



Traditional Sports Games in the Festival Culture of Tuva Turks

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Abstract

In this study, the 'folk games' that are performed periodically every year in the traditional 'Naadym' festival of the Autonomous Republic of Tuva of the Russian Federation in Southern Siberia will be analysed. In the research, descriptive description method, which is one of the qualitative study designs, was used. The Tuvas, one of the ancient 'nomadic' Turkic peoples, living in the nooks and crannies of the Sayan and Altai mountains and not much affected by the pressures of globalisation, have many traditional holidays, festivals, special family or tribal ceremonies, as well as a large number of traditional (folk) games and competitions in their organisation. In this research, we focused on the official holiday of the Tuvans Naadym, and the traditional side of the folk dances performed here, as it is the most stable and has stood the test of time. We tried to explain the folk dances of the Naadym holiday and their sign character in the context of the traditional festive culture of the Tuva people. Conclusion: Tuva people's festive celebrations and traditional dances retain their national and religious character - although half of the population is Buddhist, Buddhism elements are only a veneer - elements of Shamanism, their ancient religion, lie at the core of the inner and outer lines of the dances; they insist on keeping the elements of traditional culture alive.

Keywords: Tuva national game, traditional festive culture, folk game.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional Tyvan (Tuvinian) festival culture consists of various religious, national, agricultural, pastoral, nomadic, and other celebrations held according to a calendar of official holidays and festivals. These social commemorations or celebrations encompass the entirety of the people's spiritual culture as part of its historical development, including the work, lifestyle, traditions, ceremonies, rituals, folk dances, and other celebratory customs of social groups and society. To date, a few conceptual trends in the assessment of the holiday phenomenon have been identified. The Tuvan people have 22 religious, national, economic, calendar traditional holidays and festivals (Mayny, 2013). However, in this study, we will analyse the 'Naadım' holiday, which is very important for the Tıva people, and the games and rituals performed on this holiday.

In the Dictionary of Modern Cultural Studies, a holiday is understood as a sociological-cultural and ontological paradigm. These are days of celebration, rituals, ceremonies held in honour or memory of any phenomenon-event (Sovremennyy slovar'..., p. 550). Traditional festivals have a special place in the life of each ethnic group. A very important social feature of festivals is noteworthy, namely that at a festival a people have the opportunity to discover itself as a historical subject and express itself creatively. This human factor of the festival is

manifested not only in the deep connection between classes and nations, but also in the temporal aspect eagle dance (Turkmen et al., 2006).

The history of festive culture is rooted in traditional roots, and these roots continue to be a nurturing environment for the essence and development of festive culture. The festive culture of Tyva, like any other, relates to leisure, entertainment and recreation. Religious cults, the most important dates in the history of the Tyvan ethnos and the modern all-Russian holiday calendar are of great importance for this culture. A special place in the culture of the Tyvans is occupied by the original, traditional holiday Naadym, which has several analogues in name and composition of traditional games in other Turkic-Mongolian peoples (Turkmen, 2021).

Among the Buryats, the polysemous word 'naadan' means: a) game, entertainment; b) evening, party, dance (round dance); c) show, performance, concert; d) joke, mockery, amusement; e) current (lyrical manias about birds are sung). The corresponding modern Mongolian 'naadom' is 1) celebration, 2) competition, 3) games, 4) national holiday (Dugarov, 1991). The homonymous Tuvan word naadym corresponds to the above meanings. Three male folk games form the basis of the traditional Tuvan holiday Naadym: horse racing (*carıştırır*), 'arrow shooting' (*bag adar & kara adar*) competition, 'national wrestling' (*hüreş*) (Mongush, 2002), and the 'eagle ritual dance' (*devig*), which is performed compulsorily by wrestlers.

The number three is a number considered sacred in many folk cultures. This number represents the ideal model of any dynamic process involving emergence (creation/birth), development and collapse (death). In the traditional culture of the Tuvans, three denotes the vertical model of the world: upper, middle, lower. Ideas about the upper, middle and lower worlds, past, present and future time are universal concepts in mythology, and later in folklore and heroic epics of the Turkic-Mongol peoples (Babuyeva, 2004). This number is associated among the Tuvans with a number of representations and three main male games (wrestling, horse-racing, arrow-shooting), symbolising them at the level of signs-codes. The three main dreams in the traditional view of the people are to always eat well, dress beautifully and live their lives with honour (Sambu, 1978).

In the recent past, triathlon (wrestling, horse riding, archery competitions) had primarily a cultic content, as well as an entertainment function that brought people together. Traditionally, the first competition of the event was the traditional Tuva wrestling 'khuresh' and its rituals. This was followed by horse races and finally archery. At the semantic level, these ritual games contributed to the formation of a man's warrior spirit, fighting qualities and the ability to

overcome difficulties. Their main motto is the struggle for life. If you do not persistently strive (like a maral) for the best, the highest (the Sun), if you do not fight to the death (like an eagle) for your place in the upper world ('heaven'), fate (= arrow) will inevitably lead you to the lower world ('hell' - the kingdom of the bear) (Darzhaa, 2008). Here, at the symbolic level, through the representatives of the animal world, the symbolism of three worlds is confirmed: the deer is the middle world, the bear is the lower world, the eagle is the upper world. In folk tales, legends and epics the formation of a true male warrior is always facilitated by his presence in the three worlds of struggle = overcoming difficulties.

Among nomadic peoples, bows and arrows have long been recognised as military symbols; archery has gradually evolved from a military art into a sport and has been preserved as one of the important components of the modern Tuva holiday Naadym. Before starting the ritual game of traditional 'arrow shooting' (kara adar) goat skins are hung at a certain distance. It is necessary to hit this target with an arrow. The best shooter is the one who hits the chest part of the skin. There is also another variant: the target is a block of wool; a block of wool is placed on a log at a certain distance so that it rolls when it is hit; the winner is the one who makes the highest number of hits.

Horse races (at çariştirar) were no less popular part of the traditional Nadım holiday. Perhaps the national character of the Tuvans was most clearly expressed in these races, for the life of a nomadic herdsman was unthinkable without horses. While special skills and constant training were required to become a wrestler or archer, almost anyone could become a rider, and women were no exception (Mongush, 2002). It is known that horse races existed in many nations. Tuva horse races are very similar in content and style to the horse races of the Mongols and Buryats of Southern Siberia and the Khakassia's and Altai Turks. At the same time, it is the same with 'Bayge', also known as 'At-çabış', the horse race of Bashkir, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tatar and Uyghur people, which is organised during the festivals of the Muslim Turkic peoples of Central Asia. However, it is significantly different from the horse races of the Muslim peoples of the former Soviet Union such as Tajiks and other minority and Christian peoples such as Georgians, Armenians, Russians, Ukrainians, etc. (Sambu, 1978). This can be understood as follows: peoples, no matter what religion they belong to, are able to live the archaic cultural codes of the ethnic group to which they belong. It can also be said that religion is flexible and privileged over ethnic cultural codes.

Despite the great popularity of folk games such as archery and horse racing, it is the ritual national wrestling 'Khursh', with its roots going back centuries, which is the centrepiece of the Tyvan Naadym holiday and traditional men's games in general. The heroic epics of the Tyvans are replete with episodes of heroes meeting on the road, measuring their strength and fighting. In the story of Geser, describing the meeting with the woman Aj11-Mergen, it is said: "Let's not waste time. Let us measure our strength". Geser's opponent first brought him to his knees. Then Geser said to him: '...I will try again'. The two heroes struggled and fought for a month - 30 days, two months - 60 days, three months - 90 days. And finally, with the agility of a falcon, Geser put his opponent on his back. The sacred number three (repeated several times in the text), increasing ten, twenty and thirty times, emphasises the inhuman strength of the hero (bogatyry). The eagle dance is also mentioned in the tales: when heroes meet, after they decide to fight, they dance. About Bogatyry they say: 'he dances like an eagle', 'he is agile like a hawk' (ezirden eelgir, hartigadan kashpagay) (Sambu, 1974).

Let us consider the meaning and basic functions of the national and traditional wrestling of the Tuvans, 'khuresh', and the associated ritual 'eagle dance' (devig).

Before the start of the bout, the spectators were seated in a large circle, with the referees, mostly former champion wrestlers, on one side of the circle and the wrestlers on the opposite side. Multiples of the number eight and their numbers had to be equal. Thus, no one was left without a pair (without an opponent/partner). For 16 or 32 wrestlers, two seconds were allocated, for 64 wrestlers four seconds, and so on (Sambu, 1974). Since ancient times, the circle has had a symbolic meaning in the traditional culture of many peoples. The solar disc served as a model of the original circle and everything else was built according to this likeness. The line of the circle has neither beginning nor end. The centre of the circle where the wrestlers are located is equidistant from all points and is an infinite turning point in space and time (Babuyeva, 2004). Ritual wrestling is an imitation, an analogue, a repetition at the kinetic level of continuous rotation in space and time.

Before and after the start of the competition, the oldest traditional dance of the eagle, the 'devig' (in Turkey the traditional wrestling dance is called 'Peşrev'), which is linked to totemism, was performed.

The Mongols associate the ritual movements in this dance (waving hands, patting thighs) with the flight of Garuda, the mythical bird with 'sun nature'. It was also revered by the Tuvans under the name Khan-Hereti. "In Hindu and Mongolian mythology, in the oral folk art of

nomads, the image of Garuda, the king of birds, is found. This is a variant of the bird 'Simiurge' (Persian), the bird of fire (Slavic), a prototype of all eastern birds. It is a bird with a human body, eagle head, a snake in its beak and powerful wings that can stop the rotation of the planets. Garuda is the image of a sorcerer who can comprehend everything that is happening in the world at once, understand and connect distant events' (Babuyeva, 2004). Thus, we can say that the symbolism of this male competition is connected with the ritual of Sun worship and is a reflection of its essence: the bird of fire, the bird of the sun, the bird of the 'upper world'.

According to the Tuvan researcher V. Darjaa, the eagle and the ritual struggle dedicated to it Khuresh symbolised paradise, and the struggle was the main condition for winning paradise: 'to live somewhere in paradise is achieved in the struggle'. The definition of 'heaven' is given to understand what the bearers of traditional culture put into the definition of the place where the eagle carries the body particles of a good person together with his soul after earthly life. In the traditional understanding, this was 'something' that could be called the parallel 'upper world' ('ustuu oran'). The eagle carried the souls of the dead together with their body parts to the upper world (heaven), which was always warm due to the proximity of the Sun. In the traditional understanding, the bear is the 'ruler of hell' and the eagle is the 'communicator' with heaven. Thus, for the bearers of traditional culture, the bear and the eagle represented opposing symbols used to evaluate a person's life path on earth. This was the social idea of the cult. Hence the belief among nomads that 'a warrior who dies in battle with a weapon in his hand will have a place in heaven'. Because the remains of those who died on the battlefields became the prey of birds, only a small part of which went to predators, among which there were almost no bears. Therefore, in remote taiga, where bears lived in ancient times, as a rule, battles involving large masses of people were not fought (Darzhaa, 2008).

Focusing on the importance of folk dances in holiday culture, let us refer to the works of art historians: "Before the start of the competitions, an ancient eagle dance is performed by all the wrestlers at the same time, as if it had come down from the murals. The murals unearthed in Central Asia convey the process of man's transformation into a bird step by step" (Türkmen & Useev, 2019). The paintings are given in a dynamic sequence and consist of three stages. It is seen that the arms of the human gradually extend and turn into large wings, and the first silhouette passes to the final stage and is depicted as a gigantic bird. The magic pictures on the rocks had great power for the people. They were supposed to help successful hunting, the abundance of animals and children, while the shape of the sacred totem bird was supposed to protect the ancient community from disasters, enemies and evil spirits as their ancestor and

protector. Besides rock paintings, ancient nomads organised prayers and ritual games. Young men would test their agility and strength, and the victor would support himself with his rolled-up hands and wings, leaping from one foot to the other, leaping high above the ground, imitating the movements of a sacred bird, the Eagle (Mayny, 2013).

From century to century, from generation to generation, the national struggle of the Tuvans was constantly enriched with new and different elements, constantly transformed and finally acquired modern forms. At the same time, the traditional wrestling costume has changed. This costume, which used to be in the form of a short jacket with wide trousers, later became sports shorts that fit the athletes' bodies and tightened with a belt, and a short jacket with long sleeves that covered only the back, in a style that left the chest exposed. This was associated with a belief about the warrior entertainments of Turkic women, in which the warrior Tuvan 'Amazons' often tried to measure their strength with men, and the open wrestler's outfit was designed to prevent this. Kyrgyz women's war games were known for defeating men until the XIX century.

Wrestlers clap their hands three times on the outer and inner sides of their thighs before entering the competition arena. These gestures in the language of symbols mean that a man is strong in three skills: archery, horse racing and wrestling (Oorzhak, 2008). In the great festival ('Naadym'), which consists of three games (triathlon) - wrestling, horse racing and archery - each participant proves his manhood by demonstrating it in competition and strives to win the admiration and praise of the people. The man is called to be accurate and precise in everything, not only to lead his homeland (his people, his tribe), animals, family, hunting and a skilful personality, but also to be a master of life in general, a master of life, the victor in the struggle, the victor in fast running on horseback, accurate and sharp in shooting arrows. Therefore, the ritual folk dances of the Tuva festival Naadym revealed the masculine quality in men and socially glorified their special mission in the world (Mayny, 2013).

Straightening their shoulders and backs and stretching their strong arms upwards, the wrestlers smoothly perform the eagle dance, 'gliding' towards the place of the fight. After 'landing', they strike their thighs twice, which in the language of the symbols means to invite the opponent to fight: 'you or me'.

The pre-fight eagle dance is a ritual that prepares the wrestler for the fight, helps to reduce stress and gives solar energy to the body and soul. According to the quality of its execution, the spectators judge the wrestler's readiness for the bout, because the dance (peshrev) reveals the

wrestler's flexibility, coordination and mental state. During the wrestler's dance, a 'corner man' (moge salikchısı) supports him, instructs him and introduces him to the spectators.

After the wrestling match, the winner performs the ritual 'shaking the dust' off the defeated wrestler and helps him to his feet. The defeated wrestler, accepting his defeat, unties his ritual 'sodak' (a short jacket with long sleeves covering the wrestler's back), passes under the winner's arm and returns to his place. The triumphant raising of the hands is a special sign of victory in the competition. By performing the ritual dance of the eagle, the wrestler expresses his joy, shows his strength and thanks his opponent and fans. As a sign of obtaining grace (victory) from the supreme god, the winner imitates the magical flight of the mythical bird (symbol of heavenly power, fire and immortality) to the spirits of the 'upper' world, at this solemn moment identifies himself with the god (totem - sun bird), defeats chaos (darkness, cold, etc.) (Bolkhosoyev, 2006). The 'devig dance' of the Tuva wrestler after the victory calms the wrestler's nervous system and provides an outlet for emotions. The victorious wrestler ends the dance with a slap on the buttocks (the same action is called 'pata çekme' in Anatolian traditional wrestling) and says, 'victory is mine'.

In the religious and mythological beliefs of the Buryat Shamanists, special importance was attached to the cult of the eagle. They believed that the eagle was the son of the owner of Olkhon Island; they called him 'Khan-Hoto-Baabay'. 'King Father of Hoto' (in Yakut homol hotoy - eagle). For example, the Olkhon Buryat ethnic group, who considered the White-headed Eagle as their ancestor, called it 'Eehe Shubuun', which means 'Majestic Bird'. Moreover, the totemic features of the eagle were also characteristic of other Buryat ethnic groups. There are reports of Buryats going to the sacred cave on the Olkhon cliff to pray to the Great Lord of Olkhon Island. Here the overlap of multicultural beliefs is evident. The veneration of the cave as the womb of Mother Earth overlaps with the cult of the eagle, the ancestral bird, but the motivation remains the same: people came here with the desire to bestow offspring (wealth). A similar phenomenon has been observed among the Yakuts: childless women ask the eagle for the soul of their children (Bolkhosoyev, 2006).

Therefore, the eagle dance (the transformation of the fighter into the sacred ancestor) also symbolises fertility: bird - Sun = Sun - the giver of life and progeny. It is likely that this oldest ritual dance, related to the veneration of this sacred bird, was widely adopted among the Turko-Mongolian peoples, being an obligatory component and an indispensable part of the traditional Naadam holiday of the Tuva people.

CONCLUSION

In addition to using descriptive description within the qualitative methods in the research, at the same time, within the framework of the international scientific project, the capital of Tuva, Kyzyl, was visited on 21-23 July 2019 and Naadım folk dances were watched on site. Thus, the method of ‘natural observation’ was also applied by conducting fieldwork, and the folk dances performed on the holiday in question were observed in their own place and in their own character. In this research, we focused on the official holiday of the Tuvans, Naadym, and the traditional side of the folk dances performed there, as it is the most stable and has stood the test of time. In the context of the traditional festive culture of the Tuva people, we tried to explain the folk dances of the Naadym holiday and their sign character. Conclusion: The festive celebrations and traditional dances of the Tuva people retain their national and religious character; despite the fact that more than half of the Tuva people have been Buddhists for about a hundred years, the Buddhist elements are only a veneer; all the formal and intellectual aspects of the dances are based on the elements of their ancient religion of Shamanism. The Soviet ideology has caused all the indigenous Siberian minorities to worry about the ‘loss of national identity’, and in this context, the Tuvans seem to attach great importance to such traditional cultural elements and insist on keeping them alive. At the same time, both the Naadım holiday and the three traditional games (wrestling, horse racing, archery) in all their internal and external lines, intellectual and formal aspects overlap with the Turkic-Mongolian peoples from North to South.

The study of this component of the culture of the Tuvan Naadym holiday allows to reveal a number of semantic parallels in the culture of the peoples of Central Asia. Tuva men's folk games (wrestling, horse-racing, arrow-shooting), which today have become a fundamental and obligatory part of the traditional festive culture, were formed during the long history of ethnic development. Folk dance is a complex, multidimensional, multi-meaningful social phenomenon, reflecting forgotten cults, different beliefs, ceremonies, customs and rituals. Specific natural conditions and features of historical development give Tuvan folk dances their national specificity and reflect the unique features of the material and spiritual culture of the ethnos. The traditional holiday culture of the Tuvans forms one of the most important components of the spiritual culture of the people. This culture has a complex structure in terms of content, morphology, semantics, functions and dynamics of cultural historical phenomena. Despite this, the games and rituals of the festivals are regular, disciplined spiritual endeavour with enthusiasm and joy.

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<i>Literature Review</i>	<i>Review the literature required for the study</i>	Mehmet TURKMEN
<i>Data Collecting and Processing</i>	<i>Collecting, organizing and reporting data</i>	Mehmet TURKMEN
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