempting to point out to the closeness of these *almas* to Tyvan *albys* (the evil spirit; see Chapter 2, pp. 28, 29). However, in narrative <9> the creature remains unnamed: both the narrator and her sister (who was with the narrator during the encounter) have difficulty in identifying it:

When I asked my sister what it was, she also did not know [...].

This lack of knowledge on the nature of the being is perceived by the narrator as being almost as uncomfortable as the fear caused by it. Rather than rushing to identify it as an evil spirit *albys*, *aza*, or *shulbus* (which would not be unexpected in such circumstances), the narrator tries her best to make it clear with whom or what they deal:

We both clearly saw [it], it also seemed to see us. I kept on looking [at the creature] attentively, then in some place the bushes became thin, and when it stood there, it seemed to me like a hummel *sarlyk*.

Domesticated yaks – *sarlyks* – are reared in pastoralist households on the highlands of western Tyva; probably, the encounter in narrative <9> happened in a remote mountainous area, which is, in folklore, the typical place for wildmen to roam.

In Ståhlberg and Svanberg’s (2017) description, these beings, despite their physical similarity to humans, do not have any language. This feature is also mentioned in narrative <9>:

Now from time to time it began to roar like a *sarlyk*.

The lack of language, in the same way as hairiness, is indicative of the category of wild beings. Compare the description of the creature in narrative <9> with one provided by Heuvelmans and Porshnev (1974; in Ståhlberg and Svanberg 2017):

In 1912 or 1913, such a wildman was reportedly captured in Xinjiang and brought to a village where it was fed with raw meat and then taken away by the authorities. It was black and monkey-like in the face, very strong, whistled and uttered guttural noises, and smelled very badly, which caused local people think it was an ape.

(ibid.: 7).

These descriptions make one think that the creature is an animal (a hominid, from the cryptozoologists' perspective) rather than a human-like demon. In narrative <9> the author, throughout her lengthy depiction, never refers to this creature by using any locally known denominations of supernatural entities but limits herself to calling it a "thing" or "it". However, at the same time she clearly recognises it as an otherworldly being by blaming it for a supernatural sensibility and mysterious illness she has acquired after the encounter:

Because of it, I started seeing things from time to time. Then, having got seriously ill, I recovered and happened to lose my ability to see. Now I just hear, not very often. My mother has been to shamans countless times, with no results. [The shamans said] if you are not initiated, you'll get ill. Being afraid of seeing such a thing, I haven't agreed. Now I have an illness for my entire life [...].

On the other hand, her neighbour, a knowledgeable man, firmly identifies it as *khei chïve*, a common term for all kinds of supernatural entity (with the adjective *khei* carrying the meaning 'not real, not existing, phantom-like'; 'pointless, useless, vain').

The being in narrative <9> thus reveals a double characterisation from the emic perspective: it is a fully-fledged being, on the one hand, and "not real", on the other. One of the main issues in the narrative is therefore connected with the difficulty of identification. This relates to the category of strangers who do not belong to the narrator's environment.

### 3.3. Placeless spirits

This part is based on an analysis of narrative <8>. I will first focus on the place of the encounter, the yurt, discussing the Tyvan traditional dwelling as a place for encounters with the supernatural. Then I will discuss the description of the supernatural being, specifically its physical appearance as indicative of its placeless status.

**The yurt as a place for encounters with the supernatural.** In the settled environment, encounters with the supernatural often happen in one's home. Thus, there are stories about harmless household spirits called *bazhyng eezi* 'the owner of the house' and *domovoi* (which migrated to Tyva with Russians), or harmful beings (also called *bazhyng eezi*) – often the human owners or tenants who lived in that place unhappily and died there. The motifs of encounters with hostile supernatural landlords define the character of belief narratives in the urban environment.

In contrast, the Tyvan traditional dwelling, the yurt (Tyv. *ög*), is a considerably less frequent place for such encounters. In spite of the fact that, physically, it is an open and single space, the yurt's interior is conceptualised as a highly structured space in ways similar to the Mongolian yurt *ger* where everything has its place. In this relation, consider, for instance, the following observation:

When a Mongol woman buys a sewing machine, she has an allotted place in her tent to put it, and this place is the same in every tent across the steppe. This fact may seem insignificant, but it is evidence that present-day Mongols persistently categorize objects in terms of their position in space. This characteristic of Mongol life was noted by travellers as long ago as the 13th century; it was further observed that Mongols used this categorisation to define social positions.

(Humphrey 1974: n.p.)

The yurt thus “provided a space in which every category of person or object in the nomad's world could be located [...]” (ibid.) in a particular status-specific place. This shared understanding of space and relationships embedded in it are one of the ethnic constants (this notion is discussed in Chapter 1, p. 15) that contribute to the formation of stable, or rigid, structural paradigms, which make possible a situation in which:

[p]eople could move above the tent, but they had to sit, eat and sleep in their correct places. Earlier this [20<sup>th</sup>] century, among the Mongol-speaking people of Tuva, guests would be fined a horse, with harness, for insulting a host by sitting in the wrong place in his tent. This applied whether the

guest over-valued or under-valued himself: it was as bad for a mediumly-ranked guest to sit in the place of an important man, as it was for him to move down a place and sit in the spot appropriate for 'clean' old people. The system was so explicit that it was possible in certain circumstances to manipulate it, as for example in the case of the lama, who, with false modesty, entered the tent on the women's side, only to provoke all the women to scream and flee from the tent and the hostess to plead, "Honourable lama, please move further up! Please accept a seat further up!"

(ibid.)

The tradition of fining guests for sitting in the wrong place is obviously forgotten now, although the rigid structuring of the yurt's interior space is a living tradition, as becomes clear from a fieldworker's observations in South Tyva between 2015 and 2018:

[t]he interior space of the yurts was referred to as the western and eastern sides, the latter being the 'female' side. This hosted a kitchen area, the woman's bed, and, next to it, a section [Tyv. *üzük*] to store food supplies. Food related work (cooking, separating butter from milk, washing dishes) was done on the female side. Guests were not allowed here, except women who were close kin. A visitor, upon entering the yurt, would move clockwise, that is to the western side, which is the 'male' side. Here the visitor would sit in front of the man's bed. Horse equipment for everyday use was kept on the western side. Saddles were kept in a storage area adjoining the bed from the entrance side. Bridles, halters, lasso-*sydym*, hobbles, and whips were hung on a special hunger [Tyv. *chagy*]. [...] The *chagy* was placed at either the head or footboard of the man's bed. Horsehair rope weaving and processing of hides and leather for traditional clothing and equipment was done in the yurt's male side.

(Soyan Peemot 2019: 57)

Through a strict system of allocating a place to both objects and people, the yurt's interior becomes "a kind of microcosm of the social world [...]" (Humphrey 1974: n.p.). The family members and their guests constantly remain in the zone of physical visibility, which, due to the shared understanding of the relationships embedded within the yurt, transforms into a zone of social visibility. The yurt's interior therefore appears to be a structured and predictable environment where unforeseen encounters, including with the supernatural, are minimised.

Probably because of this, in narrative <8> the encounter with an evil spirit in the yurt required the coincidence of *a number* of liminal states. First, it was at twilight, a liminal period of the day. In the shaman's incantations, evening twilight is a time when the evil spirit is destined to manifest itself:

[...one who is] at twilight appearing in human guise [...]

Second (and the most important argument, according to the shaman's incantation) is that the evil spirit who took advantage of evening twilight to roam near the human place, had to look desperately for a shelter because of the sudden rain sent by the sacred sky *denger*<sup>45</sup>:

[...it escaped] from rain water sprinkled by the *denger* [...]

And, finally, for a short period, the yurt was an abandoned place: nobody was there, the yurt's interior was free of human presence. In nomadic cultures, there seems to be a characteristic uneasiness experienced towards abandoned buildings, belongings left in the wild, etc. (Pedersen 2016). In Tyvan folklore, abandoned things can acquire supernatural malevolent properties and harbour negative forces.

The narratives about encounters with the otherworldly in a village or urban dwelling often depict one condition of liminality.

**The description of the evil spirit** in narrative <8> is given in the shaman's incantation, which the narrator and her sister transcribed, recounting together after many years. The shaman used simple but powerful images, and probably this is why it was possible for the sisters to retain them in their memory for years. The encounter happened in the 1990s, during the first years after the fall of the Soviet Union and the period when Tyvans had just started openly practising Buddhist and shamanist rituals. There was a great interest in reviving the old traditions, something that could also be a reason why the narrator (then a teenage girl) has a good memory of the event.

The evil spirit is described in the following way:

...[One who has] both eyes full of blood,  
[with its] intestines falling loose,  
holding [its own] rot trapped.  
In twilight appearing in human guise,  
[whose] split hoof is invisible to the layman,  
with no openings for [its] mouth-nose,  
with no fate of breaking its fast,  
overwhelmed with hunger, full with anger.

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<sup>45</sup> *Denger* (or *tengri*) is one of the ancient concepts in the local belief system: "[t]he idea of *Tengri* was based on animistic beliefs about the celestial spirit as a non-personified masculine divine principle, the sky was conceived to be its actual manifestation, its dwelling place" (Kaliakbarova et al., 2018: n.p.).



Floating by the air,  
Roaming the land and spying for a human place [*ödek*],  
From rain water sprinkled by the *denger*  
Escaped, the *chetker-aza* –  
A wild *puk* has touched [her]!

My verbatim translation cannot be of much use in helping English-speaking readers to get into the ethnopoetic dimension of this text. However, I would like to draw the reader's attention to the image of the evil spirit. It is depicted as having no openings for its mouth or nose, on the one hand, and as "holding its rot trapped", on the other. Such features might point to the creature's generic incapability of consuming and producing. Both processes, from the emic perspective, are important in defining the evil spirit's position. In Tyvan folklore, malevolent supernatural beings often manifest their nature through the attributes of gluttony. This motif is particularly developed in tales where evil beings strive to swallow entire *aals*, including the humans and animals. Apart from tales, the motif of gluttony is characteristic of belief narratives about the power of shamans. Thus, powerful shamans are considered able to 'devour' other less powerful shamans and laymen, as well as to 'devour' diseases of their patients (Stépanoff 2009). Shamans' gluttony is not always a bad quality, since in some instances it has the function of healing. In contrast, anyone else's gluttony is always a negative feature. Furthermore, this feature dominates in defining one's evilness: a monstrous being is gluttonous and, *vice versa*, a gluttonous being is monstrous.

Following this logic, the evil spirit in narrative <8> is monstrous, and therefore gluttonous. But, characteristically, this being has no mouth. As a result, it is doomed to roam permanently hungry and angry, spying after human places, because human beings are those who feed spirits voluntarily (by means of ritual offerings for different *ee*) or involuntarily (through inflictions). The interaction between humans and spirits in the shared environment is based on the idea of consumption.

One important point to mention is that "[i]n Siberia, [flesh] consumption requires reciprocity" (Hamayon 1990, in Stépanoff 2009: 296). As I have discussed in Chapter 2, relationships with the supernatural owners of the taiga and steppe are based on reciprocity. The evil spirit in narrative <8> is incapable of consuming and therefore cannot reciprocate. The lack of reciprocity defines relationships with outsiders, rather than with members (human and non-human) of the community.

Along with the impossibility of incoming flows, the description of the evil spirit shows the equal impossibility of outflows (“holding its rot trapped”). This motif has a parallel, again, with the properties of the shaman’s body (Stépanoff 2009, 2013). The shaman’s extraordinary capacities are rooted in his essentially “open” body (ibid.), through which the energy circulates freely changing its own valency. In other words, the shaman ‘belongs’ to his environment to an extent that he is able to be ‘dissolved’ into it by means of unconstrained circulation of the environment’s energy in and out of his body. Charles Stépanoff (2013) uses the term *corps conducteur* when discussing such properties of the shaman’s body. According to this logic, the evil spirit in narrative <8> cannot participate in the circuit of energy in the environment and therefore does not belong with it.

The image of the evil spirit in this narrative thus reveals Tyvan representations of non-belonging through the notions of consumption, reciprocity, and circulation of essences on the bodily and cosmic levels.

### 3.4. “*I am still wondering about this ...*”: Things that just happen

Narrative <7> is relatively short, but constructed through intense images. Thus, it was an “*extremely* dark night”, when dogs started “barking *madly* [...] *right* at the door”, and the human characters saw “*quite a big*” mysterious fire not far from their yurt. And above all, the human characters are “two *poor* brothers”, the older one mentally impaired from his childhood and the younger, 22-year-old, brother who acknowledges the bitterness of the situation.

The narrative reveals a double structure more typical to belief narratives in the settled environment. One (explicit) structure is built on the encounter with an otherworldly being of unexplainable nature, and the other (implicit) structure is introduced through an encounter of a different order, the narrator’s brother’s disease, which is from the emic perspective equally unexplainable. Tellingly, the narrator’s brother is one who identifies the mysterious otherworldly being:

[...] my poor brother said it was an *aza*. A thought came to my mind that such people by their nature can see.

Compare this to the narratives about supernatural owners of place (discussed in Chapter 2), where the narrator's purpose is to provide a coherent explanation of the event. I would note that, in the belief narrative, explanation is an emic category and, therefore, it works even if it does not look like an actual explanation, as for example in narrative <3>:

Look what can happen sometimes.

As I have mentioned in Chapter 2, narratives about *cher eezi* are built on patterns of reciprocity where the actions of both human and non-human characters are, from the emic perspective, *explainable* and *anticipated*: a spirit falls for a young girl *because* she is cute (narrative <3>) or *out of* the pity (narrative <6>); dreadful consequences happen *because* the human character violates the taboo (narratives <4> and <5>), etc. Conversely, it would be difficult to reciprocate with those who reveal unexplainable nature; the lack of reciprocity, as shown in Part 3.3, is indicative of the category of non-belonging.

### 3.5. Conclusion

This chapter's focus was on narratives about encounters with wandering and placeless spirits – supernatural strangers and marginals in the Tyvan traditional environment dominated by different *cher eeleri*. Through images of supernatural entities, these narratives expose three aspects of the category of non-belonging in Tyvan tradition.

In Part 3.2., based on a narrative obviously belonging to the wildman tradition of Central Asia and Siberia, I discussed the emic perspective on the supernatural being depicted in the narrative as simultaneously belonging to the physical world (the narrative emphasises its animal traits) and to the world of spirits (its agency is of an otherworldly nature). This ambiguity in emic characterisation might indicate that the encountered creature is absent from local taxonomies of natural and supernatural entities known to the narrator.

In Part 3.3., based on an encounter with an evil spirit in a yurt, I discussed the Tyvan traditional dwelling as a structured space where unforeseen encounters are

minimised. Then, through notions of gluttony, consumption, and reciprocity, I analysed the supernatural being's appearance as indicative of its placeless status.

In Part 3.4., I analysed a short narrative with a double structure that had an emphasis on inexplicability as a feature indicative of the category of non-belonging.

Through analysis of representations of wandering spirits, I discussed such features as (a) being unidentifiable, or absent from local taxonomies; (b) being incapable of consuming; and (c) being unexplainable as defining the category of non-belonging in Tyvan tradition.

# Conclusion

This work is a study of belief narratives discussed in a Tyvan-speaking public group within a social network and encounters with the supernatural described therein. Thematically and functionally, the narratives can be distinguished into two large groups: those relating to encounters with the supernatural in the nomadic pastoralist context and those relating to encounters in the settled context.

In this work I focussed on narratives relating to encounters with the supernatural in the nomadic pastoralist context distinctive for the region. My main finding is that the narratives in this group are based on two main concepts: reciprocity, on the one hand, and non-belonging, on the other. The first theme is developed through narratives about encounters with master spirits, supernatural owners of the land (Tyv. *cher eezi*); the second one through narratives about wandering placeless spirits. Both themes (as well as both groups of supernatural beings characteristic of the nomadic pastoralist context) are in dialectical relationships. Reciprocity and belonging are concepts central to the notion of the shared landscape, formed as a result of the centuries-long development of nomadic pastoralism in the region.

In addition, the narratives in this group gave evidence of the structured character of relationships between humans and supernatural beings in the nomadic pastoralist context of encounters. I discussed common patterns in these relationships. In the analysis of the narratives with the motif of taboo, I established that the motif of taboo had the function of distinguishing the female and male human characters as social actors with gender-specific roles. The analysis of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic guises of master spirits revealed a remarkable stability in Tyvan folk representations.

The study of narratives about encounters with wandering and placeless spirits helped me to introduce, through the images of supernatural entities, the category of non-belonging in Tyvan tradition. Non-belonging to the shared landscape is defined through attribution of such features as:

1. being unidentifiable (absent from local taxonomies);

2. being incapable of consuming (consumption plays a defining role in establishing reciprocal relationships);
3. and being inexplicable (reciprocity implies knowledge).

As we see, reciprocity and non-belonging construct each other through representations embedded in belief narratives.

This work is intended as a first step in the study of contemporary Tyvan belief narratives. I hope, in continuation, to discuss narratives relating to the supernatural in the settled context of encounters to reveal the underlying concepts and compare them with those characteristic to the nomadic pastoralist context. In addition, there is a group of narratives about encounters with the supernatural in the outland far away from Tyva. Together, I believe, these narratives expose motifs relevant in discussing Tyvan and, wider, indigenous experiences of living in the contemporary world.

# Summary in Estonian

## **Usundilised narratiivid tõvakeelses sotsiaalsõrgustikus: üleloomulikud kohtumised pastoraal-nomaadlikus keskkonnas**

Uurimus käsitleb Lõuna-Siberis elavate tõvalaste sotsiaalsõrgustikes ringlevaid lugusid kohtumistest, mida jutuvestjad ise tõlgendavad üleloomulikus võtmes. Need tõva keeles kirja pandud lood pärinevad ühe internetikogukonna suhtlusest aastatel 2018–2020 ja on kommenteerimiseks avatud. Enamik neist on lood isiklikest kogemustest („memoraadid“ kui kasutada von Sydowi terminit).

Töö keskmes on usundilised narratiivid kohtumistest, mis seostuvad pastoraal-nomaadlikus kontekstiga. On võimalik eristada kaht põhilist juturühma: (a) lood paigahaldjatest kui maa üleloomulikest omanikest (*cher eezi*) (2. peatükk), ja (b) lood kohtumistest liikuvate vaimolenditega, kes pole seotud konkreetse kohaga (3. peatükk).

Põhijäreldusena võib esile tuua, et nende narratiivide aluseks on kaks suhet: esimese juturühma puhul vastastikune seotus, ja teise puhul mittekuulumine. Mõlemad motiivid on kesksed piirkonnas sajandite vältel kujunenud pastoraal-nomaadlikus elukorralduses, kus maastik on kõigi jaoks ühine.

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