

A Preliminary Analysis of the Oral Shamanistic Songs of the Manchus

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Shamanistic oral traditions in the form of primitive religion have come down to the present from ancient societies in the remote past, and have already become standardized as folk religions and beliefs among various ethnic groups. In this article I address Manchu shamanistic songs in Northeastern China, with an analytical eye to their oral form and content, looking at how they are represented.¹ Shamanistic songs are also divided into “home” shamanistic songs and “wild” shamanistic songs by type. The term “home” identifies a god or rite or song closely associated with a particular clan, whereas “wild” designates a god or rite or song outside the sphere of any clan.

Transmission and Morphology of Shamanistic Songs

The transmission of Manchu shamanistic songs has not been limited to the oral traditional *Uyun*,² or ritualized instruction through performance, but has also made use of shamanistic books³ copied and handed down to

¹ The Manchu term for shamanistic song is *angga gisun*. When a shaman holds a sacrificial rite, he sings about the characteristics of the gods, their dwelling places, and the presenter's piety, among other matters. The songs are sung for the gods, hence the name “shamanistic song.”

² *Uyun* is a Manchu term for “nine.” It takes nine days for a complete course of learning, provided that the trainees have mastered the skill of singing and dancing. However, the larger task can never be accomplished in one nine-day course. Instead, it usually takes seven, eight or even dozens of *uyun* courses to complete instruction, namely, three to four months' time.

³ Shamanistic books: called *enduri* (god) *bit'he* (book) in the Manchu language, or *dele* (above) *bit'he*, that is “shamanistic books” or “books from above,” popularly known as *tele benzi*, a Manchu-Han mixture. Such books are of two kinds: the home shamanistic books (*boo mukūn I bit'he*) and the great shamanistic books (*amaba bit'he*).

each successive generation. The author will concentrate on the content of shamanistic songs that appear in shamanistic books in the present paper, while hoping to have a chance to discuss problems concerning performance sometime later.

Apprentices who attend the *Uyun* class learn to sing shamanistic songs in addition to learning to dance and conduct sacrificial procedures. The teacher of the *Uyun* class may be the clan leader (*mukūn*) or an old shaman (*Sakda Saman*). It is the leader's responsibility to teach shamanistic songs to the apprentices and see that they have mastered them. Unsuccessful apprentices drop out. The *Uyun* class actually amounts to a folk school for teaching Manchu culture and conducting popular education. Such schools are in session until students master the songs, perhaps two to three months, and may open (as needed) every one to three years. When a sacrificial rite is held, the shaman is responsible for teaching shamanistic songs secretly and at a particular time.

For a dozen years, according to many Chinese Manchurologists who have conducted fieldwork in the tightly connected Manchurian communities—the Guan clan on the Ula Street of the Jilin province, the Guan clan in the Ning'an county of the Heilongjiang province, the Lang clan in the Shulan county of the Jilin province, and so on, totaling about 50—home shamanistic songs represent the largest percentage of the songs recorded. There are fewer than ten wild shamanistic songs in existence among the folk or among the songs recorded. For example, the Shi clan and the Yang clan each have wild shamanistic songs, and naturally they also have home shamanistic songs. If, however, a clan has the latter variety, they do not necessarily have the former.

The latter books are also known as “wild” shamanistic books (*bigan bit'he*), or “shaman's handbooks,” and they serve as a memorandum for a shaman in his or her oral teaching at an *Uyun* study session of a sacrificial rite, where novices give their fullest attention and learn everything by heart. Roughly speaking, the shamanistic books originated during the reign of *Huangtaiji*, that is, about 1632, when Manchu literati or shamans made a record of all items such as shamanistic gods and sacrificial procedures in the Manchu script. Copies of these records, called shamanistic books, made their way into popular circulation. Later they were divided into Manchu shamanistic books and then transcribed with Han characters. Before 1632, the Manchu shamanistic culture was singularly distinguished as an oral tradition. Even after the appearance of shamanistic books, its contents were largely passed down orally, since many shamans and apprentices did not know the Manchu writing. This is especially the case with the Manchu populace in the middle and late periods of the Qing dynasty, who all depended on oral teaching by a particular shaman.

The Content of Home Shamanistic Songs

The shaman and the assistant⁴ should state their clan names clearly as well as their *shuxiang* (any of the twelve animals representing the twelve Earthly Branches used to symbolize the year in which a person is born) and residences. For example, the content of the Shi clan's shamanistic songs for declaring the clan name is as follows:

hasuri hala hala oci, šekderi hala erin de omolo tomorrow, gūlmahūn aniya
bingkūn saman, angga gisun hulafi jalbarime, jalin de buraki na de bukdari
hengkilefi

Which is the one among many clan names? The children from the Shi clan are here to pray and sing shamanistic songs; the home shaman who possesses the *shuxiang* of a rabbit bows down to the earth on his knees.

The process is similar for other clans such as the Guan, the Lang, and the Xu on the Ula Street and the Yang and the Zhao in the Jilin province. All of them record clan identity at the outset of the shamanistic songs.⁵

As for the declaration of residencies, the shaman from the Shi clan, for example, will sing: "We live in the Small Han Village, and hold sacrificial rites on the Ula Street." This is the very first line the shaman sang when we made a record of the shamanistic culture from the Shi clan. The parallel line in a shamanistic song from the Yang clan is: "The old shaman settles down in Huichun," or, in other words, "He comes from the village of Huichun." Moreover, some shamanistic songs also declare the *shuxiang* of the host.⁶ Among the Guan clan on the Ula Street, for example, the following verse is recited: "The host who possesses the *shuxiang* of a mouse stands by." Some other declarations adopt the form of dialogue: "What is the *shuxiang* of the host?"

⁴ An assistant is called *jari* in Manchu language, or "god's attendant." Besides singing prayers and shamanistic songs during performances, he should also assist the master shaman in completing the performance. The word derives from *jaribi*. See Song 1998.

⁵ Here the home shaman is a counterpart to the master shaman, who used to be an assistant in sacrificial rites in honor of wild gods. In the case of home sacrifices, some assistants become home shamans.

⁶ "Host" here means the head of the family in which shamanistic rites are held.

The Timing of Sacrificial Rites

The timing of sacrificial rites is highly regarded by the Manchus because it involves important issues such as the safety and prosperity of family and village after the rites are held, ceremonies that are given full expression in the shamanistic songs. Except for particular festivals and the making of vows on lucky days, such annual rites usually take place after the autumn harvest. When the fresh millet is husked and put away, the first thing people need to do is make offerings to the gods. For example, the Southern *kang* shamanistic song from the Shi clan observes: "Now we bid goodbye to an old month and welcome a new month. It is on a lucky new day and in a clean, auspicious month that we hold our sacrificial rite." The Yang and Zhao clans do the same as the Shi clan. Shamanistic songs often lay special emphasis on the seasonal niche of a sacrificial rite. Ceremonies held for the constellations are more focused, as, for example, the constellation song from the Guan clan on Ula Street:

uce fa be ukufi,	When the door of the house is
	closed, and the curtains are unfolded,
hulan i sanggiyan gukufi,	Cover the fire in the stove,
jun tawa yaha gidafi,	Stop the smoke from the chimney.
niyalma jilgan gidafi,	People become speechless.
dai yaha didafi,	Put out the lights.
aisin coko meifen bukdaifi,	The golden cock folds its neck and
	retires to its nest,
indahun jilagan micufi,	The dog lies down without barking,
ihan morin huwejefi erin kai,	The cow and the horse are driven into
	their kraals out of sight,
deyeme gasha dekdehe hayaha	Birds fly back to their nests,
erin kai,	
feksime gurgu fekun erin kai,	Beasts and pheasants return to their
	resting places,
tumen usiha tusike erin kai,	Thousands of stars make their
	appearance,
minggan usiha mitaha erin kai,	Hundreds of stars climb up the night
	sky,
ilan usiha ilha erin kai,	The three stars are twinkling,
nadan usiha naraha eren kai,	The seven stars are sentimentally
	attaching to each other.
eriku usiha eldehe eren kai,	When the comet is shining,
... ..	
enduri usiha soliki	A sacrificial rite is held for the
	constellation gods.

This long piece deals with the timing of constellation rites. Other clans perform similar passages but not of the same length. In fact, the Yang clan is distinguished for its way of expressing time in the sacrificial rites held for the stove gods. Its shamanistic songs include lines like: “When the sun is covered and when the sun goes up and down,” a phrase that narrates the nightly rite held for the stove gods. In a word, no matter what the season or moment, the shaman has ready options to match the particular timing.

Offerings

An important part of a sacrificial rite is the making of offerings, which is given detailed description in the shamanistic songs. First comes the incense, which involves a Chinese joss-stick (*bazi*) and incense powder made from a kind of thorn. In the Shi clan songs they say: “Burning the *ayan* incense, burning the Good-year prayer incense” or “Burning *bazi* incense.” The Zhao clan from Xilin uses *ancun* incense.

Next come sacrificial offerings. The Manchu shamans give many kinds of offerings, including fish, sheep, oxen, horses, ducks, chickens, and especially pigs. As part of the process, they sing the following shamanistic song:

Cautiously we bought sacred pigs,
Kept them carefully in the sty at home.
The sacred pig is strong and nice-looking,
And is black all over.
Today we set out to divide the sacred pig according to its joints,
The sacred pig dies immediately.

This sort of detailed, realistic, and vivid description is what we read in the Southern *kang* shamanistic song from the Shi clan. Though the descriptions vary in different Manchu clans, all groups use pigs.

Next come cake-offerings. Similarly, each clan has its own particular expression of the ritual. The Yang clan’s song proceeds as follows: “On the occasion of this rewarding autumn, taking one ear of millet out of twenty, taking one ear of millet out of forty, for the sake of a feast in honor of our gods.” Some clans have special shamanistic songs for “millet washing,”⁷ which elaborate on the preparation of sacred millet, the process of making

⁷ In order to show respect for the gods, glutinous millet should be washed and made into various kinds of offerings for the gods. Every Manchu clan has its own millet-washing song.

cakes for offering.⁸ Other provisions are also used for the offerings. The shaman uses a rich stock of offerings like cereals, millet, and water, among others. In shamanistic songs we also find millet wine and strong liquor. In order to show respect for the gods, the Zhao clan from Xilin uses one-hundred-year-old cereals, spring water from the wooded mountains, and ninety-year-old millet wine, and then offers them to the gods three times. The Guan clan on Ula Street uses glutinous millet wine and liquor. On the whole, offering liquor to the gods is also a part of shamanistic songs.

Invoking Gods

Old Manchu shamans would say, “For home gods, sacrificial rites are collective; for wild gods, such rites are held for each at a separate time.” That is, in the case of home gods, songs of invocation are sung to let them all descend together. The repertoire differs according to individual clans; some have thirteen to fourteen pieces, while others have only five. But no matter the clan, the repertoire always includes western *kang*,⁹ lock-replacement¹⁰ (in honor of Omoshi Mama), blackout,¹¹ the constellation rite, and the sky rite.

First come the western *kang* gods. The Guan clan on the Ula Street holds shamanistic song feasts and invites the following gods: the god Tangzitaili, the god Zhusebeile, the god Choha Zhangjing, the god Mang’eseifu, the god Abukazhuse who descends from the sky, and Beise Enduri.¹² The invitees also include the god Nekeliansefu and Wocheku, god of the twin thrones. Some clans also add Buddha. In the Shi clan’s western

⁸ The Shi clan offers a good example; see Song 1993.

⁹ A *kang* is a Northern Chinese bed whose mattress is filled with bricks or soil and which can be heated in wintertime. The Manchus hold the “west” in high regard because there is an ancestral shrine on the western *kang* in the household.

¹⁰ Lock-replacement: sacrificial rites are held for Omoshi Mama (namely the Grand mummy god in charge of offspring) for the sake of the prosperity of later generations. During the rite the old thread-lock worn on the body is replaced with a new one, using a length of colored thread blessed by the shaman.

¹¹ This entails switching off or putting out the lights and the fire in the stove. Sacrificial rites are generally held in darkness.

¹² Beise Enduri is an ancestral god of the Manchu people. This god is located on the western side of the house. His central function is to serve the ancestral gods, though he is one himself.

kang shamanistic songs, only one white-mountain master god is invoked, whose name is Chohaye. Other invitees are all masters, all *manni*,¹³ and all *fucihi*.¹⁴

In second position is the lock-replacement rite held for the protection of infants' health and the propagation of offspring under the sponsorship of the mother-god of origin, namely Omosi Mama, sometimes known as "god mother." Next comes the blackout rite, often confused with the constellation rite although they actually have different content and address different gods. There is one similarity, however: both are held without lights. The blackout rites held by many Manchu clans all have something to do with the western *kang* gods. Other clans invoke the gods Beile and Mama.

The fourth in sequence is the constellation rite, which is especially popular among the Manchus. The number of gods invoked differs from one clan to another; more than ten or a very few can be summoned. They usually include the Big Dipper, the Lunar Mansions, and the Three Comets. Here is an excerpt from the Yang clan's shamanistic songs, which invoke the largest number of gods and are the most comprehensive in content:

wasibume soliki	Please come down, <i>yuebo</i> Star,
biyai dasuran usiha,	Please come down, Vesper,
sanggiyan usiha,	Please come down, Tricuspid Star,
orin jakun tokton usiha,	Please come down, Lunar Mansions,
gimda usiha,	Please come down, <i>jiaomu</i> Dragon Star,
kamduri usiha,	Please come down, <i>yuanjin</i> Dragon Star,
...	...
geren usiha be soliha	Please come down, all Star-gods.

The full roster numbers fifty gods in all. Every animal and plant and life on earth is included in the Yang clan's shamanistic star songs, and all exist in heaven with different names.

Fifth comes the Sky Rite, which appears in every Manchu shamanistic book. As long as there is a sacrificial rite, there is a Sky-sacrificial song. However, the names of the heavenly gods may vary among different clans. The Shi clan calls the heavenly gods "The High Sky," "The Blue," "The Nine-layer Heaven," "The Heavenly God *mafa*," "The Heavenly Khan," and so forth. Only in the Sky-sacrificial song of the Guan clan on the Ula Street are the gods invoked largely similar to the western *kang* gods of the clan, including five from the western *kang*. The invitees at the Sky-sacrificial rite

¹³ *Manni*, or *mangga* in Manchu, here means heroic ancestral gods.

¹⁴ A *fucihi* is a local Buddha.

also include Crow-Magpie God, who is worshipped widely among the Manchus.

This is a list of gods specifically invited to various rites, but it is well to remember that the home sacrificial rites are by nature collective. Phrases such as “all gods are invited” and “all our ancestors” demonstrate that collectivity.



The Shi clan's shaman conducts a divination with a steel mirror and a pearl (1985). Photograph by the author.

Piety

Pious attitudes are mentioned in every shamanistic song; they are embodied between the lines that the performers cherish and actively express. This kind of piety is evident not only in the choice of timing, offerings, and washing of sacrificial utensils, but also in the performer's humility and modesty. For example, the shamanistic songs of the Guan clan on the Ula Street observe: “We servants do not know how to respect gods, / Please show us how to carry it out, our gods. / We are sure to learn by heart the teachings from the gods, / Learn by heart the revelations from the gods.” Many repetitions are devoted to “ritual obeisance” in order to express

respect. The Shi clan says: “Fold our body and kneel down and touch the earth with your forehead.” The shamanistic songs of every clan are full of such phrases.

Rationales for Holding Shamanistic Rites

Shamanistic songs explain themselves as follows: “The one who speaks out by knocking his upper teeth against the lower has to be accountable, and the vows that have been made many times must be accepted. Here we hold a sacrificial rite.” In this way the Shi clan expresses itself in the shamanistic song, also intoning phrases widely used by the Manchus when making a vow. These vows involve annual sacrificial rites, the treatment of a patient, and harvest or other celebrations.

Although the wording differs from one clan region to another, the fundamental purpose for holding sacrificial rites is everywhere the same: to pray for peace. For example, the Yang clan’s shamanistic song goes:

gereb saman baturu,	The group of shamans would not
	give in to each other,
hutu be hokobumbi,	Competing,
uju hutu be uksalabumbi,	Without any fear,
hutu jugun be faitame,	Drive away evil ghosts, devils, and
	wild spirits,
yabure hutu yala be niorombi gaji.	Cut off routes of those evil ghosts,
	devils, and wild spirits.
akū hutu i duka be yaksimbi.	Leave no leeway.

The Guan clan on Ula Street speaks the same message from another perspective: “Please protect us, our gods; protect me, the servant, so that I may live to an old age. No problems for one hundred years, no illness for sixty years, and no bad years. Also, please protect others from disasters, safeguard their families and cattle.”

The purposes of other Manchu clans for holding sacrificial rites are likewise to pray for “peace and health forever,” with the same sentiment being expressed via other similar phrases. Due to differences in historical transformation, geographical environment, and cultural background, the perspectives, modes of expression, and emphases may vary.

The Content of Wild Shamanistic Songs

Besides these seven parts outlined in the home shamanistic songs, the wild songs have their own particular form and content. Even so, the seven parts contained in the home shamanistic songs have also changed a bit. The wild gods are invoked not only in front of the western *kang*, but also in front of the Big Dipper after a temporary altar is set up in the courtyard. Hence, one often finds a line such as “The shaman kneels down in front of the Big Dipper.” What is more, the seven parts of the home shamanistic songs have become more specific, more detailed, and more vivid in the wild variety. This is especially so with regard to offerings; some clans form the body of the sacred pig into the shape of an arch, strip off its hair, and wash it clean. The specifics of the processes are recorded in the songs.

The wild shamanistic songs cover in particular four parts: the invitation of the gods and their appearance, the sacred utensils, the gods’ residences, and, finally, the gods’ ceremonial dismissal. Adding to these four the seven parts of the home shamanistic songs yields eleven parts total. This is the entire content of the wild shamanistic songs.

The Appearance of the Gods

Something should be made clear. Except for the Shi clan’s shamanistic song on the “red-faced white-mountain *mafa*,”¹⁵ which describes the white-mountain regional commander and the ancient heroine Odu mama who travels “a thousand *li* a day and eight hundred *li* at night,” shamanistic songs that contain descriptions of the gods’ features are infrequent in other clans. In the wild shamanistic songs, however, such descriptions are rich and stirring. All of the clans that have wild shamanistic songs have one wild song for each god; as a result, there exist many wild shamanistic songs, between 20 and 150 or more. Here we choose for discussion only a few of them.

First we consider the *manni*, or heroic gods. Doholon *manni* is a lame god, whom the Yang clan’s shamanistic song describes as walking with a gold stick and a silver stick that allow him to cover vast fields and high mountains. In the Shi clan’s shamanistic song, he appears as the *manni* god on a three-pronged fork who hops along on one leg. Maksi *manni* is a dancing ancestral god who carries a sacred bell in his hand; the golden god

¹⁵ Mafa (literally “grandpa”) is an ancestral god of the mountains and the forest.

descends playfully shaking and ringing the bell. In the description of the *manni*'s features, there are also Baturu,¹⁶ Amba,¹⁷ Juru,¹⁸ Ilan ari,¹⁹ and others from the Shi clan, as well as Nadanju²⁰ and Ulgiyan²¹ from the Zhao clan. There are also many founding fathers.

Second, we deal with the animals and the plant gods. The Manchu ancestors who lived as hunters knew perfectly well the habits of animals and the characteristics of plants, which they preserved and transmitted in enthralling descriptions. For example, the Yang clan's shamanistic songs describe the eagle god as being able to cover the sun and the moon with its wings, and to fish at the bottom of the sea with its tail. In another song this creature sticks up its tail like overhanging clouds. The Shi clan's shamanistic songs describe not only actions but also appearances, comparing the vulture god's head, for example, to a stone, a golden mouth, a silver beak, and a copper neck that looks like an iron axle. The Shi clan's leopard god has copper threads all over its body and singers speak of its memorable dancing skills. They describe the leopard god in this way: "With red-flaming coal in the mouth, / The sparks fly everywhere, / Being red all over the body, / Like a big fireball." Quite different from the leopard of the Yang clan, it comes from a thousand miles away, stretching itself out and lying on the ground. The wild shamanistic songs also describe the features of the tigress, the tiger, and all kinds of bird gods and python gods. In a word, based on the appearance and action of the *manni* god and the animal gods, the wild shamanistic songs represent the features of the wild gods from various angles and aspects through vivid, detailed, rich, and realistic descriptions.

¹⁶ Baturu ("brave hero") is a hero among the heroic ancestral gods.

¹⁷ Amba ("giant") is an ancestral god.

¹⁸ The god Juru ("double" or "two") carries a spear in each hand.

¹⁹ Ilan ari is a trinity of omnipotent and omnipresent gods.

²⁰ Nadanju is a seventy-year-old ancestral hero.

²¹ Ulgiyan, or the "pig" hero, was the first ancestral god to record human knowledge on a pig skin.

Sacred Utensils

When the shaman performs a rite involving the home gods, he holds a hand drum and a stick and dances to the beat of the drum. As for the wild gods, different sacred utensils are used for different targets; for some he holds a knife, for some a fork, and for others a stick or a copper bell. These items are combined with shamanistic gestures. For example, as we mentioned above concerning the Yang and Shi clans, Doholon *manni*²² holds a stick or a fork, while Maksi *manni* holds a sacred utensil with copper bells. The Shi clan also has a great god, Amba ali, who plays with a long fiery rope while dancing. The description of sacred utensils in the wild shamanistic songs shows not only the great theurgy of the gods, but also the Manchu military experience and warrior spirit.

Residences of the Gods

Changbai Mountain and the Heilongjiang River are the cradle of the Manchu people. The mountain is a touchstone of their existence, prosperity, and development. Therefore, many gods who appear in the Manchu shamanistic songs live on the mountain, and the songs depict specific rivers, valleys, and high peaks. For example, Amba *manni* lives on the peak and Juru *manni* in the golden mansion and silvery cabinet on the fifth peak. Among the animal deities, the boar god lives in the silvery den in the golden valley, while the eagle god lives in the golden mansion and the silvery cabinet, and so on. In summary, the Shi clan's gods live in different parts at different altitudes according to their variant theurgy. The Yang clan's wild gods live in a different pattern, primarily on hillsides or in ravines. For example, the swan god lives in a nest made from twigs on a small hillside, the bear god lives in his den deep in the mountain, the tiger god lives in the ravines of flowers and grasses, and so forth.

The patterns of the Yang and the Shi clans reveal that the residences of the Yang clan gods do not differ by altitudes, and that theurgy of one god distinguishes it little from another one, reflecting the primitive life of the Manchus. By contrast, the Shi make clear differences according to status and have a strong sense of hierarchy. Second, from the descriptions of these rivers and mountains we can derive important values and meanings for the study of ethnohistory.

²² Although the heroic god Doholon *manni* is lame, he is characterized as a messenger.

Sending off the Gods

According to the Manchu primitive representation, the great gods are wild gods: so long as they are invoked and offered sacrifices, they will retire to their own respective resting places and will not linger in people's homes and villages. Therefore, ceremonially dismissing the wild gods is an important part of the shamanistic ritual. In fact, every clan that has wild shamanistic songs also has dismissal songs. Some are attached to the end of each chapter, and some constitute special chapters. The Shi clan has both types, while the Yang clan has special chapters that make a plea invoking the gods to retire after accepting the offering of incense and sacrifices. The Shi clan has long chapters, called "Flying Tigers," dedicated to seeing the gods off. Here is an example of such an emotional and touching address:

Oh Flying Tiger God, you can descend now! Oh beautiful tiger god Mafa! It is now nearly midnight, in the freezing and snowy winter cold; your children kneel down on the hard and icy earth. We are afraid of cold and want to go home. Please come down! The prayers are trying very hard in chorus with beautiful words. The people who are lined up on both flanks can hardly hold the drums any longer with their left hands, and can hardly hold the drumsticks with their right hands; they are losing their voices. The shaman has only a single coat on. The dew has dropped from the sky and winds are blowing on the ground. The people who are lined up on both flanks have lost their voices, and they cannot chant loudly or cry even in a small voice. Please, Flying Tiger God, come down from the branches! Lose no time, go back away from the branches! Flying Tiger God, you can no longer play; now you can come down and go back!²³

The passage above exemplifies the major content of the Manchu wild and home shamanistic songs. The wild songs also involve shamanistic costumes—for example, the double-bird magic hat, the nine-bird magic hat, the site for such performances, the layout of offerings, and so forth. Another form of shamanistic songs consists of formulas available in sacrificial rites; also known as "common talk," these are short phrases used during rites held for a particular occasion. Such formulas cover many areas, such as praying for the safety of people at war, promotion in military rank, sending messages back home, building a new house, looking for a lost horse, and maintaining a family tree. Thanks are given to the gods for their blessings over people's safety and good fortune. This phenomenon shows how shamanistic culture finds its way into every aspect of Manchu life.

²³ This paragraph is an abbreviation based on an old shaman's performance.

As a general principle, the shamanistic songs have somewhat standardized coverage as well as a fixed pattern, but they preserve flexibility and the capacity for improvisation. Their contents can be expanded or reduced to suit the situation.

The Organization of Shamanistic Songs

The home shamanistic songs have seven aspects of primary content, while the wild songs have eleven. These orally expressed features follow no determined order and may be freely combined. There is, however, sequencing and combination by habit. Shamanistic songs usually begin with identification of the shaman's clan affiliation and *shuxiang* and of his or her residence, and end with wishes for safety and the dismissal of the gods. Other dimensions such as offerings, pious attitudes, and the appearances of the gods, occur in the middle of the song.

From the brief and partial citations given above, we can see that the orally transmitted contents of the Manchu shamanistic songs and their meanings are clearly determined. If we view them from the perspective of folk culture, they have a history of occurring as long folk narrative poetry with an integral structure. The Shi clan has a shamanistic song entitled "First Generation Great-grandfather" of 150 lines. It starts with the first-generation great-grandfather and then comes down to the fifth generation, relating the story of how the ancestor became a shamanistic god of the Shi clan. The descriptions are vivid and detailed. Every shamanistic song is a complete narrative poem, differing from its counterparts only in length and looking like a story, a myth, or a legend. The Shi clan's "First Generation Great-grandfather" recounts the legend of how he became a god, and a certain Yang clan describes Muli Muligan as a god who herds on horseback and becomes a herding hero and a horse protector. There is also a Wujiansi *manni*, a knowledgeable god who makes the first record on a pigskin manuscript of work skills accumulated by human beings.

In addition, the shamanistic songs are quite dramatic. All of them are sung by shamans during performance and are accompanied by dances, especially in the case of the wild songs. The Shi clan's "Lying Tigress Goddess" is a fine example:

The candle lights up everywhere, and we raised our heads and spotted her coming down from the hut up on the southern mountain, from the thatched house up on the northern mountain, climbing over the mountain ridge, over the peak, out of darkness, with many tiger cubs.

While singing, the shaman gets down on all fours, imitating the movements of climbing a mountain and of caressing and feeding the tiger's young. During performances of the "Bird God of Golden Tongue" and the "Bird God of Silvery Tongue," the shaman not only imitates the spreading wings and act of flying, but also moves his or her lips, meaning that the lips are red. The shaman's physical movements thus accord with the particular characteristics of the song. For every wild god, there is a simple and brief set of dramatic movements.

When we examine these songs from the perspective of their orally transmitted contents, we find numerous reflections of human concerns, including religion, folklore, music, dancing, clothing, and ethnology. For such reasons, because they function as a sort of cultural encyclopedia, the shamanistic songs are especially valuable for cross-disciplinary study.

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