

## ALCOHOL AS A UNIFYING FORCE IN THE SHAMANIC COMMUNITY: NANAI CASE STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

The issue raised in the present article is shamanists' ideas about why there should be unity in drinking in the shamanic community. In the framework of the shamanic worldview, each act of drinking, not only ritual acts but also everyday acts, can comprise the features of worshipping the spirits and making an offering to them. Hence there is the need to make an offering during any domestic drinking, and an obligation to share the drink with everyone present. From the shamanic perspective, by rejecting alcohol a person demonstrates a refusal to subordinate him or herself to the spirits, which can cause problems.

KEYWORDS: Nanai culture • shamanism • alcohol in ritual praxis • offering

Alcohol consumption by the indigenous population of Siberia is mainly examined as a social phenomenon and response to life crises, for example, in the context of low standards of living, unemployment, disorientation, dissociation of the population, closure of cultural establishments, etc. (Leete 2005; Pivneva 2005; Ivashchenko 2011; Loginov et al. 2014). Other researchers turn to the ritual use of alcohol and describe in detail alcohol related ritual situations, referring much less to their social aspect (Gaer 1991; Dalles 2015; 2017). The central question of the present paper concerns the interdependence of social and religious factors in using alcohol in a Nanai shamanic community, and is mainly limited to discovering the reasons for this tradition, which strictly enforces all members of a group to participate in drinking. From the very beginning, it is important to emphasise that in the present paper we are not dealing with the topic of alcoholism: during rituals, alcohol is mainly consumed in small amounts. Sometimes just a sip, lubricating the lips, or a few drops of alcohol on the head is considered sufficient for ritual purposes when joining the drinking group.

Since consuming alcohol in rituals deals with the sphere of belief, it will be important to consider the views of the bearers of these beliefs. It will be necessary to find out what, according to their interpretation, happens to those who bypass the rule of unity in drinking. If we consider who, according to the shamanic view, compels people to follow this rule, we will be closer to understanding the nature of such coercion. We will also refer to the shamanists' ideas about mysterious mechanisms that unify groups who

are consuming alcohol, and manifest themselves in the absence of a strict relationship between intoxication and the amount of alcohol consumed. Identifying substances that can sublimate alcohol in the context of shamanic practice will reveal the function of alcohol in rituals and explain the nature of the pressure for unified alcohol consumption. It would also help us to contemplate its innermost essence and come closer to understanding the emic point of view on the necessity of compulsory solidarity in consuming alcohol.

#### THE COMPULSORY SOLIDARITY OF SOCIAL DRINKING

Let us define how, among the Nanai, this manifests itself as the universal feature of any meal with alcohol, an indispensable precondition involving all the people present. Regardless of what reasons one might have, no one can ever refuse and must at least take a sip or a taste from a glass of vodka. In 2010, I had the chance to observe how one after another people were sipping vodka from the same glass, which had previously been offered to the spirits. One of the guests referred to his non-shamanic religious views and refused to take any vodka. Nobody insisted, but several minutes later, one of the hosts suddenly approached that person from behind and poured the contents of the glass over his head.

Lev Yakovlevich Shternberg (1933: 91), who watched Nanai meals in 1910, reported another surprising detail of the same kind:

If you offered the host a glass of vodka, he would never drink it alone. He would only take a sip, and then that glass would pass from one person to another, going to all those who were present in the house, even if there were dozens of them, not excepting children and even babies.

A century later, I also saw how babies were involved in the use of alcohol. As babies could not drink, people dropped some vodka onto the heads of each of them.

Consuming alcohol is also an indispensable component of meeting guests. It seems that the necessity of a small feast with alcohol, which follows the appearance of a guest, can be explained by the rules of hospitality, but according to the custom it is the guest who has to bring alcohol and treat the hosts. The fact that evading alcohol (even a sip) is not acceptable under any circumstances would be difficult to interpret as only a need to comply with the rules of etiquette. Such compulsory solidarity in social drinking cannot be explained just as the hospitality of the hosts, and obviously it is not of a social nature. However, it would be possible to clarify this issue by tracing the consequences of evasion in the group.

#### THE RESULTS OF AVOIDING ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

Explaining the expediency of drinking solidarity, shamanists affirm that by serving people like this, they avoid the risk of *huni*, that is, sudden serious special illness or even death, which otherwise inevitably overtakes those who did not taste alcohol (or in other cases a dish from the table). The informants willingly told me some stories

that illustrate how this or that person neglected this custom and then suddenly contracted a serious illness *huni* that could only be fixed by drinking (or eating) something appropriate. Such illness is perceived as punishment sent by the host's spirits to those households or guests who neglected to drink. Thus, we have come to the shamanic idea about the *spiritual* roots of compulsory solidarity in social drinking. In due time this circumstance was noticed by Shternberg (1933: 91), who also wrote that hospitality (giving alcohol and food to each guest) "is more than just social etiquette or even than just having kind feelings for other people. Behind this custom there is a much more powerful motive: it is a religious requirement." Shternberg (*ibid.*: 90) ascribes this custom to the impossibility of omitting the necessary gratitude to the gods, because those gods feed people and care about their wellbeing. However, the most traditional of my informants, Nanai shamanists, on the contrary, consider this a form of the usual offering. To clarify that, it would be better to swap the offering's addressee and recipient. It is not the spirits who send treats to people and who wait for people to be grateful and not refuse to accept the treat. Shamanists believe that by drinking alcohol people actually become a kind of channel through which alcohol is delivered to the spirits, while they themselves become involved in communication with those spirits. Not only is the presence of alcohol important, but also people's readiness to offer it. There is another point connected with this. Shternberg (*ibid.*) rightly pointed out that "those gods who feed people" during the feast are "mostly the clan gods" of the hosts. One can add that those who come to visit the members of the other clans are obliged to bring alcohol to treat the hosts and feed their clan spirits. If the observance of customs was regulated by social norms a guest who breaks the custom must be punished. However, if we reason about it in the context of the social concept, everything happens in an illogical way. It is not the guest, but the hosts who are supposed to be cruelly punished by dissatisfied spirits. My informant R. B. once disregarded that custom, because her acquaintance M. E., whom she wanted to visit, breast-fed her baby and obviously could not drink. However, the situation developed contrary to any rational process. Right after she came into the house, M. E. suddenly felt ill ("vomiting and diarrhoea started right there"). R. A. explained, "The *sewen* [M. E.'s clan spirit, a figurine of whom was placed on M. E.'s garter] was watchful! With no alcohol [came the guest]!" R. A. ran shopping for a bottle of vodka, the friends drank a bit, and everything became calm. (FM 2012) The punishment of the host, who seems to be innocent, shamanists explain by the fact that the spirits have easier access to members of their own kin than to other people. The nature of that punishment (sudden illness and equally rapid healing) is also, in the eyes of shamanists, proof of the spiritual nature of the events that happen when spirits force people to use alcohol. As alcohol is not just a treat in the eyes of shamanists, but primarily an offering, this explains the rigidity of the custom of total participation in drinking. If the initiative to involve the entire group in drinking alcohol came from people, some cases of mitigations and apologies would be possible. Since the requirement of participation comes from the spirits, then, as with any other kind of offering, evasion becomes dangerous and has unpredictable consequences. Thus, the agents of coercion to unity are, according to the shamans' opinion, the spirits. They send disease *huni* to those who ignore the requirements of the offering.

## INTOXICATION DETACHED FROM ALCOHOL

A group's participation in a meal is demanded not only by the will of the spirits, as shamanists believe, but also by those special properties of the state of intoxication that can be transmitted from one member of the group to another and which do not always depend on the amount of alcohol consumed. The lack of a strict conditionality of intoxication by amount of alcohol consumed is, in the eyes of the shamanists, another circumstance that proves the involvement in drinking of spirits, intermediaries between the substance (alcohol) and the person who consumes it. Shamanists believe that people can share intoxication with spirits, and therefore, in certain cases, after drinking very little alcohol a person can lose control of him- or herself. I have been told: "I just rub my lips [with vodka], and for me it is enough, I become drunk" (FM 2007, M. B.) or "even if I drink very little, I can fall asleep on my feet" (FM 2007, I. T.). In other situations, a person drinks a lot without becoming drunk because their intoxication is considered to pass on to the spirits. A Nanai shaman told Shternberg (1927: 9):

When I am eating *sugdu* [offering] or drinking pig's blood [...], it is not actually me who is eating and drinking but my *ayami* [spirit helper] [...]. Have you ever seen a shaman at big commemoration parties? How can a human drink so much? It is the *ayami* who drinks it all.

The state of intoxication is perceived as a connection with the spirits, and since such a connection can be established for a variety of reasons, shamanists consider it natural to become drunk without alcohol, just by means of penetrating the spiritual world and connecting to the spirits. Thus, shaman M. S. affirms that when she enters the world beyond, she can see "a canyon, a mountain, a river with the purest water", and when she gets there, she becomes drunk. Therefore, as she assured me, there is no necessity for her to drink alcohol, there are other means of intoxication. (FM 2012) In the Nanai clan a bundle with a knife wrapped in it was kept and passed from one generation to the next. The clansmen remembered that once one of them murdered another person with that very knife. They considered that while the bundle remained "tightly, firmly twisted round, all the people in the family would be healthy." However, the rope, which tied the bundle, one day, got weaker, and people, as they explained, became "like drunk ones". Even without vodka, they became as if intoxicated and started fighting and quarrelling with each other. (FM 1994, M. T.) Shamanists considered that the spirit, which was hidden in the bundle, got out and started influencing people, giving them alcohol-like intoxication with no real alcohol.

The relative independence of intoxication from alcohol also manifests itself in the situations of passing intoxication from one person to another and even when those who did not drink at all become intoxicated. The spouses N. B. and M. G. came with their new-born baby to a friend right at the time of a meal with vodka. As M. G. was breast feeding the baby, she refused to drink. Among the guests, there was an old shaman who had already drunk a lot. N. B. (FM 1993) said the following about it.

My wife finished breast feeding the baby and tried to get up but could not. She became so drunk that she was not able to remain on her feet. In contrast the shaman became completely sober, as if he had not drunk at all. My wife asked him, "Uncle, why have you done it so with me that I have become drunk? I am breast feeding!"

The old man just laughed. Because she was drunk, she went to bed, but the old man was sitting. After a while, he became drunk again. He did not drink anything else; he became drunk on his own! The very same moment my wife got up entirely sober, as if nothing happened.

Not every shaman can move intoxication from one person to another, only those who have special spirits helpers. The famous shaman Ch. O., as people remember, was able to make an entire group of people drunk without drinking alcohol. If somewhere nearby a group of people drank vodka, that shaman 'stole' the intoxication from those people and gave it to his own company. As a result, his company became drunk without drinking, while the other people suddenly sobered up. As N. G. explained, the shaman did it "with help of his spirit mouse". (FM 1991)

Transferring intoxication from one group to another and receiving intoxication from alcohol at a distance were special shamanic means of making people drunk without alcohol. People remember shaman P. B., who could turn water into vodka with help of his spirit snake. Being in a boat with some fishermen, P. B. scooped up water from the river with a pot. Then he himself drank it and gave it to other people. "Water turned into pure vodka!" (FM 1991, N. B.) I had a chance to work for several field seasons with shaman M. P., who inherited the same spirit snake. Being scared of communication with such a spirit, she refused to turn water into vodka. The spirit took revenge on her for it and cruelly tormented her. Several witnesses assured me that they saw with their own eyes that when she started dancing during her shamanic séances "two snakes came out of the corners of her mouth; their heads were up and bodies down... They looked like real snakes with red mouths." She herself explained it, that painful for her phenomenon resulted from her refusal to turn water into vodka. According to shaman N. B.'s words, M. P. did not accomplish the mission given to her, and "that is why snakes appeared out of her mouth." She refused because "it was dangerous to be in touch with such spirits. It is the most dangerous thing! Such spirit can kill its own host, if she did something wrong. Those 'snakes' frightened her, coming out of her mouth." (FM 1991, N. B.)

The idea of relative independence of intoxication from any substance, which, apparently, has to make this intoxication, is connected to the idea that "alcohol is a liquid *sewen* [a liquid spirit]" (Samar 2003: 98) or, in other words, alcohol is a *sewen* materialised in liquid. Alcohol is believed to be a temporarily dwelling for spirits, similar to ritual sculptures and other receptacles for spirits. In the same way as with different figures-dwellings, spirits can be present in them only temporarily, so from time to time they can be 'empty'. In the same way they can also change their dwelling and move for a time to some other place. And so, again in a similar way, people's bodies can become temporary dwellings for spirit alcohol.

As spirits are believed to participate in each act of drinking, those people who drink together are integrated, as those who drink together are integrated with the spirits. While drinking, the spiritual barriers that usually isolate the spiritual worlds of different people disappear, and all the people who drink together, become spiritually joined. That is why shamanists consider that when drinking, companions start to penetrate each other's minds against their will. Some begin inevitably to apprehend their drinking companion's thoughts while others take their companions' sicknesses upon themselves. This happens because within the shamanic context, drinking is a phenomenon of a spiritual nature.

## THE THIRST OF INVISIBLE DRINKING COMPANIONS

Nanai shamanists consider that the spirits crave alcohol and envy anyone who drinks it. M. G. kept wooden figurines of her shamanic spirits under her bed and affirmed that, smelling alcohol, those figurines began stirring on their own. "When people neglect to share vodka with them, they think: 'All the people are drinking, why are we not?'" (FM 1992, M. G.) As people believe it is unsafe to annoy the spirits, each time before drinking they either put a small glass of vodka on the floor, or sprinkle a little vodka into the air as if inviting spirits to join in the drinking. Shamanists convinced me that on some rare cases it is possible to notice that the spirits drink the alcohol offered to them. A. K. heard smacking and other special sounds produced by spirits when they were drinking (FM 1991). G. U., a shaman's daughter, told me that before her mother starts a ritual, she usually pours an equal quantity of vodka into three glasses and puts them on the floor for the spirits. After the ritual is finished, she can sometimes see that the quantity of vodka in the middle glass has noticeably diminished. (FM 1992)

Shamanists believe that most of the time spirits hover around and only occasionally visit their figurines, so sometimes nothing bad happens if people have not offered them alcohol. However, nobody knows where a spirit will come from or when it will return to its figurine, "and if it comes and finds that no treat has been prepared for it, it would strike its host cruelly" (FM 1991, N. B.). N. B. once drank with friends and returned home with a bottle. He said (FM 1991):

I sat at the table, opened the bottle, poured some for myself, but I did not put anything in the corner [for the spirits]. I drank and went to bed. At night, it hit me so hard! I was shaking! However, what could I do? I have already drank the entire bottle dry, and there was nothing left. [...] My wife ran to the neighbours. [...] She returned, put [a glass of vodka in the corner for spirits], and I became well again right there, though I felt as if my entire body had been beaten, as if someone had beaten me with a stick. Nevertheless, in the morning I got up and went to work safe and sound. It was like water off a duck's back! After such an illness!

My other informants had similar experiences caused by neglecting to offer alcohol to the spirits: "I forgot to put vodka in the corner, and I was on the verge of death, my heart started working weakly and I lost consciousness" (FM 2014, Z. B.).

## ALCOHOL FOR CARRYING OUT THE WILL OF THE SPIRITS

Some shamans confessed that after drinking (sometimes after swallowing only a sip), they feel connected to the spirits and that they are acting according not to their own, but to the spirits', will.

When I am drunk, I do not know anything about what happens in this condition [...]. Something other than my own personality controls me at the time. There is someone else who governs me. It is kind of a different and foreign power! (FM 2012, M. S.)

Drinking alcohol attracts spirit helpers, providing them with the drunk person's body as an instrument by which the spirits act among the people on their own, not controlled by human will.

When I am drunk, I do not recognise anything around me. There is kind of a hole, where I fall and am separated from my personality. Probably after I am drunk, I go into a trance. [In normal conditions] I have my time, but then [after drinking] everything is over, I do not exist anymore. I do not remember anything; I remember nothing! There is kind of a hole, and I go into it. Then the information is coming [through me]. Before I could not understand it, but now I know what is going on with me. I am going onto the astral plane! [My spirits] torment me. Actually, it happens rarely that I get drunk. However, sometimes it is obviously necessary [...]. It is hard for me [...]. There is a kind of a hole, and I go somewhere [...]. After I drink, I sometimes lose consciousness [...]. I do not remember anything. I know that I dash aside somewhere [...]. It would be nice to remember! It happens very seldom that I remember something, but usually I do not remember anything. I even do not realise where I was. (FM 2012, M. S.)

As the condition caused by communication with the spirits is considered similar to alcohol intoxication, both shamans and non-shamans who are intoxicated and who have merged with the spirits receive the short-term capacity for clairvoyance, glossolalia or a spiritually infusion bent on aggression, etc. To predict the future, A. O. poured water into a glass and looked into it, assuring me that his spirit 'girl' would whisper all the necessary information into his ear (FM 1982). After tasting some vodka shaman M. S. begins to talk in Chinese, despite the fact that in her normal condition she does not know a single word of Chinese: "At that time I have a memory blackout. I do not exist; someone else is speaking instead of me [...]. I never knew Chinese; I do not know a word in Chinese." (FM 2012)

Shamanists also explain an inclination to quarrelling and fighting, which sometimes appears under intoxication, as joining with particular aggressive spirits called *ochiki*. As *ochiki* are believed to have a passion for provoking people to fight, they first intentionally inspire people with wish to drink alcohol. Then they join the drunk person and satisfy their passion by instilling in that person the desire to quarrel and fight; and it is not only *ochiki* who are believed to inspire the wish to fight. Thus, as shaman T. B. affirms, if a shaman's spirits helpers get tired of their aged owner and are starting to want him or her dead (FM 1992) they would first provoke their owner to drink, then to quarrel and fight with a knife, and then into a situation where he or she is murdered.

Shamans believe it to be unsafe to trust the will of spirits. Therefore, it is unacceptable for shamans to drink large quantities of alcohol. However, contact with spirits is needed, so shamans do not do anything without alcohol. However, using alcohol, especially during shamanic séances, was necessarily limited; otherwise, shamans could lose control while performing rituals and their careless actions could threaten not only them, but also their families. Thus, when drinking, a shaman could risk being unnoticeably harmed by his or her rivals (alien shamans). Knowing this, shamans' relatives observed them so that they did not drink before performing séances. Relatives worried for example that when drunk shamans could mix up the souls with which they were working, and to give alien shamans the souls shadows of their own children, and that

this could result in the children's deaths. For example, shaman T. B. sometimes drank, but very little, because she was always on guard, watching for possible attack from her enemies. As she explained, "if I were drunk, my enemies [alien shamans] would crush me" (FM 1992, T. B.). Shaman O. E. (FM 2000) explained her caution in drinking in the following way: "Did my *baigoan* [rival shaman] promise that he would never attack me, if I were drunk, did he not? When you are drunk you do not know, do not feel anything!"

At the same time, the absolute rejection of alcohol is not possible since it helps to establish contact with the spirits and makes the very fact of implementation of shamanic activity realisable. Being chosen by the spirits, a shaman must communicate with them, "feeding them with sacrifice, and giving them pleasure by offering vodka, tobacco, singing, music, etc." (Lopatin 1922: 258). Using alcohol was so important a condition of shamanic activity that during the anti-alcohol campaign of the 1985–1987 period, when it was not possible to buy alcohol in the Nanai villages, people travelled to distant Khabarovsk and other cities to buy vodka for shamanic rituals in order to avoid the spirits taking revenge on those who ignored the rule of offering them alcohol. Once a married couple stayed overnight at shaman L. B.'s place and asked her to shamanise. Despite the fact that they came to her already drunk, they did not bring any alcohol for L. B.'s spirits. As L. B. said: "they did not have medicine [vodka] with them... Such muddle-headed people! If you came to shamanise, you are meant to bring some vodka. If they got drunk at home, they should also have brought some here!" However, even in such an unfitting and unusual situation, shaman cannot refuse the supplicants a shamanic séance and must shamanise ("it was necessary to feel sorry for those people" – L. B.). The consequences of that unusual ritual were tragic:

A short time afterwards, the husband shot himself with no rational motivation. After his death, the members of his family started dying one after another. First his wife died and then their children. During one year, all the people of that house died one after the other. (FM 1993, L. B.)

It seems possible to interpret the requirement to use alcohol in rituals as a social norm, or at least in the context of traditional belief as a custom aimed at an expression of gratitude to the spirits for their help in healing. However, the shamanists themselves look at it more dramatically. They certainly believe that ritual use of alcohol is a requirement that comes directly from the spirits, not from humans, and due to the rigidity of this stipulation there is no possibility for people to avoid it. Without such an assumption it would be difficult to explain the behaviour of those children who became shamans at an early age and started demanding alcohol even if adults did not teach them this behaviour. M. G.'s relative started shamanising at the age of five:

She began dancing in the shamanic way. At age of five! She screamed "*Heis, heis!*" in a shamanic way and asked for vodka. People poured some vodka onto the top of her head... She danced like an adult shaman. [Spirits] marked her and tormented her from her very infancy. (FM 1992)

One should also take into account the following circumstance. When for some reason ordinary people, non-shamans, have not tasted the alcohol offered to the spirits and fallen sick because of this, their disease *huni* sometimes manifests itself in a form similar

to shamanic disease. For example, being non-shamans, they can involuntarily begin to cry out in a shamanic way (FM 2012, Z. B.). This fact can be considered another proof of the spiritual nature of the wish to drink and use alcohol in the context of shamanic praxis.

#### ALCOHOL AS SUBSTITUTIVE OF SACRIFICIAL BLOOD

The question of what the most important function of alcohol in shamanic praxis is can be clarified if we try to explain what substances can replace it in different situations. According to studies by Vladimir Bogoraz (1991: 140–142), Andrey Shapovalov (2002), Yana Ivashchenko (2010), Yelena Bat'yanova and Mikhail Bronshteyn (2016), and others, the indigenous peoples of Siberia and Far East Russia have used drugs made from natural plants to change their state of consciousness for a long time. They also used these drugs to dilute the purchased alcohol with the aim of saving money. Following the same principle, not because of thrift, but rather because of mercantile aims, the same mixing was done by merchants, who added some drugs (for example fly agaric) into the alcohol to intensify the effect (Ivashchenko 2011: 264). Some indigenous peoples used koumiss, made of mare's milk, for sacred purposes as a low alcohol drink. Fly agaric was considered a delicacy for the spirits. "Shamans who ate it performed magical and ritual songs, communicated with spirits, were transferred to other worlds; under the influence of these hallucinogens fortune tellers fell into a trance, during which they met their spirits advisers" (Elert 2007: 127). Before alcohol became available to the Nanai, they used an infusion of *ledum palustre* as the offering for the spirits. Sometimes even now the Nanai continue to offer this to the spirits or burn dried leaves to fumigate the places of the spirits.

*Ledum palustre* is considered much weaker than alcohol. However, there is another substitution, the most powerful one. It is blood. Nanai shamanists insist that alcohol, just like its substitutes, is a second-order offering only, an *olhon sugdi* ('bloodless offering'); blood is the only basic donation to the spirits, as it always was. Alcohol is only important when it is difficult to get sacrificial animals and because it is relatively cheap and convenient to use. Moreover, the bloodless offering is an innovation, a kind of modernisation of the old and correct custom: "Previously the Nanai made no bloodless offerings at all" (FM 1994, N. B.).

In the literature, one can find a number of references to other Siberian shamans using sacrificial blood in the same way that the Nanai rub their lips with alcohol. For example, there exists a similar custom of joining those who come to a séance, attaching them to sacrificial blood. Thus, Galina Gracheva (1981: 83) wrote that sometimes a Nganasan shaman rubbed a patient with his or her blood. A. V. Olsuf'yev (1896: 114) mentioned that the indigenous peoples of Chukotka rubbed all the participants in a funeral procession with the blood of sacrificial reindeer, etc.

Shamanists explain the interchangeability of blood and alcohol, and the similar practices of use, by the fact that drinking both liquids causes very similar feeling of intoxication.

When people drink fresh blood, they become drunk in the same way as after drinking alcohol, they fall into the same kind of trance... Having drunk fresh blood, people

are under an energetic influence because they receive something fresh and alive right from another living creature, as if they were swallowing someone else's energy. Drinking blood adds one energy to another energy. (FM 2012, E. K.)

Another shaman, M. S., now lives in a city and cannot farm pigs, and because of this has become convinced that she sometimes suffers from an irresistible desire to drink and get drunk. She says that from time to time she must get drunk, because otherwise she feels that she is "becoming demagnetised" and needs to get out of it even in spite of the lack of a sacrificial animal. (FM 2012)

During the sacrificial ceremonies, when the Nanai kill an animal for the spirits, they use special techniques to mix alcohol with sacrificial blood. Thus, just before shamans kill a sacrificial pig, they usually pour some vodka into its ear in order that the pig would shake its ear and spray alcohol around into the air offering vodka to the spirits. They believe that the more actively the sacrificial animal shakes its ear, the more eagerly the spirits will receive alcohol from that ear and the more enthusiastically they will be waiting for the blood of that animal. If an animal does not shake its ear at all, people refrain from killing it because it means that the spirits refuse both the alcohol and the animal's blood. If this animal is killed, its blood is used side by side with alcohol for the entirety of the ritual.

## CONCLUSION

Having taken into consideration the emic idea of drinking as a means of connecting to spirits, we can return to the question posed at the beginning of the paper, the question concerning the roots of compulsory solidarity in social drinking.

It is the spiritual content of drinking that causes, first the strict requirement to make an offering, which must take place during any domestic drinking, and, second, the obligation to share drinking (or anointing by alcohol) with all the people present. Offering alcohol to the spirits is something done by people: those who serve as instruments (channels) for sending intoxication to the certain local spirits. By rejecting alcohol, a person actually avoids submission to the spirits, which, according to the shamanistic view, provokes the spirits to harm that person. Taking a sip from a glass that has an alcohol spirit offering is believed not to be a means to please humans, but mainly as a donation to spirits. In Nanai, this is called *obo*, 'a quota'. The need for solidarity in social drinking is caused by the fact that nobody dares to neglect unity with certain spirits. In addition, no guest would neglect to bring a bottle to the hosts as an offering to the local hosts' spirits, and would always participate in drinking because it is an expression of subordination to the hosts' spirits. In the framework of the shamanic worldview, each act of drinking, not only ritual acts but also in the course of a normal meal, can comprise the features of worshipping the spirits, and making a collective offering to them.

## NOTES

1 For a more detailed review of the literature on this topic, see the article by Art Leete (2005: 249–252).

2 This issue is examined here using the example of the Nanai (field research from the 1980–2014 period), with the addition of published data on the shamanic praxis of other indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and Russian Far East.

3 The author watched that ritual over several seasons of her field research.

4 Shamanists believe that under certain circumstances, any food on the table can be interpreted as an offering to the spirits, but this is especially true of alcohol.

5 Contemporary Nanai Pentecostals also compare their condition during the services with intoxication: “During the services we get such a thrill that it replaces alcohol for us” (FM 2010, E. K.).

6 According to a legend, the representatives of that clan cut a girl’s head using this knife in order to take a precious ring from her neck, which had been put on when she was much younger.

7 The shamanists narrated the same thing about a shaman woman Kiakta. “It happened to her, when she was drunk; against her will some snakes appeared out of her mouth. They appeared; she picked them up and threw them away. Then some more snakes appeared, and she again picked them up and threw them away. We were really interested in watching what it really was. Something alive appears out of her mouth and she throws it away. So we went to that place, where she had thrown them, we looked there, but there were no snakes. We saw how she threw them, we heard how they tumbled, when falling down, we clearly saw how they were falling, but when we approached the place, we did not see anything. They disappeared!” (FM 1993, T. B.)

8 The shaman M. S., whose words I cite here, was born in 1962 and belonged to the generation fond of occult literature. So they widely used concepts such as astral, aura, chakras, etc.

9 The idea that after drinking a person is connected to the spirits can be approved, as the shamanists believe, by the following visions. V. B. narrates: “Once I looked at my drunk husband and saw [...]. I was not frightened, nothing! I just opened my eyes and looked. There were some small creatures running along his body [...], so many of them! They were running and running and pulling him about!” (FM 2012, M. H.)

10 In the contemporary discourse, using alcohol is interpreted as a means of opening an informational channel.

11 “*Heis, heis!*” is a typical non-semantic shamanic exclamation.

12 Here is one of the descriptions of how a Nanai shaman drank sacrificial blood: “As soon as the shaman had felt blood near his mouth, he scarily growled and, choking, began to drink it with big swallows. His movements became furious to such an extent that it seemed that this was not his own body but an external force, which had installed itself in the shaman’s body and produced them.” (Lopatin 1922: 278)

13 I watched that ritual during my fieldwork in 1991. It was also mentioned by Shternberg (1933: 498).

## SOURCES

FM = fieldwork materials of the author. The author conducted her field research in Khabarovskiy krai (Naichin, Troitskoye, Dzary, Dada, Sinda, Lidoga, Verhniy Nergn, Kondon, and other villages) and in Khabarovsk during many field seasons in the period 1980–2017.

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