

THE CREATION OF NEW SPIRITS IN NANAY SHAMANISM

Tatyana Bulgakova. St.-Petersburg, Russia

Nanay shamanism presents an extremely favourable material for investigating the problem of how new spirits come to being and what their origin is. At present, the spiritual tradition of Nanays is rapidly becoming extinct, but it still keeps developing and is being enriched by new plots and personages. It is important to note that the instability and creative character of Nanay mythology has been marked by I. Lopatin already in 1922. According to his exploration, 'the development of Gold's (Nanay's) mythology has not finished yet' and that is why 'many of the Golds know neither the classification of spirits nor many of the spirits' and 'new ones are being created at every turn'.¹ The latest expeditions² have supplied extensive material to confirm his words. When a shaman starts his meditative journey in search for a soul which has left a sick person, he does not know for sure what will happen in each successive stage of the ceremony. He might come across utterly unknown spirits. Up to the present time, as in the times of I. Lopatin, 'during every shamanic ceremony some new spirits have sometimes been discovered, and some forgotten spirits have been recalled'.³ A constant change of the pantheon personages takes place. Some spirits have been forgotten for some reasons, but others come to take their place.

However, different categories of Nanay spirits vary by the degree of their stability. The most dogmatic conceptions of this phenomenon are connected with the most powerful spirits *endurs* ('deities'). It is hard to imagine the appearance of a new *endur* now. Most probably it is due to the fact that the origin of these spirits goes beyond the Nanay culture. One can find many proofs of their Manchurian origin. On the other hand, the appearance of new personages among Nanay spirits proper is quite usual an event. This article is about the spirits of two categories, such as the spirit-assistants of a shaman (*sevens*)⁴ and the spirits of ancestors which used to be the souls of shamans (fathers and mothers as patrons of clans).

The expedition materials allow us to presume that the spirits actually originate in the reality of everyday life. I have managed to write down a legend of how *simurs* became *sevens*, spirit-assistants of a shaman.⁵ (Simurs are creatures resembling huge snakes, whom, according to the words of Nanays, the hunters see in the taiga from time to time).

Once in summer a man was resettling. He was a young shaman. It

took him some days to find a new place. One morning he got up and made up his mind to go hunting. There was thick fog. He was boating on the lake. Suddenly he saw something floating in the fog – either a roe or anything else. He rushed after it and when he was about to get it – he saw that it was not a roe but a simur. It was too late to go back. What could he do, being so near to it? He gripped his lance and thrust the simur thrice. He killed it, and continued his journey. Since that time he saw simurs everywhere.

Once he was boating up the Amur river. While passing the Sandar cliff or the Sikachi-Alan cliff, a big simur jumped down from the top of the cliff just into the boat. The man himself was then sitting at the rudder. He gripped the lance and killed the simur. Then he went on boating. At night while sleeping he saw both the killed simurs in his dream.

'You have overcome us, ' – they told him, – ' and since now each time you'll be acting as a shaman or doing something else, we'll serve you as sevens. If you come to grief, or get into trouble, call us this way: 'My father Simur! My mother Simur!'

And since then the simurs became sevens, the spirit-assistants of the shaman.

A new spirit-assistant appears after the shaman meets some unusual creature in his real life. Most probably a shaman finds a new spirit-assistant when he happens to meet some dangerous creature, whereas he may either overcome it or get along with it. In the accumulation of positive experience of real life the number of spirits multiplies, and the shaman's power will increase.

Here is another example. A woman shaman Gara Geiker had a spirit-assistant which she called 'my child'. She explained its appearance this way. Once after a normal childbirth she gave birth to something else and got frightened by it. The shaman threw it out. But at night she saw the thrown-away creature in her dreams. It appeared to her as a little girl and said that she was her daughter. Later that spirit-girl began to help Gara in her shaman practice.

It must be emphasised that the dreams are of great importance in the process of making a new spirit. After a shaman meets an unusual, but quite a material creature in reality, he meets it again in his dreams. Just in his dreams the shaman finds out that he has acquired a new spirit. But there are dreams which are difficult to understand. If the shaman cannot understand his dream, he himself or some other shaman starts singing. He calls the spirits and with their help he finds out what real event has provoked that dream, if the personage of that dream is his new assistant-spirit, and if this spirit can be called out for the shaman's ceremonies. And only after that the shaman is given an opportunity

to operate in the world of spirits with the aid of a new assistant.

In the same way any personal spirits, not only shaman's ones are generated. Sometimes only the stage of the shaman's guess-work at the meaning of the dream may be omitted. For instance, a wide-spread legend tells about the acquisition of a spirit that provides success for hunting.

Once some hunters took a boy with them to the taiga. They left him alone near the hut and went hunting. At that time a tiger attacked the boy. Trying to escape, the boy managed to grip a V-shape spear and aimed it at the tiger. The tiger stuck between the ends of the spear.' (According to another version, the boy climbed up the tree. The tiger tried to reach him and stuck between the branches.) 'The boy pitied the tiger who could not move and was doomed for death. He helped the tiger to get free and it went away. Next night the tiger came to the boy in his dream. It promised him luck in hunting. After that the boy became a successful hunter.

So, in shaman's new spirit-assistants, the shaman's life-experience concentrates and is personified. But not all shaman spirits are created during the shaman's life. Most of them belong to tradition and are passed on from one generation to another. The first meeting with such spirits takes place in the dream of the shaman. And no real events precede that dream. For example, Gara Geiker had another spirit which she also called 'my child'. It appeared after she dreamt of a child with a fish-tail being born from her mouth. That half child-half fish was boating on the water in a little boat made of shavings. Gara performed a shamanic seance after the dream and learned that the child was her new assistant-spirit⁶. Then when she, with the retinue of her spirits, had to cover quickly great distances along the Amur, on the lake or on the sea, she called for the above-mentioned spirit and it helped her. It seems that some real event had preceded that dream, too, but it had happened in the life of one of Gara's ancestors. It may be supposed that someone of her ancestors was able to emit different creatures out of his mouth. Many Nanays shamans possess such an ability. They say that two contemporary women shamans can emit snakes out of their mouths during shaman ceremonies. While dreaming of his new spirit a shaman usually does not know what event in whose life has called into being this spirit. But he can learn it at a shaman ceremony. After an unusual dream the shaman takes a drum and invokes his spirits. During the singing, the words that explain the meaning of the dream are pronounced and it comes out whether the personage is his new spirit, of what kind it is, and with what history. The folk legends very seldom preserve the information about shaman-spirits. It is explained by the fact that such knowledge is most sacral in Nanay tradition. The Nanays consider that the shaman runs into danger when he tells others about his spirits.

If a shaman begins to speak of it without any fear, it undoubtedly means his quick death. The knowledge about the majority of the shaman's spirit-assistants has not been passed through the word and people's memory as in folklore. In the ideal world this knowledge is passed through night dreams and during the immediate shamanic contact with the spirits. Not the people but the spirits themselves bring that knowledge to the next generations.

When a shaman dies, the spirits which have been created during his life do not disappear, but only fall asleep. They wait for their hour to come, when it becomes possible for them to pass over to some descendant of the dead. The event of an ancestor's life which preceded the appearance of the spirit does not repeat in the life of the descendant when he receives the spirit. There is no need whatsoever for the repetition because the spirit has only been created, it exists. But the next owner of the spirit will experience in his dreams the event which has taken place with his ancestors in their real life. So the shaman whose ancestor had killed two simurs dreamt how he suddenly bumped into the simur which was swimming on the lake in the fog. He dreamt also about another simur leaping down from the cliff into his boat. It seems as if the shaman is given a chance to gain assistant-spirits, but only one chance and no more. How the events will progress depends on the shaman. He himself has to conquer dangerous personages of the dream or to get on with them. But a new shaman differs from his ancestor, he has other abilities and different physical features, and he might not overcome the test he is dreaming. To gain and to assimilate the experience of his ancestor sometimes is not an easy thing. If the shaman dreams, for instance, that he has overcome simurs, it means that he has gained assistant-spirits from his ancestors and he can use them in further shaman practice. If he has dreamt that he could not conquer simurs, the same dream will be repeated several times. Again and again he is given the opportunity to overcome simurs and to make them his assistant-spirits. But if it does not yield good results, if the shaman suffers a defeat in every dream, it means he cannot take over the life experience of his ancestor, he cannot capture the heritage intended for him. In this case the shaman would not get the strength meant for him. And what is more, after a series of such dreams he usually falls ill and sometimes so seriously that he may die.

Besides sevens there is another category of Nanay spirits which are like an imprint of the past real life. These spirits have been turned out of deceased people's souls. They are not ancestor's spirits but simply spirits of clan fathers and mothers (or sometimes they are named grandfather's and grandmother's spirits), because they have appeared from souls of people who had died not more than a hundred years ago. The spirits of this category are the youngest. In 1926 I. Kozminsky put down from the bearers of the tradition Fyodor and

Konstantin Kogo-Samars what events had brought to origin the first spirit of this kind, *Khari mapa* ('the hovering old man), or as it is named more often now – *Sagdi ama* ('the old father). *Khari mapa* was a man who died at the end of the 19th century.

Khari mapa was a powerful shaman of the Khadger clan. But as far as he had had a liaison with a woman of his own clan, after his death his soul and the soul of that woman turned into very strong sajkas, i.e. into evil spirits who were killing the people of that clan and sent epidemics.

Once the shamans succeeded in sending the sajkas to the world of the dead or buni, and the wholesale dying stopped for three years. But the sajkas had been able to return to people and the whole-sale resumed with double power. Nanays appealed for help to one of the most powerful endurs, to the spirit Laoja, but that was of no effect either. It turned out that sajkas were more powerful than the endure. But the epidemic continued and raged especially in the Khadger clan.

According to the data of the November-expedition of 1990, one of the unsuccessful attempts to save oneself from the sajkas runs as follows. The sajkas were driven into special figures made of grass. Then those figures were hidden on the board of one of the steam-boats which had begun to navigate along the Amur for the first time. Nanays wanted the steam-boat to take that sajka as far as possible from their place. But when the steam-boat had set sail, a strong wind blew out, heavy waves rose and the boat was subverted. As shown on figures depicted in the future, *Khari mapa* and his wife miraculously came back to the former place in the Nanay village. Now Nanays affirm that then *Khari mapa* captured that steamer to himself and now he sometimes sails with it along the Amur. All this ended when (continues per Kozminsky) a Nanay man

decided to pray for success for the sajkas at the next hunting season. He promised that if his request be complied he would acknowledge him as the god and would sacrifice animals to him every year. Khari mapa wanted very much that people would regard him as a god as the Golds said), and therefore he arranged that the hunter killed a lot of sables, while the best hunters killed only a few. After that many Golds began to consider him as their god, too, till at last he became the main patron of the Khadger clan and then the universally recognised god among the Nanay population.⁷

During the years after Kozminsky's expedition, many analogical worships could be found in different Nanay clans. But *Khari mapa* or *Sagdi ama* are still held sacred as the most powerful among them. Nanays say he has become like

an endur ('a god'), but he cannot become a real endur and cannot excel them in power. Till now, Sagdi ama is worshipped by all Nanays, not only by fathers of Khadger clan. What concerns other spirit-fathers and -mothers – each of them is worshipped only by the people of its own clan. The bearers of the tradition confirm till now that before Sagdi ama Nanays never worshipped the spirit what had been a man before. The shaman Khadger was the first shaman who was worshipped after death. And the epidemics that had lasted so long after his death are now explained so that other shamans could not submit to the thought that a shaman who recently had been exactly the same man as they has turned into a spirit, and they have to worship him. Nanays say that if other shamans had recognised Sagdi ama at once, he would have helped people earlier and there would not have been such long epidemic.

The comparison of the data about different worship of other spirits – clan's fathers and mothers – shows that they have many traits in common. Each of these spirits was earlier a human being and lived among the Nanays. They were strong shamans and enjoyed indisputable authority among the people of their clan. But after the death something abnormal happened to all of them. For example, after the shaman of Posar clan was buried, his skull came miraculously out of the grave. It was found outside the tomb and was buried again. But some time later the skull turned out on the surface anew, and it repeated once again. Another shaman of Oninka clan named Alha ('two-coloured') died of smallpox and was put into the burial place, called *keren*. In a few days he revived and left the *keren*. One part of his face turned red and the other one – black. Later he was still alive and practised shamanism. A shaman of the same clan, Oninka, was torn to pieces by a bear in the taiga. His body was not found and buried for a long time and his soul was not sent to the world of the dead (*buni*) in time. Shaman Khadger's soul was not sent to *buni*, either. It was Khari mapa described by Kozminsky. Khadger's soul had to stay among the people because it is impossible to sent to *buni* the souls of those who had married women of their own clan.

There are other versions of the legend about Khari mapa. According to them, incest did not take place, but the relatives of this shaman for some reason did not send his soul to the world of the dead in time. Either they were careless or, as somebody says, they loved that shaman very much and for a long time they did not want to part with his soul which lived at home after his death. Gradually his soul changed into an evil spirit, *amba* (not *sajka*) and began to kill its relatives. The shaman woman Zaksor did not want herself to go to the world of dead and before death she told her relatives about it.

In the case when the relatives knew at once that the soul of the deceased shaman became the spirit patron of the clan and they began to perform neces-

sary rituals – everything was all right. But sometimes people did not understand what was going on. They either wasted time and did not fulfil proper ceremonies, or worst of all, opposed to the events. For example, they again and again buried the scull of the shaman Posar, which had appeared on the surface of the earth. Or they did not stop the attempts to get rid of sajkas which had appeared out of the souls of shaman Khadger and his wife. In such cases the soul of the deceased shaman turned into an evil spirit and disasters befell on the people of his clan and the wholesales began.

Those died first who had more actively prevented the making of the clan spirit (for example, those who buried shaman Posar's scull). Sometimes it is as if the soul of the deceased shaman tries to teach people what to do. The deceased shaman appears in a dream, to someone of his relatives and lets him know that he would have helped now the people of his clan, would have fulfilled their wishes if they had prayed to him and sacrificed animals. As soon as people recognised that spirit and established the usual relations the evil spirit turned into the guardian spirit of his clan. They began to call him a clan father (or clan mother) and to worship him near a special sanctuary.

The sanctuary of the clan spirit is established usually in the house of one of this clan's people. It represents a large clay vessel, *saola*, in which the scull of the deceased shaman or his picture is kept. When the owner of such home sanctuary dies, the *saola* is handed over to someone else of the same clan, who is able to bring up the pigs and annually sacrifice them to this spirit. Sometimes the *saola* is carried from one house to another.

Literature

¹Lopatin, I. *Goldy amurskie, ussuriskie i sungariskie*. Vladivostok, 1922.

²In this paper the materials of the author's expeditions to the Nanay villages of the Khabarovsk krai, Russia in 1980-1990, and expedition of J. Pentikäinen and the author to the Naihini and Daerga villages of the Khabarovsk krai in 1991, are used.

³See Note 1, p. 213.

⁴*Sevens* usually personify some nature creatures or phenomena. Not all *sevens* are shaman's spirits.

⁵This legend was told by Nicolai Beldy (b. 1927) in Naihini village of Khabarovsk krai in April 1990.

⁶It was written down from Gara Geiker (1914-1985) in Daerga village of Khabarovsk krai, Russia in January 1985.

⁷Kozminsky, I. *Vozniknovenie novogo kulta u goldov*. In: *Sbornik etnograficheskikh materialov*. Leningrad, 1927.