

Title: The Wind Horse: Tradition and Practice in Contemporary Buryatia

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This paper examines two fundamental components of the contemporary landscape in the Republic of Buryatia, namely the obo (a site of worship, i.e. a pile of stones, normally located on a mountain top or marking a land boundary) and the khadak (a ceremonial scarf tied to trees, common in Buryati and Tibetan culture). Drawing from studies on the reemergence of Shamanism in Buryatia (see A. Bernstein, C. Humphrey, E. Friedman), and my own field research in Arshan, Olkhon and Ulan Ude, I will discuss the contemporary practice of obo construction and khadak placement and the inherited and invented rituals associated with them. An analysis of elements of Shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism in the rituals unpacks issues of gender and agency while revealing a negotiated relationship between Buryatia and the Mongol-Tibetan world. Responding to Elliot Oring's call to "focus on what the study of objects and practices contribute to an understanding of tradition as a process of handing over or handing down", this paper will answer the following questions: What is the source of authority of these rituals?; How do past practices continue to operate in the present?; How and why do the new practices come to destroy or marginalize the old? What is the power of the new, invented traditions?

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