

## COMMON FEATURES IN THE CULTURES OF THE KALMYKS AND THE BURYATS

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In this article peculiarities of common features of the culture of the Kalmyks and the Buryats are considered. The authors compare and describe common folk holidays, artistic crafts, homes, national cuisine and national clothes of the nomads, and many other things in the culture of these two similar peoples. In this article, we can see that Kalmyk and Buryat cultures have much in common. The Kalmyks and the Buryats are two peoples of significant number and significant time of existence. They are both descendants of the Mongolian ethnos. Today's Kalmyks and Buryats are rightful members of the Russian society. The Buryats are a people that has survived several hard periods in their history. Nowadays their economic conditions are not very good, but it does not prevent them from preserving their national spirit and the belief in their people. Tens of years of isolation from other peoples of the world made for their becoming a very close-knit nation. Family ties and connections with their compatriots in various social groups are very meaningful for them. Modern Buryats have inherited a strong character, they steadfastly cope with difficulties. They are used to fighting for their wellbeing, and achieve their goals, whatever it takes. Buryat families have a considerable impact on a personality: children grow up, being strong in body and spirit, and they have a concrete image thinking. People who have achieved mastery in their profession are respected in the society because it is a characteristic of confident and strong-willed people. And the Kalmyks are rather a specific people; if we know their psychology, we can build strong, mutually advantageous and equal relationships.

**Key Words:** Ethnos, culture, nomadic people, The Buryats, the Kalmyks.

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Origin of the Buryat Ethnos

The original area of living of proto-Buryats (the tribes shono and nohoy) was Cisbaikalia (about 2500 BC). The totemic names "shono" and "nohoy" mean "wolf" and "dog". The shono are considered to be the ancestors of bulagats and ehirts, and the nohoy are considered to be the ancestors of hori. Most nohoi migrated to Transbaikalia. Hori began to consider themselves Buryats only after Russians had come to those lands. Modern hori Buryats, living in Buryatia, are the most numerous of all Buryats [20].

According to legends, the ancestor of all Buryats, Barga-Bator, had three sons. Ilyudar's descendants were the oyrats, those of Buryaa were the tribes of Cisbaikalia, and those of Horidoy were the hori. One of Horidoy's daughters became the foremother of the Borgeguins, the kin of Genghis Khan, the founder of the Mongol

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Empire. Separate ethnic groups ultimately united and formed the Buryat nation in Russia by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The History of the Incorporation of the Kalmyks into Russia. The Forced Displacement of the Kalmyks**

Originally the ancestors of the Kalmyks led a nomad's life in Cisbaikalia and in the upper reaches of the Yenisey, gradually migrating to the West, pushed by other tribes. At the beginning of the XVII century they took Russian citizenship and migrated to the lower Volga and Don, where from 1664 to 1771 there existed the Kalmyk khanate. At that time there were about 270 thousand of them. They were not ethnically homogenous. There were derbets, torgouts, hosheuts, hoits, choroses among them. In 1771 the Kalmyk khanate was liquidated. Nearly half of the dissatisfied Kalmyks left for Dzungaria, most of them perished in the way, and nearly all the cattle (the main treasure of those people) was lost. The Kalmyks who had stayed in Russia, were moved to the rivers Ural, Terek and Kuma. In the years of the October Revolution and the Civil War part of the Kalmyks accepted the new regime, and another part (especially the Kalmyks of the Territory of Don Army) was in the White Army and after that emigrated to other countries.

In the time of the Great Patriotic War, in 1943, the Kalmyks were forcefully deported to Siberia, Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Altai. As a result, they became three times less numerous.

Some elements of the national culture were lost, The Kalmyk language was practically replaced by Russian. In 1957 – 58 many Kalmyks returned to the places where they had lived before.

### **The Number of people**

Nowadays the whole number of the Buryats in the world is about 600 thousand people. Most of them live in Russia (more than 400 thousand): in the republic of Buryatiya (more than 300 thousand), in Irkutsk region, Chita region, and other regions of Russia. Except the Russian Federation, The Buryats live in Kazakhstan and other countries of the CIS in the North of Mongolia and in the North-East of the Chinese Republic [9].

The whole number of the Kalmyks in the world is about 200 thousand people. Most of them live in Kalmykia (about 160 thousand), also in Astrakhan, Volgograd, Rostov and Orenburg regions, Stavropol krai, Moscow, Siberia. Small groups live in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, in the USA, France, Switzerland and Germany.

### **Language**

Buryat and Kalmyk languages belong to the Mongolian group of the Altai Language Family. Besides the Buryat language, Mongolian and Russian language are use

among the Bouryats. The Bouryat language has 15 dialects. The Kalmyk language is gradually giving way to Russian, and today there is a real danger of its disappearance. The Kalmykian language is one of rarely used languages of Russia; it has been recorded in the Red Book by the UNESCO.

The Kalmyks and the Buryats have much in common in their culture, not only because they speak similar languages of the Mongolian group, understood by both peoples. Other things also matter: both peoples had been nomadic cattle-breeders till the beginning of the XX century, both peoples used to have shaman religion, and later became Buddhist (the Kalmyks in the XV, and the Buryats in the XVII century). Their culture combines Buddhist and shamanic features, they have traditions of both religions. There is nothing unusual in it. There are many peoples on the planet, who are officially Christian, Muslim or Buddhist, and still follow their Pagan traditions. The Buryats and the Kalmyks are among them. Though they have many Buddhist temples, they celebrate traditional pre-Buddhist holidays with special solemnity. For the Buryats it is Tsagaan SAR (the White Month), the New Year Day, that comes on the first new moon in spring. Now it is considered to be a Buddhist holiday, and services are held in Buddhist temples, but by its character it is still a folk holiday.

## **METHODS, RESULTS, DISCUSSION**

### **Methodical-Comparative Analysis of the cultures of the Kalmyks and the Buryats**

#### ***Folk Holidays***

Every Year Tsagaan SAR is celebrated at a different time, as the date is defined according not to the solar, but to the lunar calendar. This calendar is called a 120year animal cycle, because each year has the name of some animal (the year of the Tiger, the year of the Dragon, the year of the Hare, etc.), and each animal name recurs in 12 years [8].

When Tsagaan SAR comes, much white (milk) food should be eaten: curds, butter, cheese, milk foam; and milk vodka and koumiss should be drunk. That is why the holiday is called “The White Month”. Everything white is considered sacred in the culture of Mongolian-language peoples, and it is connected with holidays and solemn ceremonies: the white felt, on which the newly elected khan was elevated, the bowl with fresh milk (just after milking) that was given to an honoured guest. The horse that had won a race was sprinkled with milk [7].

As for the Kalmyks, they celebrate the New Year on the 25 th of December and call it “dzul”. “The White Month” (Tsagaan SAR) is the celebrating of the coming spring; it has no connection with the New Year.

In the height of summer the Buryats celebrate Surharban. On this day the best sportsmen compete in archery hitting the targets (felt balls). “Sur” means a felt

ball, and “harbah” means “shoot”; that is why the holiday is called so. An important moment of this holiday is the sacrifice to the spirits of earth, water and mountains. If the spirits are pleased, they will send good weather and abundance of grass on the pastures, and it means that the cattle will be fat, people satisfied and pleased with their life.

In summer the Kalmyks celebrate two holidays very similar in their meaning: Usn Arshan (sanctification of water) and Usn Tyaklgn (sacrifice to the water). In the dry Kalmyk steppe much depended on water, so it was necessary to make a sacrifice to the spirit of water and achieve its indulgence. At the end of autumn every family performed the rite of sacrifice to fire, Gal Tyaklgn. Cold winter was coming, and it was important that the “master” of the fireplace be kind to the family and give warmth to the house (yurt, tilt cart). A sheer was sacrificed; its meat was burned in the fire of the hearth [5].

### ***Traditions of Household and Economy***

The main role in the economy of Buryat tribes was played by cattle breeding: half-nomadic by the Western tribes, and nomadic by the Eastern ones. They kept sheep, cattle, goats, horses and camels. Hunting was developed, especially with the help of a bow and arrows. Agriculture and fishing were developed by the Western Buryats. Eastern Bouryats were taught to cultivate land and grow crops by Russian old believers. On the Baikal shore, seals were caught [19].

The basis of the traditional Kalmyk economy was also nomadic breeding (of sheep, horses, cattle, goats, camels). Since the XIX century, pigs were grown in their settlements. On the banks of the Volga and in coastal areas of the Caspian Sea they fished. When the Kalmyks became settled, they began to grow crops, practice gardening, melon growing and rice growing.

### ***Artistic Crafts***

The Buryats used wood and breeding products (leather, skins, wool and horsehair) for their crafts. Skins and wood were used to make clothes and shoes; they also were used for the arrangement of their homes and vehicles. Leather was used to make bags, and sacks, in which melted butter, salt, tea and tobacco were kept. Leather was dyed with tree bark. All dishes were made of wood. Iron things were considered to be amulets. Blacksmiths often were shamans at the same time. This profession was inherited in Buryat families. Blacksmiths and goldsmiths' work was of great skill, their production was sold in Siberia and Central Asia [4].

Embroidery was popular by the Kalmyks (special multi-colored stitches on women's clothes), also metal works (embossment, engraving on the metal parts of saddles, bridles, weapons, smoking pipes, women's decorations), leather carving and wood carving. Spinning, weaving, twisting threads, makond clothes and decorating them were traditional women's activities.

*A yurt, the typical house of nomads. Kalmyks' kubitka. The circular planning of settlements.*

The traditional Buryat's home was a 6 hexagonal or an octagonal yurt made of wood or felt. Cisbaikalian Buryats often lived in wooden yurts. There were no windows in them. The roof had a big opening for light and smoke. The frame of a felt yurt was made of siding lattice walls made of willow branches. The roof rested on four pillars. The door was on the southern side. The yurt was divided into the man's part (where guests were received) and the women's part. In the center of the yurt there was a hearth. Behind the hearth, opposite the entrance, there was the home sanctuary. Benches stood along the walls. In front of the yurt there was a hitching post up to 2 meters high. It was an item of worship, a symbol of well-being and the master's social status. Roofs were covered with shingles or with larch bark. If there were small windows, there was no glass in them, it was replaced with animal bladders. Thick felt mats made of white sheep wool were used instead of mattresses. To have meals, the Buryats sat on the floor; each one had one's own dishes. A cast iron boiler with soup or boiled meat stood on the floor [2].

The Kalmyks traditionally lived in kubitkas or earth-houses. A kubitka is a yurt of Mongolian type, that nomads took with them, carrying it on a four-wheeled cart. In some time the cart disappeared, but the word "kubitka" was still used. The frame of a kubitka consists of six lattice walls, a two-shutter door, sixty poles and a round chimney, that was closed with thick felt at the top. They closed it for the night. Snow and rainwater did not stay in the kubitka; it all ran down. The lattices were connected with broad ribbons made of camel wool and horse hair. The door was painted with oil paints. It was on the southern part of the kubitka, and it opened inside. Above the door there was a felt curtain, decorated with embroidery. The interior of the kubitka had little in common with the interior of the yurt. The property of a family consisted of things suitable for constant travelling. All furniture and utensils were made of wool. Felt was used for the covering of a kubitka, for carpets and cloth for horses and camels. The floor was also covered with it. Bed clothes of the Kalmyks and the Buryats were mainly made of felt. A traditional Kalmyk settlement had a circular planning, convenient for defense. Cattle was led to the center of the circle for the night, property was kept there and meetings were held there. The Kalmyks lived in khotons – settlements of clans. The poor lived in earth houses with clay or turf roofs. Since the XIX century houses of Russian type and popular settlements with linear planning appear [5].

*National cuisine: meat and milk dishes. The Kalmyk tea and the Buryat tea.*

The main foodproducts of the Buryats and the Kalmyks are meat and milk. Sour milk and dried and pressed curds, that substituted bread, were stored. Koumiss was made of horse milk. Curdled milk, cheese, milk foam and sour cream were made of cow, sheep and goat milk. Milk kvass and milk vodka were produced [18].

The favorite kinds of meat were mutton and horsemeat. Broth with onions was boiled and cooked in pits covered with earth, without access of air; later it was cooked in closed boilers. They cut neat into thin slices and dried it. The Buryats like pelmeni (buuzy), that are prepared using the steam of boiling fat. Later the Kalmyks began to cook pancakes, like the Russians [16].

Both the Buryats and the Kalmyks boil green tea with milk, butter or lard and spices. Instead of the green tea the Buryats often boiled leaves of labrador, rosehip, cowberry, bergenia, hypericum or other herbs [10].

*Buddhism and traditional beliefs.*

Due to the Russian influence Western Buryats became Orthodox Christians, and Eastern Buryans are Tibetan Buddhists. Monasteries and temples of the Buryats are called datsans. Among the Western Buryats shamanism ("the black faith") persists [1].

Most of the Kalmyk believers are Tibetan Buddhists. Oyrats, the Kalmyks' ancestors, first got acquainted with it in the XIII century, in the time of Genghis Khan's campaigns. Since the XVI century it became the national religion of the Kalmyks. The Kalmyks' Buddhist monasteries and temples are called khuruls. Except Buddhism, shamanism, the cult of the Eternal Blue Sky, the cults of the Fire and the Mother Earth have long existed. A part of the Kalmyks, who live separately, are Orthodox Christians.

In 1640 there was a congress of Nongolian and Oyrat Noyons, that officially prohibited shamanism, but it still existed later. In 1741 Elizaveta Petrovna, the Empress, edited a decree permitting the existence of Buddhism, the third religion in Russia (besides Christianity and Islam).

In the Soviet time, most datsans and khuruls were destroyed, there were practically no lamas and no shamans left. At present, the religious part of the Kalmyks and the Buryats's life is being revived.

*National culture and sport.*

The Western Buryats have preserved their national culture better, than the Eastern ones. An honorary place in it is held by the roundelay dance yohor that occurred from the tradition of battue hunting. Yohor is a dancing not to music, but to singing voices. One voice begins, then another one goes on, then the third one... [12]

Among the various genres of folk art of the Kalmyks and the Buryats there is guttural singing, that has been used in shamanic practices, healing rituals and performing epic songs. Nowadays a competition of guttural singers is traditional in Ulan-Ude [14].

By both the Buryats and the Kalmyks three national kinds of sport are developed: wrestling (including wrestling on belts), archery and horse races (the

“three game of men’, or “three man`s competitions’). These preferences have been caused by the old traditions and the traditional way of life [15].

A popular Buryats’ holiday is Tsagaan SAR (or the New Year), also Surharban. The latter is translated from the Buryats’ language as “sur shooting”. “Sur” is a leather target. The “surs” (balls of wool covered with leather) are arranged in the training camp. The winner is the one who hits more targets. After the shooting competition there are competitions of bators (wrestlers). The winner’s prize is a live sheep.

The Kalmyk holiday of Jangariada is of ancient origin, and it has got its name in honour of the great Jangar, a hero of the epos “jangar”. Jangariada traditionally consists of horse races, wrestling, javelin throw, lasso throw and archery.

#### *Family*

It is prohibited to the Buryats to marry their relatives up to the seventh generation, and to the Kalmyks to the tenth generation; it means that they knew their origin very well. Marriages took place after matchmaking. A bridegroom paid a kalym for his bride (a herd of 20-30 female horses and a male one). If the bridegroom was poor, his relatives helped him with his kalym. The bride had a dowry that included decorations, clothes, items of interior of a yurt or a kubitka, utensils, horse gear, cult objects. The kinship was defined as paternal. Weddings were expensive, that is why they were sometimes postponed for two or three years. Families had many children.

It is remarkable, that a Kalmyk family has a separation of duties and a hierarchy. The father is the head of the family, and the mother is the person who does most housework and cares for all the family, including old relatives. The Kalmyks work hard to create their own families and provide them with all that is necessary. They are responsible workers and try to do their best.

#### *National costumes*

We should note that a costume is one of the important parts of a national culture. In XVII–XVIII the Buryats were nomads, and their clothes completely corresponded to their worldview and their way of life. It was comfortable in the everyday life, it was adapted to the climatic conditions and reflected the symbolic of a three-part world. The arrangement of the elements of the clothes was strictly defined, and a loss of even a small part of a costume was considered as a threat to the owner’s well-being. [17].

A costume is a reflection of the culture, and it presents an image of the modern world, its main ideas, preferences and even moods that exist in the people.

Buryat and Kalmyk national costumes are adapted to horse riding, to sitting on the floor and to the climate. This is why men’s and women’s clothes have similar features. Clothes were mainly made of products of cattle breeding. Men’s

clothes of the Buryats and the Kalmyks consisted of a caftan (or a coat), belted with a sash, to which a knife and smoking items were tied. In winter, men wore sheepskin coats and skin trousers with fur inside. Summer trousers were made of rough leather or cloth. Women's clothes consisted of a shirt and trousers, above which a coat was worn. Besides, a woman could wear a costume consisting of a bouffant skirt and a jacket, or a dress. The sheepskin coat was fastened left side over right, so that it could be convenient to take things from under the coat with the right hand. The shirts of the Buryats were usually blue, and the Kalmyks had white shirts. Winter shoes were high leather boots (unty) or boots with felt stockings. In summer they also wore shoes knitted from horse hair, with leather soles. Women's clothes were decorated with metal buttons, coins and embroidery. Women wore beads made of coral, silver and golden coins, large earrings were in their ears, silver or coral bracelets were on their wrists. Men wore an earring in the left ear [12].

An indispensable item of a Buryat's costume was some kind of headwear (and there were many different kinds). Great attention was paid to the color of headwear and to different details, which was connected with the Buddhist traditions. Blue is the favorite color of the nomads, it symbolizes the sky. The best known are the round hats with narrow brims and a red tassel (zala) on the top, that men and women used to wear, that is why the Kalmyks and the Buryats were called "red-tasseled". Sometimes there was a red button, a bead or a piece of a coral instead of the tassel [6].

The tradition to decorate the headwear with a red tassel has a long history. In 1437 the oyrats' leader Togon-Taysha signed a special decree in which it was said that all oyrats should wear red tassels on their headwear, so that they could differ from other peoples. In 1750 the leader Dondok Daishi confirmed that decree. And all, in 1822, at the Zelezinskoye meeting, it was decided that each hat should have an ulan zala and each man should wear a plait. Plaits are the traditional hairdo of the Kalmyks: men and young girls have two, women have one. Young Buryat girls wore from 10 to 20 plaits, decorated with numerous coins. Buddhist monks shove their heads [3].

As it was long ago, the costume still reflects social processes and people's worldview, their esthetic and artistic ideals. That is why we can quite confidently say that modern Buryat and Kalmyk costume is not an isolated cultural phenomenon, but one of the elements of developing national cultures [13].

The striving of modelers to preserve the artistic and esthetic principles of the traditional costume is a characteristic feature of their work. Images created by modern authors often are from the traditional culture, and at the same time they reflect modern life [11].

## CONCLUSION

Thus, we can note, that today the Kalmyks and the Buryats are rightful members of the Russian society. The Buryats are peaceful, notwithstanding their active temperament. To avoid unpleasant situations they use diplomacy and maximal tolerance. The Kalmyks are freedom loving, they do not stand any pressing, either from their elder relatives, or their bossed. From the beginning of their life, Kalmyk children learn to be independent and rely only on their personal opinion, make decisions and communicate with the society, thinking about their personal physical, psychical and material resources. In their activities, either at work, or working to improve themselves, the Kalmyks are persistent and confident. But like the Buryats, the Kalmyks are collectivists. The opinion of other people mean much for them; they are used to live and work together with somebody, who is dear and familiar. If a friendly family or a collective of Kalmyks begins working together, they can achieve the best results. They are unpretentious, but they need communication and mutual activities with their nearest and dearest.

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