

M.M. Sodnompilova

*Kalmyk Scientific Center,
Russian Academy of Sciences,
I.K. Ilshkina 8, Elista, 358000, Russia
E-mail: sodnompilova@yandex.ru*

Verbal Restrictions on the Communication of Turko-Mongols of Inner Asia

Verbal restrictions common among the Turko-Mongol peoples of Inner Asia and Siberia are analyzed on the basis of folkloric and ethnographic sources. Their principal forms are silence, circumlocution, and whisper. The socio-cultural context of these restrictions is reconstructed. They are seen in various domains of culture, in particular relating to social norms, and are believed to reflect fear of human life and the well-being of man and society in the communication with nature represented by deities and spirits. This is a natural reaction that has evolved under the harsh environmental and climatic conditions of Inner Asia. The same concerns, extending to social communication, have regulated interpersonal interactions. In a nomadic culture, verbal restrictions stem from the importance of the ritual function of language and a specific attitude toward spoken language, which, over the centuries, was the principal means of information storage and transfer, cognition and adaptation. This concept of speech affected the emergence of the principal behavioral stereotypes. The rigid norms of behavior account for the importance of the nonverbal context of the nomadic culture—the high informative potential of the entire space inhabited by the nomads, and the rich symbolism of their material culture, traditional outfit, and dwelling.

Keywords: *Inner Asia, Turko-Mongol peoples, communication, silence.*

Introduction

Verbal restriction generally understood as silence is one of the most important phenomena in universal human culture and a component of communication that has been increasingly attracting the attention of scholars. K.A. Bogdanov wrote (1997) about the versatility of this phenomenon, and the impossibility of clarifying its social and cultural semantics from the point of view of any highly specialized field of the humanities. With regard to specific societies and cultures, verbal restrictions have been analyzed by the founder of “cultural grammar” E. Hall, who authored a number of studies on the subject (Hall, 1982; Hall E.T., Hall M.R., 1990). He divided cultures into those with low and high context. In the latter

type, a significant part of the information is framed by non-linguistic context (tradition, hierarchy, and status of the interlocutors), and only a small part of information is presented in words. Highly contextual cultures are characterized by high density of social ties in which status and reputation extend to all areas of life, and are inherent in many peoples of Asia, primarily those living in China and Japan.

It is also legitimate to describe the culture of the Turko-Mongol peoples of Inner Asia* as a high-context

*Selection of this region in the humanities is to a great extent justified not by geographical, but by historical and cultural boundaries: “Inner Asia is a territory primarily united by a common historical destiny in connection with natural and

culture for which non-verbal texts play a paramount role in the information space. Specific verbal culture, sparing in words, emerged among the nomads who settled in the vast territories of the region, a significant part of which is unfavorable to life. Representatives of the traditional Turko-Mongol nomadic society cannot be called emotional. This society has reproached open manifestations of joy, anger, attachment, and especially affection outside a narrow family circle. Priority of silent behavior can be seen in etiquette, which strictly regulates the rules of behavior in society for men, women, and especially children, and is duplicated by customs and rituals, prohibitions and signs.

The emotional and sensual aspect of traditional nomadic society has not been one of the problems provoking the interest of scholars. This may be possibly explained by the difficulty of including this issue into the system that divided culture into spiritual and material realms, common in the Soviet ethnography. With the emergence of new approaches to the study of culture and the expansion of the conceptual framework, behavioral features have been becoming an integral part of the studies of ethnic mentality, consciousness, and character. In the 21st century, the problems of emotions and space have become a topic of research. For example, scholars have been interested in how space affects the emergence of certain emotions, and how it limits them (Dundon, Hemer, 2016). This problem was previously indicated by Yi-Fu Tuan, who wrote about the topophilic and topophobic spaces (1974). To a certain extent, these studies have become a reference point for this work.

It is not the purpose of this article to analyze mentality and ethnic character; this study rather focuses on the factors that formed the image of the laconic secretive nomad of Inner Asia (a Mongol, Buryat, Khakas, Oirat, or Tuvinian) known to us from the works of the scholars and missionaries of the 19th–20th centuries. Such character traits irritated many people and seemed to be a manifestation of stupidity, stubbornness, and cunning, or were explained by childish naivety (Radlov, 1989: 214; Osokin, 1906: 222; Termen, 1912: 111). The rare scholars who became engaged into the culture of nomads have managed to learn more deeply their traits of behavior and character, and also to understand

them more deeply (Sieroszewski, 1993; Shinkarev, 1981). Secrecy and laconic speech have survived to this day and are of interest to specialists in psychology (Semke, Bogomaz, Bokhan, 2012). How and why has the spiritual world of nomads evolved to be so “sparing” with manifestation of emotions and feelings? In our opinion, this question can be answered by the sources of various types accumulated over the centuries among the Turko-Mongol peoples of the region under study. They contain rich information about the “culture of silence” and the conditions of its emergence. The sources of this study are descriptions of the rituals of the life-cycle, as well as of hunting and fishing activities, travel notes of members of expeditions to the central regions of Asia, small genres of Turko-Mongol folklore, and evidence from the personal fund of P.P. Batorov at the Center for Oriental Manuscripts and Xylographs at the Institute of Mongolian, Buddhist, and Tibetan Studies of SB RAS. The chronological framework of this study is the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, which is justified by the presence of historiographic research for this period. This framework is rather arbitrary, since the meaning and content of rituals and different genres of folklore reflect a set of ancient ideological concepts that are little susceptible to change.

Verbal restrictions, creating the impression of the laconicism of nomads, are expressed in various spheres of culture, and numerous prohibitions, signs, admonitions, and reprehensions. This makes it necessary to structure such a large array of evidence. The aim of this work is to reconstruct the social and cultural context in which verbal restrictions manifested themselves among the peoples of the Turko-Mongol world of Inner Asia, which will be attempted by interpreting cultural phenomena. Analyzing available evidence through contrastive and comparative methods will make it possible to identify the most common situations accompanied by verbal restrictions, and to establish the common origin of seemingly different rituals and traditions. A large array of data does not allow us to consider all situations when verbal restrictions are manifested in detail, and therefore we will focus only on the most common and relevant cases.

Verbal restrictions associated with hunting

Verbal restrictions are clearly manifested in one of the archaic economic activities of nomads: hunting. Despite the fact that cattle-breeding played an essential role in their economy, hunting was of great importance, especially in the forest-steppe and taiga natural zones. The archaic nature of this activity determined the preservation of the most ancient layer of traditional culture and accordingly, some archaic forms of ideology, associated with hunting

climatic features which created the preconditions for a single nomadic civilization. In the present-day situation, it comprises Mongolia, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of China, Buryatia, Tuva, and Altai” (Mitupov, 2007: 6). N.N. Kradin includes Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia of China, as well as Southern Siberia and Transbaikal region (Tuva, Khakassia, and Buryatia) into the boundaries of Inner Asia (2016: 8). The author of *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia* D. Sinor considers the lands of Siberia and the Urals to be the northern periphery of the region (1990).

(Zhambalova, 1991: 5). A number of verbal restrictions typical of the complex of traditional hunting may go back to the early stages of human development, when fear of the forces of nature and animals prevailed over humans. In addition, the taiga world is the most sophisticated realm according to the concept of sound landscape—a new field of research emerging in acoustic ecology (Sheikin et al., 2017: 94). Sound-orientation in limited forest visibility was extremely important for the hunter. Being in the forest required a sensitive behavior which was in harmony with the acoustic environment of the landscape.

According to traditional beliefs, some spirit-lords of the mountains—for example, the lord of the Altai—are calm, and like it when everything is quiet and calm around: “the one who gets angry in the mountains, quarrels, makes loud sounds, will bring misfortune causing the anger of the spirit of the mountain” (Zelenin, 1929: 64). The need for such behavior in the forest is understandable, because the task of the hunter is to find prey, not disclose his own location, and prevent the attack of any dangerous predator. In order to become a part of the taiga world, hunters would put on special clothing traditionally made of skins of wild animals. The Buryats sewed light, warm, and waterproof jackets and pants from the skin of roe deer or musk deer. Ancient headdress, manufactured of the entire skin, which was removed from the head of an animal along with ears and even horns, retained its importance (Zhambalova, 1991: 79–84; Galdanova, 1992: 40). Such clothes disguised human smell and appearance. When Mongolian hunters went to hunt deer and elk, they put on special *boitog* shoes sewn of deer or elk skins with fur on the outside. It was believed that the animal would not hear the approach of a human wearing such shoes (Vyatkina, 1960: 171).

Yet hunters were afraid of malevolent forest spirits even more than dangerous animals. According to popular beliefs, the spirits could lure people into remote places, kill them, or even take them to their world. In the beliefs of the Turko-Mongol peoples, such spirits include Buryat *muu shubuun* (Galdanova, 1987: 28), Khakas *albys*, *khukhat*, and Tuvan *diiren*, *shulbus* (Butanaev, Mongush, 2005: 32–37). While hunting, it was strictly forbidden to brag, cheat, swear, or complain about poor prey (Butanaev, 1996: 27; Erdenebold, 2012: 114). Boasting, dissatisfaction with prey, excessive greed and cruelty were severely punished by forest deities (Yakutian “Baianai”, Mongolian “Manuukhai”, etc.), who deprived the hunter of their mercy.

Verbal restraints were associated with many hunted animals. When people were going to hunt them, it was customary to hide their intentions. Therefore, the object of the hunt was not discussed; a method of circumlocution was used in relation to it. Such rules were observed when hunting bear, wolf, wild boar, deer, and some fur animals. Mongols called red deer *turag* (‘raven’), fox – *malgai*

(‘hat’), wild boar – *tugdger* (‘humpbacked’) (Vyatkina, 1960: 171), wolf – *tengeriyn amtan/nokhoi* (‘creature of the sky/dog’) (Lkhagvaseren, 2013: 146). They believed that a bear, wild boar, and wolf had “earth ear”, that is, they were able to hear conversations at a great distance, and deer had clairvoyance, “The one who intends to kill me – let him not live to old age; the one who comes to listen to me – let him gain longevity” (Galdanova, 1987: 39). Verbal restrictions were often accompanied by secrecy of action: in order not to frighten away hunting luck, the Yakuts removed the skin from the killed fox at night, after everyone fell asleep, so no one could see this (Yakutskiyemy, 2004: 249).

Verbal restrictions associated with natural objects

In the normative culture of nomads, it was strictly forbidden to mention the names of sacred objects and true intentions and goals in certain places out loud. Compliance with these rules was especially important while traveling. The measures for protecting travelers from dangers include a prohibition on saying the “name” of a natural object aloud, be it a river or a mountain pass. According to the beliefs of the carriers of traditional culture, the lord-spirits of such places may have bad tempers and harm the travelers if they provoke their anger. One such awe-inspiring natural object is the Shurgantu Ridge in Mongolia with the “fierce” Mount Khutsa: “If anyone dares to pronounce the name of the ridge or the mountain, he has perished: either he will be struck with thunder, or thieves will steal from him, or he will get sick” (Zhamtsarano, 2001: 181). Difficulties in crossing require special measures in respect of the Kerulen River, which according to the local residents is related to the Tola River by the ties of kinship. It is considered the older brother; therefore, it is forbidden to name the Tola River before crossing the Kerulen River: “The Kerulen will be offended that they prefer its younger brother Tolu” (Ibid.: 183).

Circumlocution was also a precautionary measure. The tradition of referring to majestic natural objects in the following verbal forms is observed everywhere in the Turko-Mongol environment: “Grandmother”, “Mother”, “Dear one” (Buryat, Mongol *Khairkhan*; Turkic *Kairakan*). Among the Buryats, travelers who stop at the river bank will not say that they will cross the river tomorrow. There is a special expression for that: “Tomorrow we will try to ask our grandmother to get there” (Batorov, (s.a.): fol. 69).

In the Turko-Mongol world, beliefs concerning the inadmissibility of imperative, arrogant, and—even more so—insulting address to lord-spirits of all natural objects, were stable, since the anger of the spirits of even

insignificant lakes or streams could have had disastrous consequences for people. In the Yakut legend about the lady of the taiga lake Kharyialaakh, an arrogant rich man who came to the lake to fish refused to arrange the ritual meal for “grandmother” (this is what the spirit-lords of the Yakut reservoirs were usually called) and insulted the spirit of the lake with the following words: “People call it ‘grandmother’. That is a pity; they started to call every little lake ‘grandmother’. Cannot it really give away all the rubbish that lives in its waters?” The rich man swore, threatened to turn the lake inside out with a net, not leave a single frog in it, etc. Everyone who participated in the fishing disliked his speeches. As a punishment, the rich man did not catch a single fish, lost his seine, carts, and barely returned home alive (Yakutskiyemy mify, 2004: 289–302).

People treated high mountain peaks, large rivers and lakes, and deserts with special reverence, which was traditionally expressed in praise, hymn-like songs, and sacrifices. At the same time, the observance of silence was an expression of respect in sacred places. When a person was near sacred rivers, mountains, and lakes, he was not supposed to make noise, speak loudly, or shout. For example, even today people try to keep quiet on the banks of the largest Siberian river, the Lena.

The majestic Gobi Desert was an especially awe-inspiring natural object. Unusual phenomena typical of desert regions, such as mirages or sandstorms, contributed to the emergence of the image of a mysterious place hostile to man, which the Mongols called the Land of Witches. In the Gobi, often only the guides knew where the next rest-stop would be, and usually they tended to avoid sharing this information out loud with their companions. According to the beliefs of the Mongols living in the Gobi, the desert is inhabited by evil spirits who can learn from people’s conversations where they are going to spend the night, and harm the travelers. This is how one of the members of N. Roerich’s expedition described a similar situation: “What a misfortune—the desert heard about us. By the evening a whirlwind had arisen; it turns out that we ourselves are to blame for this: we loudly pronounced the name of the stopping-place and thus, in the opinion of the Mongol caravaners, alerted the evil forces of the desert. They can locate the whereabouts of travelers and send any misfortune. Nobody should know about the stopping-places except for the caravaners” (Ryabinin, 1996: 75). The travel notes of K.N. Ryabinin also mention the inaccuracy of the maps made by the Mongol caravaners, and the absence of important topographic points (mountains, passes, roads, etc.) therein, which was explained by the same fear of revealing oneself on the way before the spirits of the desert, “...much data on the maps is incorrect probably because the Mongols shrink from pronouncing the names of particular localities, in order to avoid (in

their opinion) misfortunes for travelers after mentioning the name; since ‘the desert hears’ and thus learns about the location of the caravan” (Ibid: 80). There are many examples confirming the relevance of such views. In general, it probably makes sense to speak about such a phenomenon as the “language of the traveler” with a typical feature of widely using conventional names (Sagalaev, Oktyabrskaya, 1990: 155).

Pronouncing the names of the lords of the sacred places without good reason is extremely dangerous from the magical point of view, since it may bring harm to the household and to the person who bothered the spirits without good reason (Zhukovskaya, 1988: 98). In the Buryat tradition, the names of deities, spirits, and even epic heroes may be pronounced only during the ritual addressed to higher powers. Small sacrifice of food and drink should be offered to the deities and spirits: “Without a drink, forbidden names cannot be pronounced out loud” (FMA*, 2004, G.V. Baskaev, born in 1937: Baitog Ekhirit-Bulagatsky District, Irkutsk Region).

Restrictions on noisy behavior

In the traditions of all peoples of Siberia, it was strictly forbidden to behave noisily or call someone by name loudly, especially after dark, since it was believed that any loud sounds made by a person could attract the attention of evil spirits, who would harm the person, his family, and household. This applied also to all spirits of disease: they had particularly keen hearing, and tracked down the whereabouts of people by focusing on the various sounds of human habitation. The Yakuts believed that the spirit of smallpox listened to the barking of dogs, the mooing of cows, the sound of an axe, or the creak of sleigh, and comes to people (Yakutskiyemy mify, 2004: 321). Fleeing from epidemics, people hid in the forest trying to keep silent—they talked in whispers, got rid of dogs, did not let cattle out to pasture, and carried hay and firewood at night (Ibid.).

According to the beliefs of the Buryats, the spirits of disease cannot stand noise. Therefore, in case of epidemic diseases, silence should have been observed. The Buryats represented the *zayans* or *ezhins* (lord-spirits) of some diseases that cause fever as very powerful spirits, who ride in black carts drawn by black horses; one half of their face is black and the other is white. They travel around the uluses and spread deadly diseases. Traditionally, during an epidemic, the Buryats performed propitiatory rituals dedicated only to the *ezhins* of these diseases (they did not perform these rituals in relation to the spirits of other diseases). The

*Field materials of the author.

Buryats spoke to the spirits through a black shaman. “During the ceremony, people spoke quietly by whispering, and they pronounced the words of prayer also in a whisper, since the spirits of these diseases do not like loud talk. The spirits were addressed in the following way:

‘Shibenzhi kheleshin Those who speak in whispers
Shimkhelzhi ideshin... Those who eat with pinches’”

(Khangalov, 1958: 456).

According to popular beliefs, good deities also love silence. The Yakuts believed that goddess Aiyysyt (the protectress of women in labor and newborns) is invisibly present during childbirth, assists the woman in labor, and remains in the house where the child was born for three more days. At this time, people were supposed to speak only in whispers, to walk quietly, not to make loud knocks, and not to quarrel. Otherwise, the goddess could get angry, abandon the woman in labor, and leave the newborn without her favor (Sleptsov, 1989: 93). The Buryats shared similar views. They believed that noisy behavior and loud sounds could frighten the deity who protects children and domestic animals: “The Agi Buryats said to the children: ‘Do not close the door too loudly, you will scare the zayash’. Ongon Emegelzhe Zayaashi is the protectress of children and cattle” (Gombozhapov, 2006: 52, 53).

According to legend, animals, birds and other creatures, from which individual tribes and clans originated, enjoyed special respect among the nomads. Men manifested respectful attitudes to the mythical ancestor, particularly the bird, by keeping silent, while women, in addition to special behavior, revealed this attitude in the tradition of wearing obligatory elements of clothing, in which the daughter-in-law had to show herself to her father-in-law and other relatives of her husband. This is an elegant sleeveless jacket (*uuzha*, *khubaikhi*, *deglee*, *tsegedek*, *tsegdk*) among the Mongolian peoples (Badmaeva, 1987: 64–65; Sharaeva, 2011: 124); *sigedek* among the Khakas people (Butanaev, 1996: 76), and *tangalai* fur coat among the Yakuts. “If daughters-in-law of the Engels met a hawk on the way and were not wearing a tangalai, they hid from the hawk in a ravine, and thus they observed the custom of ‘kiyiittii’. Even men do not dare to frighten the hawk; they do not speak loudly, speak only in whispers, and do not pronounce its name...” (Predaniya..., 1995: 189–190).

Restrictions regarding song performance

In the culture of nomads, musical performance and song performance belong to the realm of the sacred, connecting the earthly world of humans with the other world. Rhymed speech and music acted as a kind of

language through which people communicated with the inhabitants of the other world. According to the beliefs of the Buryats, diseases could manifest themselves in a song (songs of the *zayans* (Mikhailov, 1987: 55)). The song was believed to heal the disease (here it is appropriate to mention the art of Yakut singers—smallpox charmers (Gurvich, 1977: 184–185)). The supernatural power of song performance explains the logic of restrictions in that area. For example, in Tuvan culture, women are prohibited from “singing with their throats”, otherwise her relatives will be harmed (FMA, 2015, C.A. Kara-ool, Ulan-Ude). The Khakas people prohibited crooning to oneself, since the devil hears a crooning person through forty hills; the crooning person has no happiness (Butanaev, 2003: 34). In many cases, these restrictions were local. Among the Buryats, the ban on performance of songs was observed in the Osinsky District of the Irkutsk Region. That is the location of the village of Ulei, where dwelled the souls of 330 girls who committed suicide or died tragically, according to the legends; all of them used to be the best singers during their lifetimes. This host of spirits, headed by the famous beauty and singer Burzhuutkhai-duukhei (Nebesnaya deva-lebed, 1992: 285–287), is interested in multiplying its community; therefore, the ban on performing songs in this area is still relevant, especially after dark.

Rules and prohibitions associated with the concept of happiness/goodness

Restraint in manifestation of emotions is justified not only by the fear evoked in people by harsh nature, but also by the fear of losing happiness. N.L. Zhukovskaya (1988: 86–100) described the category of “happiness/goodness” in the culture of the Mongols in detail. According to her research, the nomads were convinced that it was very difficult to acquire and preserve goodness, and it was easy to lose it if they did not live according to the rules. Emotional expression of joy could soon be replaced by sadness, as evidenced by one of the Mongolian sayings: “He who has excessive fun, cries afterwards”. Therefore, there is a whole system of restrictions and prohibitions in the culture of the Mongols, which protects happiness from possible accidental or deliberate encroachments. Happiness/goodness resembles an elusive “bluebird”, which could be scared away by anything. As Zhukovskaya aptly noted, grace is a very delicate substance.

Many social and individual rituals pursued the goal of soliciting happiness and well-being from higher powers. Large collective prayers in the tradition of the Turko-Mongols were the spring-summer *tailgans* (Buryats) (Dashieva, 2001), *ova taklhn*, *obo takhil*, *balind mörgökh*, *deer mörgökh* (Kalmyks, Oirats of

Mongolia, Khalkha Mongols, Buryats) (Bakaeva, 2003: 208; Lkhagvasuren, 2013: 141, 142; Erdenebold, 2012: 39–41), and *taiyg* (Khakas) (Butanaev, 1996: 179), which were attended by the members of the same clan, tribe, or tribal union. R.S. Merdygeev described in detail the restrictions and prohibitions that Buryat families had to observe after the *tailgan* was carried out: “After the last *tailgan* is completed, the household keeps a strict three-day ban *khoryul*. During this *khoryul*, absolutely nothing can be given to an outsider, one may not shout in the pound, beat or scold the cattle, or slam the gates hard. Otherwise, if these rules are not observed by the owners, *khishyk* (‘happiness’) that has been just received by entreating and which has not yet managed to move into the household could go to a stranger along with the object that was given away; or if dead silence is not observed and the cattle are not treated with love, ‘*khalyakha*’ may slip away (that is, separate) from the household. Therefore, *khishyk* is, as it were, a living and sensitive being” (Merdygeev, 1928: 146).

Verbal restrictions in the area of marriage and family relations to the greatest extent regulated the relationships between the representatives of the family and clan with their new members—daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, or children. The most common example is the custom of avoiding *kinit* (Yakut), or *seergkhe* (Buryat) in marriage and family relations, expressed by the prohibition imposed on the daughter-in-law to pronounce the names of the husband’s father and his close relatives, especially of the more elderly*. The older relatives usually included those in relation to which she performed a special ritual of veneration during the marriage ceremony: father-in-law, mother-in-law, their brothers, as well as elder brothers and sisters of her husband. The daughter-in-law had to use the method of circumlocution *bai syos* (Turkic). The Turks of Southern Siberia even developed a special language (*paila*), which was used by women (Sagalaev, Oktyabrskaya, 1990: 151). It has been suggested that in social relations, the principle of circumlocution acts as a universal way of semantically marking situations of the “friend or foe” type (Ibid.: 154).

In the folklore of the Turko-Mongol peoples, there is a widespread plot about resourcefulness of the daughter-in-law, who in a difficult situation (wolves’ attack of a herd of cows and coincidence of the names of the father-in-law and his sons with the names of animals and natural objects—stream and bush, where this happened) was able to quickly inform the family members about what happened using a circumlocution. Notably, the custom of avoidance in different societies of the Turko-Mongol world has its own features. For example, among the Khakas people, it was observed only in relation to

those wives of the father-in-law whose official status was secured by the norms of traditional marriage, and did not apply to the third wife, “because this life-partner was not brought to worship the Sun and the Moon” (Butanaev, Mongush, 2005: 41). Violation of the custom of circumlocution was allowed only in case of complicated child delivery. In this case, the woman in labor directly addressed her husband’s sisters, his mother, and father by name, asking for help. After a successful birth, the daughter-in-law gave her husband’s sister a dress as a sign of gratitude (Ibid.: 140).

The fear of violating the ban on pronouncing the names of husband’s relatives appears in the folklore plot of the Kalmyks in a mother’s special instruction to her daughter-brid. The mother sewed a stone into her hem, instructing her to be silent until the hem wore out and the stone fell out. In this way, the mother tried to help her daughter adapt to her husband’s family (Sharaeva, 2011: 130). In our opinion, this plot is associated with the ritual, widespread among the Turko-Mongol peoples of Inner Asia in the past, in which a stone played a special role. In the wedding traditions of the Mongols, it is used as a symbolic object that secures the bride in a new place of residence, in a new family. At the end of the wedding celebration in the groom’s house, the bride’s mother put a stone and several seeds on the hem of her daughter’s dress, accompanying her actions with good wishes: “Be more beautiful than gold, be heavier than a stone” (Ochir, Galdanova, 1992: 47). During this ceremony, the bride sat down and was not supposed to get up until her parents left. Rituals with a stone are observed in the traditions of various Mongolian peoples—the Khalkha, Oirats, and Altai Uryankhai (Vyatkina, 1960: 211; Ochir, Galdanova, 1988: 117; 1992: 47; Lkhagvasuren, 2013: 128).

Verbal restrictions were accompanied by other prohibitions: at first, in a new house, and sometimes throughout her life, the daughter-in-law should not pass dishes with tea or food into the hands of her father-in-law, treat him to tobacco, touch his things, or ride his horse. Among the Urats, when starting her duties as the hostess of the yurt after the wedding, the daughter-in-law passed a cup of tea to her father-in-law through a third person (Naranbat, 1992: 70), while among the Kalmyks, at first she did not even take part in family meals (Sharaeva, 2011: 130).

Prevention of sexual relations between the father-in-law and his daughter-in-law and of her close relationships with other relatives of the husband on the ascending line explains the taboos that the daughter-in-law had to observe (Sieroszewski, 1993: 549; Petri, 1925: 30). Any deviation from the norms of behavior was regarded by the Buryats as a sin (*seer*). This concept was most fully described by B.E. Petri: “To sin (for the Buryats) means to incur the wrath of the gods and all the consequences of their anger and revenge—diseases, misfortunes, loss

*Similar prohibitions were observed by the son-in-law in relation to wife’s relatives.

of livestock, crop failure, unsuccessful hunting, damage to things, etc. To sin is to violate ancient traditions and thus cause displeasure among the old people who guard them, and maybe even the ancestors; to sin is to commit an offense against society and the clan and thereby cause ridicule from those around” (1924: 24–25). Analyzing the relationship between the father-in-law and daughter-in-law in Buryat society, Petri observed that “any violation of prohibitions in relation to khadym [father-in-law] will be punished by deities, whose images [ongons] hang in his yurt” (1925: 26). As we can see, sin is not connected with morality, and the only thing that kept a person from falling into sin was fear of nature personified in numerous deities and ancestral spirits.

A number of requirements restricting freedom of expression were imposed on children. They were forbidden to speak loudly or laugh in the presence of adults, or interrupt the conversation of those who were older; adults were not supposed to be called by name, but by the name of parents (grandmothers, grandfathers) of a child they knew (Butanaev, Mongush, 2005: 157; Basaeva, 1980: 105). All these rules embedded in children respect for those who were elder and for nature.

Verbal restrictions were also present in funeral rituals. For example, the prohibition on pronouncing the name of the deceased is known (Potapov, 1969: 381). However, the occasional nature of such events in the life of society makes it possible to exclude them from the list of the most relevant normative rules in everyday life.

Verbal restrictions on persons in power

In the 19th century, the verbal restrictions observed by the newlyweds in an expanded social group spread to the representatives of the nobility among the Mongols. For example, it was not customary to pronounce the names of the Khoshun and Aimag noyons, Khan, and clergy (Vyatkina, 1960: 237). According to G.N. Potanin, the custom of not calling one’s noyon by name was associated with the fear of harm inflicted on the one who uttered it: “The noyon will not be offended, but it will be bad for the person who pronounced the name of the noyon...” (1883: 131–132). All these phobias regarding those in power might have resulted from the nature of supreme power in nomadic communities, in which the ruler acted as the chosen one of the Sky and the owner of the charisma and power of the Sky, capable of ensuring the prosperity of his people and state. In the period of Genghis Khan, the ideological justification of power became much more sophisticated and was filled with new concepts, symbols, and cults (Skrynnikova, 1997). Many of these, such as the idea of charisma or the cult of Genghis Khan, retained their relevance in the Mongol society of the 19th century. With such attitudes to power, taking the names of the

rulers in vain could have been tantamount to pronouncing the names of deities and sacred objects of nature, which, as mentioned above, incurred various misfortunes.

Conclusions

Verbal restrictions play an important role in social communication and communication with nature in the nomadic culture of the Turko-Mongol peoples of Inner Asia and Siberia. These restrictions are expressed most often by a method of circumlocution, quiet speech, or silence. We should emphasize a special meaning for the spoken word in the cultures with few literate people. For centuries, the spoken word remained the main means of preserving and transmitting information, and a way of learning and mastering the world. Up to the present, the importance of the ritual function of language survives in the nomadic culture, which imposes great responsibility on a person for each spoken word. Thoughtless empty chatter is reproached in nomadic society.

The study of the phenomenon of verbal restrictions in the culture of the nomads living in Inner Asia has shown that the nomadic society functioned in a strict framework of normative traditions. The slightest deviation from these traditions could lead to tragic consequences. Verbal restrictions in communicating with nature and the unreal world are justified by fear—a natural reaction, which evolved in the harsh natural environment and climate of Inner Asia. The custom of avoidance (the most common example of implementing verbal restrictions in public relations), aimed at preventing unwanted forms of communication between the members of society, was supported by the fear of causing the anger of nature in the person of deities and spirits. A sophisticated and rigid system of rules and regulations in fact resulted from the experience gained in the process of human adaptation to harsh natural conditions of the region.

The narrow framework of normative behavior could have determined the important role of non-linguistic context in nomadic culture. Information richness is inherent in the entire space occupied by the nomads (Allsen, 1996; Bawden, 1958); their object environment, traditional outfit, and dwelling are deeply symbolic (Maidar, Darsuren, 1976; Wasilewski, 1976; Zhukovskaya, 1988; Sodnompilova, 2005).

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