

***Xongodory* and Homeland: Manipulating Identity in a Multi-Ethnic Region**

Katherine R. Metz, Indiana University-Bloomington

Before leaving Ulan-Ude for the mountain region of Tunka, I was already inundated with images and tales of the fiery Tunkintsy, with whom I would be spending the next 10 months. At first, I interpreted these statements about the residents of Tunka¹ as highly derogatory. Wanting to remain as neutral as my human nature would allow, I often responded that I wasn't sure what people meant and that during my 1998 visit I had found people in Tunka, Buriats and Russians alike, to be hospitable and kind. My interlocutors often launched into an explanation of their statements, remarking that people from Tunka just behaved differently from others who came to the city. Those who went further would sometimes cite correlations between behavior and geography or climate. Others would talk about pride (*gordost'*), as if Tunka Buriats somehow felt their ethnic identity differently from other Buriats. After arriving in Tunka, I found that local residents took pride in this discursive separation from other Buriats. As I began spending more time with residents of Tunka during my visits to Ulan Ude, I saw that they also did not mind the stereotypes and sometimes propagated these perceptions through dialogue about themselves and through their actions. While in Tunka, I also began to hear about Xongodory, a vaguely familiar term that refers to a pre-Buriat ethnic group. Soon I learned that Xongodory was more than just a historical term for one of the pre-Buriat Mongolic tribes (four tribes—also including the Ekhirit, Bulagat, and Xori—settled on the territory of present day Buriatia). I found Xongodory being used as an ethnic identity in contemporary society as well.

My conversations and discoveries about how and when people talk about being either *Tunkintsy* or *Xongodory* as opposed to being simply "Buriat" led me to question the use of multiple identities and ask why *Xongodory* in particular has been revived as an ethnic marker. Answering these questions requires an examination of how people use particular ethnic markers. One of the arguments that Nancy Ries (1997) advances is "that spontaneous conversational discourses are a primary mechanism by which ideologies and cultural stances are shaped and maintained" (3). *Tunkintsy* is a colloquial term and its use both reinforces and creates an identity for a specific group of people based on their tie to a geographic location. What is curious about the term *Xongodory* is that it does not occur in "spontaneous conversational discourses;" rather, it is calculated and occurs in public settings. Therefore I suggest that use of the term *Xongodory* is a conscious manipulation of ethnic identity aimed at marking distinction in the post-Soviet context. Specifically, those who advance the revival of *Xongodory* align themselves locally and trans-locally for socio-political and economic reasons.

While the terms I examine are separated by use, their shared connection is identifying Buriats at a sub-ethnic level. The terms also have a tie to a geographic territory, often referred to as *malaja rodina* (little homeland). Difference is marked by use in shifting contexts. In other situations, people use terms such as Buriat, *metis* (mixed origin), or *rossijskij* (Russian in the civic, rather than ethnic sense). In this paper I have chosen to examine the use of the terms *Tunkintsy* and *Xongodory* because of their shared connection to homeland as well as their multivocality as ethnic markers. *Tunkintsy* is a contemporary term more often associated with men but which defines a concrete geographic territory and indicates a set of learned behavior patterns peculiar to the region. *Xongodory*, on the other hand, is a historical term that has maintained relevance in religious use but has gained new meaning as a positioning tool for recognition of similarities and differences in the Soviet period. I will examine the ways in which residents of Tunkinskij Raion use two ethnic markers, *Tunkintsy* and *Xongodory*, to build local and trans-local communities. I focus more on *Xongodory* because its re-emergence as an ethnic marker sheds light on the ways in which various ethnic markers are used to separate and align, building community in different post-Soviet spaces.

“*Malaja Rodina*” (Little Homeland)

I wish to begin my analysis by discussing the ways in which *Tunkintsy* and *Xongodory* are similar. Both terms, as I have mentioned, refer to sub-groupings of Buriats. More importantly, both terms are used in identifying a person's *malaja rodina* (little homeland). *Rodina* is sometimes also translated as motherland, implying a nurturing, sentimental nature. Often in Russia, *rodina* is personified and described as suffering at the hands of external forces (see Ries 1997:102-104). Nevertheless, for Russians and Buriats alike, more important is a smaller, better-defined community or place—“little homeland.” In Nikita Mikhailkov's recent documentary (1994), *Anna*, he interviews his 16-year-old daughter and asks her what *rodina* means to her. For her, it is a field near her grandmother's *dacha* (summer cottage) where the family would gather and spend vacations together. She identified a place associated with her extended kin and patterns of her kinship community, established in her youth.

Buriats often distinguish *rodina* as more political in meaning than “*malaja rodina*.” Generally, *rodina* refers to the Buriat Republic or Russian Federation. Their sense of a little homeland is a location, but their definition of this location is generally more circumscribed. *Malaja rodina* is tied to the location of a person's ancestors. In the past, *tailgan* (yearly offerings to lineage ancestors) took place at ritual sites during the summer months (see Humphrey (1998), chapter 8, for a detailed description of the *tailgan* ritual). While *malaja rodina* today is often broadly interpreted, particularly in urban settings, to describe a geographic or administrative region, it is done to geographically place the speaker in reference to the listener, who may not know particular villages or historical sites. Others use *malaja rodina* to refer to the location where they grew up, though it may not be tied to their ancestral homeland.

Graham Smith, et al. (1998) have noted that dialogue about homeland “has emerged as pivotal” in the Baltics (96). In the Baltics the definition and circumscription of a precise geographic territory is critical for marking national identity. While homeland is also a critical concept in Buriatia, the boundaries are not as solid, despite the ability to historically document it. Fluid boundaries and multiple identities tied to homeland reflect the layered and dynamic nature of identity among post-Soviet Buriats.

Tunkintsy

Geographical in origin and referring to the Tunka valley, the term *Tunkintsy* can be used to talk about people of various ethnicities based on residence. The Tunkinskij administrative region is named for this valley in which it is located. In public addresses (“*dorogii tunkintsy*,” or “my dear *Tunkintsy*”) or in referring to place of birth, the term, indeed, is used in a generic geographic sense, devoid of cultural meanings. On several occasions, individuals used *Tunkintsy* to refer to *metis* (mixed origin). Those who used the term in this way pointed out the amicable relations between Buriats and Russians and the high occurrence of intermarriage over the past several centuries. The most curious use of this term, and the one I wish to concentrate on, occurred in conversations in the capital city of Ulan-Ude. Wild behavior (loud, violent, or inappropriate in the civilized urban conditions of Ulan-Ude) was frequently explained away by reference to a man’s origins in Tunka.

The most common epithets I heard were that *Tunkintsy* are *dikij* (wild), *goriachij* (fiery), or *gordyj* (proud). Playing off the landscape and the orthographic commonalities (or poetic possibilities) between these descriptive terms (*gora* means mountain in Russian), people attribute the aforementioned behavioral characteristics to residents of Tunka because of the influence of the Sayan Mountains. One woman, who grew up in Kizhenga, a steppe region, characterized *Tunkintsy* as being both physiologically and psychologically different from people raised in other landscapes. This is a theme I heard repeatedly. Comparing herself to her husband, she accentuated his aggressive and excitable character and contrasted it with her tranquil character. She missed the plains of her *malaja rodina* and claimed that she had become more anxious after over a decade of living in Tunka. She asked if I noticed that *Tunkintsy* are louder, more prone to raising their voices, and that they become more agitated when greeting and asking questions. Urban Buriats also used the same set of characteristics to describe *Tunkintsy*. Once, while I was strolling with a friend from Tunka, we ran into another acquaintance and exchanged animated, loud greetings, drawing attention to our meeting. Later he asked if I had taken note of this, stating that it is typical for *Tunkintsy* to stand out in the cities because of their boisterous characteristics and that *Tunkintsy* men tend to get into frequent fights. People even claimed that concepts of time differ between Buriats living in the mountain regions versus those in the steppe regions. The Buriats in the steppes were noted for their more relaxed notion of time.

Discussions about *Tunkintsy* identity, such as ones I outlined above, are often in reference to male behavior. This is not to say that such behavioral characteristics were never attributed to women. This division becomes quite clear when one begins to use the singular form of *Tunkintsy*. *Tunkinets* is masculine, while *Tunkinka* is feminine. The first time I used the female term "*Tunkinka*," everyone in the room broke out laughing. I was very puzzled and defended myself by demonstrating my linguistic knowledge that "-ka" is the appropriate paired female ending for "-ets." If my consultants didn't use "*Tunkinka*," what did they use? Laughter subsided and one consultant replied "*Tunkinskaja (devushka)*" or Tunka girl. Again, I protested that it was not an accurate pairing. Finally, they agreed that linguistically I was accurate, but that in practice women are hardly ever talked about in terms of their Tunka-ness, that their affiliation with their *malaja rodina* is not an explanation for their behavior. Women talked about themselves and their identities in reference to Tunka, but only once while in the city did I hear a member of the intelligentsia refer to another woman as "*Tunkinka*."

I can only speculate as to why the gendering of *Tunkintsy* occurs. The primary reason, I believe, is related to the cultural practice of rendering genealogies through the male line. Even though some couples live closer to the wife's relatives or receive substantial aid from their parents, the most accepted practice is to take up residence near the husband's family. Inheritance is bilateral, but when asked to draw kinship charts, my consultants, even the women, had difficulties tracing descent through the female line. Beyond grandparents or great grandparents, consultants were only able to trace senior males in each generation for up to a maximum of seven or eight generations.

Xongodory

More recently, people, especially intelligentsia, have begun reviving a historical marker, "*Xongodor*," which is the name of one of the tribes that make up the Buriat nation. *Xongodory* historically occupied the territory of Tunkinskij, Okinskij, and Zakamenskij regions of Buriatia, Xovsogol aimak of Mongolia, the Republic of Tuva, and Alarskij region of Irkutsk Oblast'. The first mention of *Xongodory* can be found with one about the Xory at the beginning of the 1640s, a report that mentions widespread military actions. *Xongodory* were written about as the best fighters, giving a very different perspective on the "combative nature" of *Tunkintsy* from the earlier perspective that attributed aggressiveness to growing up in a mountainous region. In the 1650s the *Xongodory* migrated to Mongolia to take part in a war between Mongolia and Djungaria, but when the ethnopolitical situation stabilized at the end of the seventeenth century, they began migrating back to Oka and Tunka. They were encouraged by Russians to populate the border regions as a defense against the Mongols. As the ethnogenesis of the Buriat nation began, Russian trading forts (*ostrog*) became centers for the formation of sub-ethnic divisions. Only Xory remained a distinct ethnic identity, because the name was used for an administrative

region. By the early twentieth century, there were already ten different sub-ethnic groups based on these trading fort centers. However, they had very little in common with the original four ethnic groups that made up the Buriat nation (see Pavlinskaja 2000).

In February 2000, I was invited to the *Xongodor* festival which was being planned for early July, but I did not begin thinking seriously about going until two employees of the park, both members of the Munko Saridak Writer's Guild², told me that it would be very useful for my research and that it was a celebration of the history of a Buriat tribe. As I began to understand more about what would actually take place at this mid-summer festival, I valued the opportunity to attend an academic conference specifically targeted at the region of my study and the festivities that would surround several historical events. Moreover, my understanding of who the *Xongodory* were was still vague. At that time, I only understood that they were horse-riding warriors traveling between Buriatia and Mongolia.

As the months passed I decided that the trip to Orlik in Oka Region for the *Xongodor* festival would be valuable for contextualizing the local history of the Tunka Valley, which includes both Oka and Tunka regions. On Friday, July 7, an academic conference in the village of Orlik kicked off the fourth celebration of the *Xongodor* tribe, and I quickly became aware of the significance of this event. Students, academics, and poets talked of the history and unique cultural traditions of the *Xongodory*. One Buriat (*Xongodor*) scholar in particular focused his discussion of the historical linguistic structures of several Mongolic dialects in order to demonstrate his argument that migrations in and out of Mongolia originated in the territory of the *Xongodory*. He hypothesizes that the *Xongodory* are not only proto-Buriat, but also proto-Khalkh--the dominant Mongolian ethnic group that makes up the leadership of Mongolia (Chagdurov 2000). Also of interest was the excitement over the recent official designation of Soyots as a numerically small ethnic group by the Russian Federation. By recognizing the value of political rights and subsidies given to small ethnic groups and by reinterpreting their own history, many of the participants were taking part in a shift from Buriat to *Xongodor* identity.

The second day of the celebration started out high in the mountains in a cup-like depression. I was traveling with the Buddhist lamas who would be praying at the ceremony that morning and they told me that this field was a sacred site, in part because of its unique geological appearance³ (see photo 1). In the middle of this field stood a totem, about three meters high, with a face carved near the top, and a white swan carved into the very top. Several feet away stood a prayer station where Buddhist lamas set up an altar for that day. The altar was a simple stand that they adorned with prayer flags and cloth from the temple. Along with a pitcher of holy water, they set out a row of butter candles, prayer wheels, and several plates where spectators placed offerings of money, milk, cookies, and candy. The lamas themselves sat in rows on either side of the altar, facing each other for a series of prayers and blessings, which they chanted in Tibetan (see photo 2). The totem and the

altar served as center stage and, arching out from each side in a horseshoe configuration were three hitching posts (for a total of six). These hitching posts were for the delegations from each of the contemporary *raiony*, *okrug*, and *aimaks*⁴ where *Xongodory* once resided. Representatives from five of these regions were in attendance, but the representatives from the Republic of Tuva, which lay across the mountains to the West, were unable to attend. As the lamas finished preparations and began their prayers, representatives from the Buriat Republic (Zakamensk, Tunka, and Oka (the host) *raiony*), Irkutsk *Oblast*⁵ (Alar *okrug*), and Mongolia (Xovsogol *aimak*) gathered at their respective stations near one of the hitching posts.

After the lamas read prayers, male shamans and civic leaders from each represented region stood in front of their hitching post, lit small fires and provided offerings of sacred white food (such as milk, vodka, and cottage cheese) to the mountain spirits, representing the second official religion of the descendants of the *Xongodory*--shamanism. Following shamanic tradition, they also provided milk and vodka offerings in the four directions (north, south, east, and west), following the path of the sun. Regional delegates circumambulated the totem, following the path of the sun, deposited a stone at its base, and returned to their stations (see photo 3). A representative from the organizing committee in Oka officially welcomed guests to the celebration of the "*Xongodory* mountain *ethnic group*." His speech emphasized the importance of *Xongodor* history and of keeping traditions alive. Local young women performed a swan dance in honor of their female primogenitor in front of the totem, tying genealogy and history to a performance of contemporary identity.

Regional leaders and festival organizers made more speeches which focused on various aspects of the celebration from the sporting events and cultural performances that would take place over the next two days, to a report on the conference from the day before, to other ceremonies that would be occurring later that day at the stadium in Orlik. Indeed, the celebration also encompassed two other significant events—the recent declaration by the Russian Duma of the official existence of the *Soyot* people in Oka *raion*⁶ and the Tree of Peace along the Russian-Mongolian border. Following the speeches, thirty-three horse-riders approached the crowd, representing the thirty-three *batorood* (heroes) of Buriat epic lore, who according to the *Geser* (Mongolian epic poem), rode through this same landscape centuries ago. Thus, through this performance, the Mongolic heroes of the *Geser* represented the warrior ancestors of the *Xongodory*. To conclude the official portion of the ceremony, the young dancers led the crowd in dancing a traditional circle dance, or *ekhor* as they would do several more times over the next several days (see photos 4 and 5). As people mingled informally, the organizers also conducted the horse races.

Larissa Pavlinskaja (2000) addressed the question of what type of process or movement this festival is in her talk on the resurgence of *Xongodory* as an identity marker. She notes that it is a phenomenon occurring at the level of the intelligentsia. While suggesting that such a phenomenon will very likely spread to other corners of

Buriatia. She asserts that the process we see among the *Xongodory* “is nothing less than a new branch of ethnogenesis, a new level in the development of internal ethnic structures and national self-identification of a people” (Pavlinskaja 2000:5-6). Earlier she states that ethnic consciousness had always existed on two levels—to the clan (rod) and to the ancient nation (*drevnyj narod*). Humphrey (1998) discusses the sustained practice of clan-based rituals among collective farm workers during the 1970s, lending some support to Pavlinskaja’s argument of continuity. However, the practice was transformed into one based on collective working groups. Pavlinskaja’s analysis suggests that the revitalization of ancient tribal affiliations is a trend to watch for among other descendants of these proto-Buriat groups, freed of the constraints placed on them by Soviet nationalities policy. In addition, she claims the revitalization of the *Xongodory* identity is a natural process growing out of sustained connections to primordial tribal affiliations, which occurred in spite of Russian and Soviet attempts to assimilate indigenous Siberian populations (for an extensive discussion of Imperial and Soviet nationalities policies and relations with indigenous Siberians, see Slezkine 1994).

The ability of contemporary Buriats to trace lineages back is not unproblematic, as I noted when I was at the Ethnographic Museum in Ulan-Ude in September 2000. Because of migrations, intermarriages, and limitations placed on cultural practices through Soviet policy, Buriats are not always clear about their lineage. In Ulan-Ude, I had attended a shamanic blessing ceremony, sponsored by the Union of Shamans, out of pure curiosity and found that shamans from all corners of Buriatia participated that day, each representing their genealogical clan. People wishing to make prayer requests were instructed to write their request on a sheet of paper along with information about their lineage and the family member names that were to be included in the blessing. As I have no biological affiliation to a clan, I was rather confused about what to write, though the ladies around me strongly encouraged me to write something. After standing for a while at the information desk, trying to figure it out, I realized that many of the people around me did not know their clan affiliation either. For some it is because their families already lived in Ulan-Ude for several generations. The assistants at the desk responded with a series of questions about whether any grandparents or great grandparents still lived in the countryside or about family history. When Caroline Humphrey (1998) returned to the collective farms where she originally conducted fieldwork, she noted that patrilineal clan groups are again becoming important to the people. She speculates that this trend is fueled by economic motivations. Simultaneously, shamanism is experiencing a revival and the “new” shamans are also pressuring people to learn about the origins of their ancestors. The shamans claim that they cannot heal people effectively without this information (Humphrey 1998). The point I would like to make with this example is that although the revival of *Xongodory* is not a mass movement, the interest in kin and local history is growing. For many of those who know their ancestry, *Xongodory* is a tie to the past, but others are looking to the future. I view the revival of *Xongodory* as a

strategic effort by the intelligentsia to show cultural alliances on a micro-scale with neighboring Mongolia.

Manipulating Identity

The scholarly value of the *Xongodory* movement emerges when it is juxtaposed against other ethnic identity markers used by the Buriats of Tunka. Routinely, Tunka Buriats used a number of identity markers in discussions with me, such as "Buriat," a standard way of marking oneself off from other major ethnic groups in the area, such as Russians and Evenki. In my survey, I asked people to name the nationality (*natsionalnost'*) they most closely identified with. Buriat and Russian were, perhaps predictably, the most common answers. At other times, Buriats use a variety of terms depending on their relationship to a given context, identifying as *rossijskij* to mark citizenship (rather than *rususkij* for ethnicity) or *metis* to denote a mixed ethnic background. *Tunkintsy* is first and foremost a geographic term referring to anyone residing within Tunka, but also has cultural implications regarding traits. *Xongodory* has ties to historic ways of identifying oneself through an affiliation with a clan, but is also experiencing a curious revival as people increasingly reacquire themselves with the history of their ancestors. While both *Tunkintsy* and *Xongodory* clearly point out the generic and specific ways in which residents of Tunka Valley positively identify themselves to the outside world, they also accentuate difference: difference from Russians, and difference from other Buriats.

What is surprising is the revival of an ethnic marker that predates the formation of the Buriat nation and its manipulation by the intelligentsia. Calling for unity and recognition of *Xongodory* necessarily means straddling political boundaries between Russia and Mongolia, an idea directly contrary to national values in Mongolia where the emphasis in nation-building is to tie together ethnic sentiments with the identification of a greater Mongolian race (Bulag 1998). Bulag notes that the state level movement is in part a reaction to minority groups, such as Buriats, who are seeking to strengthen ties with kin outside of Mongolia. While it may be tempting to label the resurgence of the *Xongodory* ethnic marker as a pan-Mongol sentiment, *Xongodory* is about history, territory, and difference. Difference includes a distinction not only between Mongols and Buriats, but between Buriats of different ancestry as well. *Perestroika* brought about a renewed interest in the past, and in the early 1990s there was some discussion of reuniting the disparate Buriat okrugi in other areas with the Buriat Republic, but this was never a serious pan-Mongol movement (Humphrey 1996). Caroline Humphrey hypothesizes elsewhere that returning to clan affiliations has economic motivations in a society where kinship has always been a strong factor in social organization and market reform is unbalanced between sectors and regions of society (see Humphrey 1998).

The interest in looking to cultural history began in the late 1980s because, "many young Buryats were ignorant of elementary facts about their past. For this

reason historical articles published in the *perestroika* years had enormous effect” (Humphrey 1996: 119). One of the authors writing at this time who is particularly relevant to this discussion is Ardan Angarxaev, who became the parliamentary representative of Tunkinskij, Okinskij, and Zakamenskij Raiony (all *Xongodor* territory) in Moscow. In 1989 he published a series of articles in the local Tunka newspaper titled: “Who are the *Xongodory*?” This series directly preceded the first meeting of the *Xongodory*, which he helped to organize. These articles, along with later publications (Angarxaev 1999; Angarxaev, ed. 1999), reflect his growing scholarly interest in the territory of his ancestors. In one publication, which includes an essay on the ethnonym *Xongodor*, he states, “even if an ethnos disappears, the land remains, on which it lived and created. And the person remains, dissolved into new ethnic surroundings” (Angarxaev 1999:3). From this he concludes that studying one’s cultural history is equivalent to studying world history, a living heritage for all.

A consequence of the renewed interest in cultural history among the broader population is the revitalization of ancestral offerings, or *tailgan*. The sites for these offerings are specific to particular lineages. One unusually hot day in early summer 2001, I was walking with one of my consultants outside of Tory and we happened to meet a small group of Buriats waiting in a field. The teenage boys who were accompanying us had just been explaining that a truck that went by was dropping people off at an ancestral site. He used the term ancestral hearth. My curiosity was piqued so I asked him what he meant by hearth. He patiently explained that the hearth is the most important part of a Buriat home and that people retain information about the location of the hearths of their ancestors. In order to bring prosperity to the home, they are obliged to return to their ancestral hearth to make annual offerings in honor of their dead ancestors to local protector spirits. He also admitted that in recent years he has seen more groups like the one we were approaching. The teenage boys went with me through the field to the kin group, where we met an older man, approximately 55-years old. I asked if it was okay to inquire about their gathering. He responded that we could even stay, but the best person for me to talk to was probably an old man who was coming later with the shaman. He carried on by asking me questions about myself, which I answered, deciding in the meantime to ask him more questions anyway since we had an appointment later that day. He said that his kin had been coming back to this site only in the last few years. This year there would be fewer people than last year because the trip, for many, is very expensive. In response to my question about what they do here, he responded, “make offerings.” When asked to clarify what he meant—how, specifically, do they make offerings—he told me that they would do whatever the shaman directed them to do. He was able to volunteer a great deal more information on why they do the ritual, though, stating that the Soviets forbade such a practice, even though it is very necessary. He stressed that their ancestors were very displeased with them during the Soviet period, attributing some of the difficulties faced under communism to the discontinuation of this ritual. “We turned our backs on them,” he said, and seemed assured that resuming the ritual was making the situation more bearable.

Building on the work of Caroline Humphrey (see 1996 and 1998), I would like to suggest that the revitalization of *Xongodory* has developed out of this growing interest in cultural and family history. In Tory middle school, the children actually work on building family genealogies in one of their classes. Families have renewed ancestral offerings, tailgan, and Buddhist and shamanic religions have seen a growing following. *Xongodory* is one of the several possibilities that people are using to identify themselves, but actual usage of the term *Xongodory* remains most prevalent among the intelligentsia. In an interview with Ardan Angarxaev in 2001, we talked about the formation of Tunkinsky National Park. He was the primary actor in the movement to found the park as well as active in bringing cultural celebrations to Tunka valley. He is also a nationally recognized poet, dramatist, novelist, and scholar of Buriat culture and history. He shared with me his concerns about the environmental degradation that occurred in Tunka as a result of centralized Soviet policies and the lost connection between people and their local histories. Founding the park for him was a way to give something back to his *malaja rodina* and the people living there. He meant this in both a symbolic sense of preserving culture, history, and the environment for future generations, and a practical sense. Tunka is not suited for heavy industry or extensive agriculture, so part of his motivation in forming the park was economic. As Humphrey has suggested (1998), the resurgence of clan affiliations, such as the revitalization of *Xongodory* ethnic identity, has economic motivations as well. In this case, by creating a park, economic opportunities exist for ecotourism, resort-based tourism for medical treatments, cultural tourism, traditional agriculture, and the like.

Angarxaev and other members of the intelligentsia continue to be involved in the operations and development of the National Park, as well as in the *Xongodory* movement. In my research on the park, I was struck by the discourse used for founding, funding, and maintaining the park. Tunkinsky National Park is the first of its type in the Russian Federation, combining agricultural, light industrial (for dairy processing, water bottling, and construction), and different levels of conservation zones. Angarxaev and Vladimir Syrenov, the current director of the park, envision Tunkinsky National Park as a model for protecting natural resources and sustainable development on ethno-cultural foundations. Central to this vision and the discourse surrounding the park is setting Tunka up as a distinctive region. Furthermore, long term goals for economic development of international tourism include the necessary but very complicated step of opening up the border between Tunkinskij and Okinskij raiony and Xovsogol Aimak in neighboring Mongolia to transit. While I do not want to go as far as to suggest that the *Xongodory* movement is a result of political and economic aspirations of the National Park, I would like to point out that both movements evolved out of increased attention to local histories during perestroika. Thus, these two contemporary movements to reconfigure the political, economic, and social landscape of Tunka are inextricably linked. *Xongodory*, more so than any other ethnic marker, supports the argument for opening the border between Russia and Mongolia for cultural and economic development.

Cross-Cultural Models of Ethnic Identity

Larissa Pavlinskaja (2000) has indicated that the revitalization of the ethnonym *Xongodor* is a response to the fall of the Soviet Union. Local residents see the need to define themselves in different ways than they had under communism. Further, she believes that this movement is only political to the extent that it is an explicit rejection of tendencies towards globalization. Such a conclusion oversimplifies the importance of groups affiliating themselves more specifically with *Xongodory*. The leaders of this movement are emphasizing centuries of shared history and challenging the legitimacy of Soviet and Russian colonial attempts to consolidate several Mongolic clans into a single ethnic group. The emphasis on “Asianess” and difference from “colonial” images of themselves indeed places the intelligentsia into the framework of globalization (see Said 1994; Slezkine 1994). Reinterpretations of local history in this area, like nationalisms emerging out of the fall of the Soviet Union, are complementary processes to globalization. Reinterpreting history is often contentious because it has such an impact on how people view themselves in the here and now (Stroganova 1997).

The discourses surrounding the use of *Xongodor* and *Tunkinets* are, at the same time, more complicated than being for or against nationalism, globalization, or other homogenizing processes. In this case, I find it helpful to look at two recent ethnographies of minorities in multi-ethnic settings. While in Tunka, Buriats are the majority, within particular villages and within the Buriat Republic, they are less than half the population, and in the Russian Federation, they are one of several minorities. The ethnographies differ from my case study in that the populations studied by Baumann (1996) and Lemon (2000) are more mobile and are separated from geographic-historical homelands. Nevertheless, what I find cross-culturally relevant is the way in which actors actively position themselves in various, at times almost contradictory ways, constantly readjusting their identities and making community.

In Gerd Baumann’s book *Contesting Culture* (1996), he critically analyzes the concepts of community and culture in a multi-ethnic suburb of London. He finds that residents of Southall can easily fit into multiple ethnic categories, some of which by nature are not easily extricable from one another. The bearers of these layered identities are quite capable of using the dominant discourse about a particular identity, while also counteracting it, “by drawing attention to the daily process of ‘making culture,’ rather than ‘having a culture’” (Baumann 1996:6). At times, the dominant discourse is appropriate for drawing distinctions from larger groups, but individuals have religious and socio-economic characteristics that do not easily fit into a single package.

Alaina Lemon’s (2000) ethnography of Romani performance and identity also attributes a very active and conscious role to the actors, who manipulate the perceptions of themselves by others, while simultaneously creating and asserting their own versions of themselves. The worlds in which Moscow Romani move are

overlapping, each with different degrees of inclusion and exclusion. To operate in one context reveals a particular identity that may be more restrictive than the identity presented in another context. At the same time, different identities are not mutually exclusive; rather they are part of the continuous making of Romani culture in the various worlds in which they operate. Both these studies focus on the dynamism of culture, which is constructed and reproduced through actions and discourse. The layered sense of identity is part of the changing dialogue about what makes one Buriat, *Xongodor*, or a *Tunkinets*.

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to shed some light on the question of what the implications might be of positioning oneself in a sub-ethnic grouping such as *Tunkintsy* or *Xongodory*. To a certain degree, I agree with Russian ethnographer Larissa Pavlinskaja. The revitalization of *Xongodory* is certainly a post-Soviet phenomenon, but I would not agree that this is a replacement of other ethnic identifications in the face of globalization or some other force. Instead, it is essential to look at *Xongodory* in relation to the existing term *Tunkintsy* because of their shared connection to a sense of homeland. By understanding what homeland means and looking at recent movements to learn about one's past, new questions emerge.

Xongodory takes the geographic homeland of *Tunkintsy* and broadens it out to a historical base that connects Buriats in several political districts. The crossing of these borders between Mongolia and Russia, even symbolically, has the potential to disrupt political unification (Bulag 1998), but it also has the potential to improve economic conditions in the remote regions of Okinskij, Tunkinskij raiony, and Xovsogol Aimak by promoting tourism. However, the articulation of economic and ethnic discourses have not merged, except in private conversations with the intelligentsia with roots in Tunkinskij raion. Of more immediate consequence is the way in which Tunka Buriats shift between *Xongodory* and *Tunkintsy* along with other ethnic identities very regularly throughout the day. These discursive shifts are sometimes natural, or unconscious, but quite often are conscious discussions of an individual's relations to his or her surroundings. *Xongodory* in particular has growing saliency in this region where the reinterpretations of history have led to a revitalization of religion and new forms of economic relations.

Acknowledgements

This paper is based on research conducted under an IREX IARO grant, a Wenner-Gren dissertation grant, and an Indiana University Grant-in-aid. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Soyuz conference in Berkeley, California, in February 2001. I am grateful for the comments of participants, in particular Douglas Blum, my discussant. I would also like to thank Kathy Petrie for long and insightful conversations about ethnic identity in post-socialist Mongolia.



Photo 1: The crowd gathering in a field just outside Orlik for the official opening ceremony of the *Xongodor* festival, July 2000. *Photo by K. Metzo*



Photo 2: Buddhist Lamas prepare a shrine for the opening of the *Xongodor* festival, July 2000. *Photo by K. Metzo*



Photo 3: The author with a friend in front of the partial *Xongodor* totem and a cairn built from rocks deposited as delegates circumambulated the totem. *Photo by B. Zandanov*



Photo 4: “Swan” dancers leading those gathered in several *ekhor* (circle dances). *Photo by K. Metz*



Photo 5: Participants dancing a ekhor (circle dance). *Photo by K. Metzo*

Works Cited

Angarxaev, Ardan

1999 *Istoki*. Ulan-Ude: Buriad Unen.

Angarxaev, Ardan, ed.

1999 *Tunka: Istoria I Sovremennost'*. Ulan-Ude: Buriad Unen.

Baumann, Gerd

1996 *Contesting Culture: Discourses of Identity in Multi-Ethnic London*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Bulag, Uradyn E.

1998 *Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

Chagdurov, Shagda D.

2000 *Mongolzhon-gua*. Paper presented at the Fourth meeting of the *Xongodory*, Orlik, Russia, July 7.

Humphrey, Caroline

1998 *Marx Went Away, But Karl Stayed Behind*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

- 1996 Buryatiya and the Buriats. *In* The Nationalities Question in the post-Soviet States. Graham Smith, ed. Pp. 113-125. London: Longman Group.
- Lemon, Alaina
2000 *Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romani Memory From Pushkin to Postsocialism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Mikhailkov, Nikita
1994 *Anna*. France and Russia, Camera One and Studio Trite. 99 minutes.
- Pavlinkskaja, Larissa R.
2000 *Xongodory v Svete Protseessov Etnogeneza v Baikalskom Regione*. Paper presented at the Fourth meeting of the *Xongodory*, Orlik, Russia, July 7.
- Ries, Nancy
1997 *Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation During Perestroika*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Said, Edward
1994 *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Slezkine, Yuri
1994 *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Smith, Graham, Vivien Law, Andrew Wilson, Annette Bohr, and Edward Allworth
1998 *Nation-building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: The Politics of National Identities*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Stroganova, E. A.
1997 *Nacional'no-Kul'turnoe Vozrozhdenie v Buriatii: Vzgl'ad Iznutri Sela. Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* 97(1): 86-99.
-
- ¹ Tunkinskij Raion is situated in a valley between the Sayan mountains and the Xamar Daban range of mountains in south central Siberia. Most residents of the region refer colloquially to Tunkinskij Raion as Tunka. I will follow their example in this paper primarily to maintain the distinction between "Tunkinty" as an identity marker and the administrative region and its residents.
- ² This writer's guild was named in honor of a famous Buriat poet and has members from Tunka and Oka Regions of Buriatia. Members have been very active in religious and cultural revitalization movements on the local and Republic levels.
- ³ People were more recently familiar with this field as the site of the local air strip, which has been abandoned in recent decades after being replaced by a paved road.
- ⁴ *Raiony* are regions in Russia, similar to US counties. *Okrugy* are small administrative units in Russia, similar to *raiony* in size, but they are formed as ethnic territories within larger administrative units. *Aimaks* are Mongolian administrative units that resemble US states.
- ⁵ Administrative unit similar to a US state
- ⁶ The Soyot are a Turkic population, similar in cultural traditions to the Tuvans and the Tofelars, also of south central Siberia.