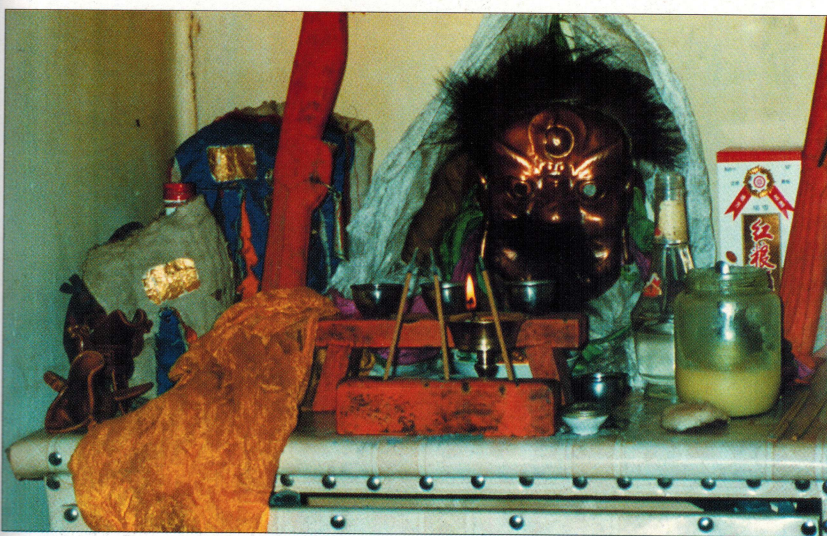




21 Ewenki shamaness Du'lar. Photo: Richard Noll, 1994.



22 (a) Ewenki shamaness Du'lar and Richard Noll. Photo: Kun Shi, 1994.



22 (b) Bedside shrine of Ewenki shamaness Du'lar. Photo: Richard Noll, 1994.

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23 Ewenki shamaness Du'lar wearing Abagaldai mask. Photo: Richard Noll, 1994.

A Solon Ewenki Shaman and her Abagaldai Shaman Mask

RICHARD NOLL,
DESALES UNIVERSITY
CENTER VALLEY, PA

KUN SHI
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Introduction

The shamans of the Tungus peoples of Russian Siberia and Northeast China have been a source of fascination for explorers and scholars for almost 500 years (Znamenski 2003). The word *saman/xaman* is originally of Tungus origin, but ethnolinguistic interpretations of its indigenous meanings remain speculative (Janhunen 1986). Although once an ubiquitous phenomenon of Northeast Asian spirituality, as discovered by Sergei I. and Elizabeth N. Shirokogoroff during their fieldwork in northwest Manchuria from 1915 to 1917 (Shirokogoroff 1935), at the beginning of the twenty-first century we are instead documenting its apparent extinction. This tragic end to a legendary religious phenomenon is documented in a paper published in *Anthropos* in 2003. Anthropologist F. George Heyne recorded the stories of the last two shamans of the Reindeer-Evenki in the Greater Khingan Range of Northeast China (Manchuria), Olga Dmitrievna Kudrina, who died in 1944, and Njura Kaltakun, who died in 1998 (Heyne 2003a).

In the summer of 1994 we conducted fieldwork among the Oroqen of Shibazhan in northern Heilongjiang province, the Manchu of Jilin province, and the Solon Ewenki near Hailar (now Hulunbuir), Inner Mongolia, with the generous support of a Wenner Gren Foundation grant. Our goal was to find the last living Tungus shamans and to learn as much as we could about the cognitive psychological and psychiatric aspects of their training, particularly their use of internal visual and auditory mental imagery. We were testing the hypotheses generated in a theoretical article published in *Current Anthropology* (Noll 1985).

Although we did not collect enough data to support or reject those hypotheses, we did have the good fortune to record perhaps one of the most detailed stories of the life and training of a Tungus shaman to ever appear in print, the Oroqen shaman Chuonnasun, known to outsiders as Meng Jin Fu (Noll and Shi 2004).

In July 1994 we traveled to the village of Yiming Gatsa in the Ewenki Banner (county) of Hulunbuir League (prefecture), Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. There we interviewed and photographed one of the last Solon Ewenki shamans (pl. 21, 22 *a*), a (then) 75-year-old woman named Dula'r (her Ewenki name), but also known as Ao Yun Hua (her Han Chinese name). Due to the ravages of age and alcoholism she was not a particularly good informant, but perhaps the most intriguing aspect of our encounter with her was her presentation and shamanic demonstration of a rare Abagaldai shaman mask. The only known photograph of this mask in the possession of a shaman was taken in 1931 by Otto Mamen of the Daur shaman Huangge Yadgan (Lindgren 1935a, 1935b; Humphrey 1996: 246, see Fig. 1). As far we have been able to determine, no known photo exists of a shaman actually wearing an Abagaldai mask has been published prior to the photographs we include with this fieldwork report. However, an illustration of a "Solon shaman with copper mask" from the National Museum in Copenhagen can be found in Heissig (1970: 20).

At the time of the writing of this article we could not confirm if Dula'r is still alive, nor could we confirm the current whereabouts of her rare mask.

The Solon Ewenkis

The Solon (*Suolun* in Mandarin Chinese, native, *Soloön*) are the largest of the three distinct ethnic groups included under the official designation Ewenki (*Ewenke*) by the government of the People's Republic of China. The other groups are the Manchurian Reindeer Tungus (Ewenkis) and the Khamnigan Ewenkis. The Solon Ewenki (*Suolun Ewenke*) are by far the largest of the three, with a population of nearly 25,000 estimated in 1987 (Janhunen 1996). The two most populous Solon communities are found in the regions of Hailar and Nonni. The Ewenki Autonomous Banner region in the basins of the Imin and Hui rivers near Hailar contained approximately 8,300 Solons in 1987. Most Solon Ewenkis are bilingual,



Fig. 1. The Daur shaman Huangge Yadgan. Photo: Otto Mamen, 1931.

speaking the Mongolic language of their neighbors, the Dagurs (Daur). Not surprisingly, there is much cultural cross-fertilization between these two peoples who have been historically linked for centuries. Both shamanism and Buddhist Lamaism are still followed by older persons in the northern and western areas of the Ewenki region.

Although there is a literature on the shamanism of the Reindeer Ewenkis (Heyne 1993, 2003a, 2003b) and the Dagurs (Humphrey 1996), we are unaware of any extensive published reports specifically on the shamanism practiced by the Solon Ewenkis. Even Shirokogoroff had little to report on this matter: "In so far as I could gather, there were some shamans among the Mergen group and Solons. But I did not see them and I got no details about them." (Shirokogoroff 1935: 386) He did estimate,

however, that there were "probably far over twenty" shamans still active among the Solons. According to Mandu Ertu (1999: 122), three Ewenki shamans existed by the early 1990s and they were all females. The other two female Ewenki shamans are Niula and Modege.

The Life, Training and Career of a Solon Ewenki Shaman

We were taken to the residence of the shaman's daughter and son-in-law by the Ewenki scholar Ha He'r. By local standards this was a very affluent family. The son-in-law was part owner of a mining operation that was quite lucrative. The family was proud to show us their new sports utility vehicle (a Cherokee Jeep), and they dressed in their finest clothes to pose with for photographs while standing next to this vehicle. Dula'r slept in a separate concrete building in the rear of the home. Next to her concrete stove-bed was a wooden dresser upon which was constructed a shrine containing a plate of rotting meat (an offering to the spirits) and her shaman's paraphernalia: her wooden horse-head staffs, her drum, and the copper mask adorned with bear fur (pl. 22 *b*). It was in this piping hot room, along with countless flies, that Dula'r continuously sipped beer and told us her story.

Dula'r was born in 1920. She said she had been physically frail since childhood. When she was 20 years old she experienced an initiatory illness (Mandu Ertu's version indicates that she got the strange illness when she after her marriage at age 18.) She claimed she was "thin" and felt pain all over her body. She approached a lama for a healing, but he introduced her to a Mongol shaman and said she should become a shaman. Her father also encouraged her to be treated by a shaman. The name of the Mongol shaman who healed her was Jamusu, and after he healed her he trained her and officially initiated her to become a shaman. She was initiated nearby, within the territory of the modern borders of the Ewenki Banner. Later she also studied with an Ewenki shaman, but did not remember his name. For the first three years she learned to dance and chant by imitation, but she was not taught how to travel to the upper or lower worlds. She claimed she was 25 or 26 years-old before she conducted her first major healing ritual. Her guardian spirits include her ancestors, a dog, a snake, and a wolf.

Since we were conducting fieldwork in Manchuria and Inner Mongolia to see if we could collect data on the cognitive styles of shamans,

and in particular their use of visual and auditory mental imagery (as hypothesized in Noll 1985), we asked many questions of a psychological nature. When we specifically asked her if she saw visions during her healing rituals, she replied that she often saw the spirits of a fox, a wolf and a snake. Three legs of the wolf were bound together.

Dula'r insisted on making a distinction between "prairie Ewenki" (such as herself) and the "forest Ewenki" (i.e., reindeer Ewenki) who lived in the north. She told us that learning to have visions was not part of the training by a master shaman in the prairies, but she didn't know about the shamans in the forests to the north. She noted that she couldn't speak of the experiences of others. She said that when she was young she traveled to an area just south of where the northern forests begin and she watched the healing rituals of Oroqen shamans. She said they danced and chanted and drummed until they fell to the ground. When asked, she admitted that Ewenki shamans also fell to the ground during healing rituals.

We then asked her about her own subjective experiences during healing rituals. She told us, "After inviting the spirits from above, I had a feeling of shivering and would fall down." She would invite spirits and a deceased shaman she knew to come down to her, and in her "blurred state" she saw a fox, a wolf and a dog.

We asked her if she ever left her body to travel to the lowerworld. She replied that she "could never be anywhere other than here" (the world of humans and animals). When she denied going to the lowerworld, she used the Mongol word for that realm, *elenkan*. When we asked her if she had ever treated a patient whose soul went to the lowerworld because of shock, she replied, "Yes. I chant. I ask the wandering soul to come back. I do not travel myself." She added, "While chanting I would use the name of the lowerworld in getting rid of spirits. But that was a long time ago—more than 30 years ago."

Healing rituals were carried out at night. If the patient was a child, she would ask the mother of the child to squeeze her breast to entice the soul of the child to return. If the patient was an adult, she might leave offerings of food to lure the wandering soul back into the body. She healed many children and adults suffering from shock or "seizures."

Dula'r claims to have openly practiced shamanism up to the time of the start of the Cultural Revolution (1966). Before then, she claims to have treated many people, old and young. She was tormented by the communists during the Cultural Revolution, and people would scorn her

and yell “cattle spirit/snake spirit” (*niu gui she shen*) at her. All of her shamanic paraphernalia was taken from her and destroyed—all except her Abagaldai mask, which she had received from the Mongol shaman Jamusu when she was in her 20s, because it was well-hidden. Dula’r was therefore very suspicious of us and was reluctant to talk about anything regarding the inner workings of shamanism, going so far as to deny any knowledge of the upper and lower worlds in later interviews. She did still participate in religious rituals. She told us that earlier in 1994 she had gone to the banks of the Hui River and made offerings at an *obao*. She said she saw many young people there, but when they asked her for help she told them to go to a physician when they were sick.

Shamanic Paraphernalia

Dula’r told us that during the Cultural Revolution everything was taken away from her except her shaman’s mask and a large medal medallion that hung from wooden Lamaist beads from her neck. The medallion contained a mandala of Chinese astrology.

She had two orange-painted horse-head staffs (pl. 23), each about a meter in length. Tiny bells hung from them. She told us the staffs had been made two or three years prior (circa 1991). She complained that they were “too short” and not at all like the staffs of old. Two pairs of such staffs were taken away during the Cultural Revolution. The Ewenki word she used for the staffs was *sorbi*. Dula’r told us that the staffs represented a whip for the spirits, and she “fed” the staffs tea or wine. She further revealed that the staffs helped her to “foresee things” and to see things ordinary people did not see. The staffs were also there to help her during rituals when she was possessed by the spirits.

Dula’r would not reveal much information about the copper shamans mask. The mask itself was damaged—one of the white eye coverings was missing—and was obviously not of recent origin. The head hair, eyebrows and beard were comprised of bear fur. When the mask was on display, a wad of animal fat was wedged in its mouth, making the ritual mask look as though it were sticking its tongue out.

Dula’r was kind enough to demonstrate how she would wear the mask during a ritual, and donned it for us so that we could take photographs. Vilmos Diószegi (1967) described many of the more than 30 masks collected for European museums from the Ewenki in the late 19th and

early 20th centuries. According to him, Abagaldi was a powerful spirit known not only to the Ewenki in Siberia and Northeast China, but also to the various Evenki and Buryat groups of Manchuria and Transbaikalia. He noted that it was mostly female shamans who mastered this spirit (Diószegi 1967: 190). According to Humphrey (1996: 242–243), the mask represents a *barkan* (spirit or deity) known as Abagaldi, the spirit of a black bear. According to her Daur informant, “rather than an item of apparel . . . it was worn by a shaman only once every three years at the *ominan*.” For Dula’r to don this mask and to allow us to photograph her was therefore a rare privilege indeed.

Conclusion

Much remains to be learned about Solon Ewenki Shamanism. Mongol and Chinese scholars have published Ewenki folklore collections which contain information about Solon shamanism, and one Daur scholar has even published one paragraph in Chinese about the life of Dula’r (Mandu Ertu 1999). We hope that this fieldwork report, though brief in detail, and our photographs, may add to the growing understanding of Solon Ewenki shamanism.

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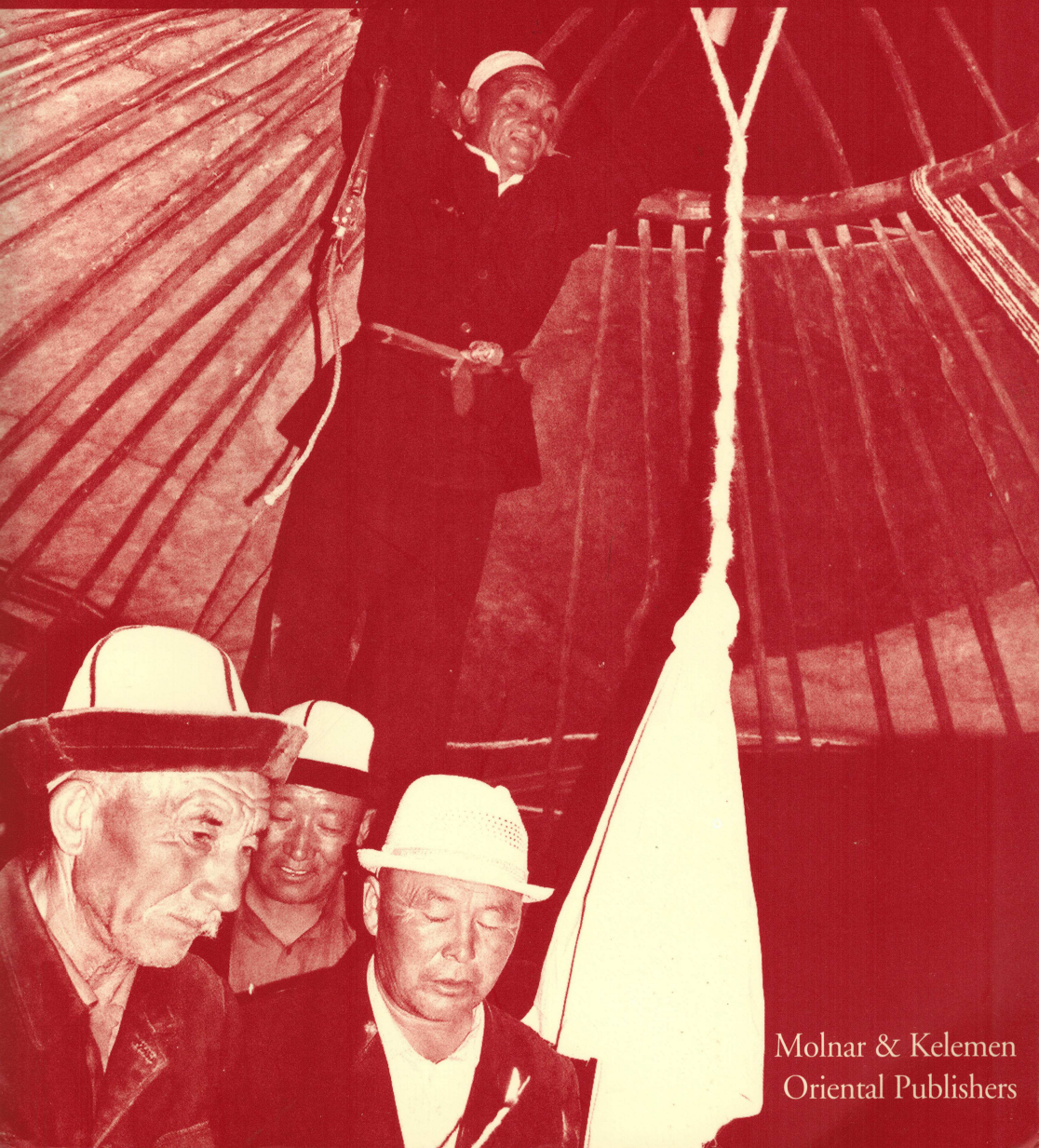
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RICHARD NOLL, Ph.D., was born in 1959 in Detroit, Michigan. He is a clinical psychologist and Associate Professor of Psychology at DeSales University in Center Valley, Pennsylvania, USA. In addition to his research interest in shamanism, Noll has also published numerous scholarly articles and books on the history of psychiatry (primarily the works of Carl Gustav Jung and the early history of dementia praecox/schizophrenia). Currently he lives in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and is the father of a seven year-old boy, Wolfgang Noll.

KUN SHI has done research on shamanism since 1987. He received his M.A. in cultural anthropology from the Ohio State University in 1992 (and completed Ph.D. studies in 1995), taught at OSU and Denison University, served as program developer for social service agencies and program evaluator for Ohio's Legislative Office of Education Oversight, and currently is director of the K-12 Chinese Flagship Program at OSU.

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