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“THE KHOMUS IS MY RED DEER ON WHICH I FLY THROUGH THE MIDDLE WORLD”* (KHOMUS IN THE SHAMANIC PRACTICE OF TUVA: RESEARCH ISSUES)

«МОЙ ХОМУС – ЭТО МОЙ КРАСНЫЙ ОЛЕНЬ, НА КОТОРОМ Я ЛЕЧУ ПО СРЕДНЕМУ МИРУ»* (ХОМУС В ШАМАНСКОЙ ПРАКТИКЕ ТУВЫ: ПРОБЛЕМЫ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ)

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The author first got acquainted with Tuvan music in 1991, at the 2nd International Congress of Jew's Harp Music in Yakutia, Russia. Among other ethnomusical bands from Russia's various regions and CIS states, the Tuvan band stood out with its special techniques of playing the khomus (Jew's harp) and of throat singing which accompanied their music. One of them, Gennadii Chash, later tutored the author in throat singing during the latter's visits to Tuva, where he also met Tuvan musicians and ethnomusicologists. The author attended a number of symposia on music in Tuva and researched the Tuvan khomus playing techniques. He also co-produced a CD with their audio recordings (2013).

Of special interest for the author are the khomus playing techniques as they are used in shamanic practice. The author follows the study of the shamanic rituals as they appeared in the works of the Russian



Знакомство автора с тувинской музыкой состоялось в 1991 г. на Втором Международном конгрессе варганной музыки в Якутии (России). Среди других этномузикальных групп из разных регионов России и стран СНГ группа из Тувы отличалась особой техникой исполнения на хомусе (варгане) и сопровождением музыки горловым пением. Один из участников группы Геннадий Чаш стал учителем горлового пения для автора, который впоследствии побывал в Туве, познакомился с тувинскими музыкантами и этномузыковедами. Автор стал постоянным гостем музыкальных симпозиумов в Туве и обратился к исследованиям особенностей исполнения тувинцами на хомусе, а также выступил сопродюсером выпуска компакт-диска с аудиозаписями (2013).

Особый интерес вызывают своеобразие использования хомуса шаманами в шаманской практике. Автор обращается к этнографическим работам российского ученого Севьяна Вайнштейна

* Words by Dezhit Tozhu / Слова Дежит Тожу (Вайнштейн, 1991: 255).

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scholar Sevyan Vainshtein, in the videos made during his ethnographic field studies, and also reflects on his own observations.

Keywords: khomus; Jew's harp; khomus player; Tuvan music; shaman; S. Vainshtein; хөөмей; Тува; shamanic practice

по шаманским обрядам, видеосъемкам по следам его этнографической экспедиции, а также анализирует собственные наблюдения.

Ключевые слова: хомус; варган; хомусист; тувинская музыка; шаман; С. Вайнштейн; хөөмей; Тува; шаманская практика

The first time when I met Tuvan Jew's harp players was more than twenty five years back in 1991, at the 2nd International Congress of Jew's Harp Music in Yakutia (Russia). This event was a kind of initiation for me to step into the world of the Jew's harp more deeply. Not only the Sakha (Yakut) people, there were so many participants from various ethnic groups from different parts of the Soviet Union (it was just before the perestroika) — Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Turkmen, Karakalpak, Bashkort, Khakas, Dolgan, Even, Ul'ch, Udege and so on. Among them, there was a group from the Tyva Republic.

The performance of their ensemble was unique, as they were the only musicians who played while sitting on the floor of the stage — some of them cross-legged and some on one knee — in a half circle. Playing the Jew's harp to accompany themselves, they sang in ordinary voices and throat voices, while moving their bodies happily. As I had been interested in ingenious musical instruments, sound objects (the Jew's harp was, and still is on top of my list, but also different ones as well) and unique vocal technique, I was simply attracted by their music.

When I got acquainted personally with them during the conference, they taught me how to pull out the whistle-like overtone melody from a fundamental tone. Especially, Gennadii Chash¹ from Shagonaar (Ulug-Khem district) became my first



*Fig. 1. Ensemble from the Tyva Republic on stage. 1991, Yakutsk.
Рис. 1. Ансамбль из Тувы на сцене. Якутск, 1991 г.
Фото из архива автора.*

¹ Chash was chosen as one of the nine World Virtuosi in the contest. Others were, Robert Zagretdinov (Bashkortostan, Russia), Süidüm Tölökova (Kyrgyzstan), John Wright (France/England) Mike Seeger, Larry Hanks (both USA), Spiridon Shishigin, Fedora Gogoleva and Pyotr Ogotoev (Sakha, Russia).



teacher of throat-singing — *xöömei*. Also there were Eles-ool Kuular from Chöön-Khemchik district, and Aleksandr Salchak (from Bai-Taiga district) the maker, player and teacher of different kind of musical instruments, among others.

It was significant for me to meet Valentina Suzukei, a scientific researcher on the Tuvan music, musical instruments and the specialist on the Tuvan Jew's harp — *khomus*. She (who participated with a little boy — one of her sons) showed me different kinds of instrument which are categorized as “*khomus*” in Tuvan concept, including not only *demir-khomus* and *kulzun-khomus* (which are generally included into the “Jew's harp” in a narrow sense), but also *yyash-khomus* — a simple twig and *charty-khomus* — a simple wood chip, which require man's oral cavity to play “music.” These small “primitive” tools for producing sound make me notice the deeper meaning of the word “*khomus*.”

A year later in 1992, I got an invitation from my Tuvan friends to attend the 1st International Xöömei Symposium. I was excited and immediately decided to take part. But how to get there? At that time, no Japanese tourist company could give me suggestion how to get to Kyzyl. After long investigation, they only could sell me a ticket to Abakan, the capital of Khakas Republic, saying that there are no direct flights from Moscow to Kyzyl.



Fig. 2. Gennadii Chash. 1991, Yakutsk.
Рис. 2. Геннадий Чаш. Якутск, 1991 г.
Фото из архива автора.



Fig. 3. Valentina Suzukei, Leo Tadagawa and Gennadii Chash (from left to right). 1992, Kyzyl.
Рис. 3. Валентина Сузукей, Лео Тадагава и Геннадий Чаш (слева направо). Кызыл, 1992 г. Фото из архива автора.

Some people in Khakassia, whom I met and became friends with one year before at the



Congress in Yakutia, helped me much. They contacted the organizer of the Symposium in Tyva. Thanks to them, I could get on the GAZelle dispatched from Tyva to pick up the foreign participants.

It was a great experience to take part in the Symposium, and to know the background of the Tuvan Jew's harp culture by my own eyes. It was also my pleasure to meet the "old" friends again in Kyzyl. During the Symposium, Valentina Suzukei and I started to talk about a new project of releasing a CD of Tuvan Jew's harp music, but at that moment, it was just like a dream. Gennadii Chash, the teacher of mine, invited me to his place in Shagonaar after the Symposium, to give me the "continuation" of the lesson. It turned out that we were of the same age. It became an unforgettable experience for me.

After that, I became a "periodic" visitor of Tyva. I took part in every Symposium (except the most recent ones) — 2nd visit in 1995 for the 2nd Symposium, 3rd in 1998, 4th in 2003 and 5th in 2008.

At my 3rd visit, I encountered the news of Gennadii's death. It was really sad to know that we would never meet again.

This time, at the research session, I made a presentation about the relation between the Jew's harp and the boot as a motif for the case of the *khomus*¹. Actually, it is unique that a musical instrument is kept in a case of a shape of something else that has no definite connection.

By 2008, I had produced CDs of Jew's harp and other music from Sakha, Ainu, Khakas and Kyrgyz under the label of Japan Jew's Harp Association. But our Tuvan *khomus* CD project was still a dream. Especially during the Symposium, everybody was too busy to do something else which looks more important. However, thankfully, I could get acquainted with musicians who play *khomus* from time



Fig. 4. Aleksandr Salchak making *khomus*. 2003. Kyzyl.

Рис. 4. Александр Салчак делает хомус. Кызыл, 2003 г. Фото из архива автора.

¹ Among the German speaking peoples, the container for the Jew's harp maultrommel is sometimes in the shape of a shoe. Is it a coincidence?



to time, and could meet some makers who agreed to show me their khomus making process.

Once in 2003, just after the 4th Symposium, I was interviewed by a journalist from Moscow. His name was Sergei Markus, and he asked me why I was visiting Tyva. I'm not sure if I told him about the CD project or not. But he got the information from somewhere, and wrote about it in his book – an encyclopedia called “Тува: Словарь культуры [Tuva: Dictionary of Culture]” (Маркус, 2006: 595) as if it is already under practical preparation.

When I read this piece of information, I thought I should realize it, otherwise it's too embarrassing. That was why I started to think about the project more seriously.



Fig. 5. Aldyn-ool Sevek with his cha-khomus. 2003, Kyzyl.
Рис. 5. Алдын-оол Севек и его ча-хомус. Кызыл, 2003 г.
Фото из архива автора.



Fig. 6. Ailangmaa Damyran with her yyash-khomus.
2010, Kyzyl.
Рис. 6. Айланмаа Дамыран и ее ыяш-хомус.
Кызыл, 2010 г. Фото из архива автора.

At last the time had come. In 2010, I had an opportunity to take part in the International Conference of Chatkhan (long zither) in Khakassia. When I contacted Valentina telling my visit to south Siberia, she told me that she could organize recording sessions with different *khomus* players, if I come to Tyva after the Conference in Abakan. Of course I promised to come. Also we agreed that the CD concept might be based on the book about *khomus* by Valentina that was published early in this year (Сузукей, 2010).

So we could record talented and unique musicians of different



generations, like Tatyana Sorzhu, Aidyng Byrtaan-ool, Anchymaa Sonam, Arina Aiyzhy, Aleksandr Saryglar, Ailangmaa Damyrán, Mǒnggǔn-ool Ondar, Opal Shuluu and others.

There were so many various ways of playing *khomus*, such as: 1) Imitation of sounds of nature, 2) Execution of the “melodies” of songs such as *kozhamyk* (antiphonal quatrains or improvisational humorous songs with certain refrains), called *ylradyp oinaary* or “singing play”, 3) Silent execution of the “words” of well-known *kozhamyk* and other songs called *chugaaladyp oinaary* or “speaking play”, 4) “*Uzun-khoyug*” (literary “long-soft”), a genre which is expressed only by musical instruments and throat-singing, 5) Simultaneous execution of the *khomus* playing and throat-singing. Some tunes were played both vocally and on the *khomus* to compare the melody and the text.

The instruments played during the recording are also various. There were *demir-khomus* (iron Jew's harp), *kulzun-khomus* (bamboo Jew's harp), *charty-khomus* (mouth resonating wood chip), *yyash-khomus* (mouth resonating branch of tree), *cha-khomus* (mouth bow) and *khylyzynnyg-dyrgak* (comb-and-tissue-paper, a primitive kazoo). It was very interesting to learn about playing the Jew's harp with a metal hammer, as this kind of invention for the players who lost their teeth is widely spread in northern part of Asia.

Adding some old precious field recordings by Valentina, we made a CD “Авамның ойнап чораан аялгазы / The Melody My Mother Played: Old and Modern Khomus (Jew’s Harp) Music of the Tuva, at the Center of Asia” (Süzükei, Tadagawa 2013).

When it was almost ready to be published in early autumn of 2013, I've got information from Valentina that there would be the 2nd International Khomus Festival in Tyva in October. What perfect timing! The organizer of the Festival

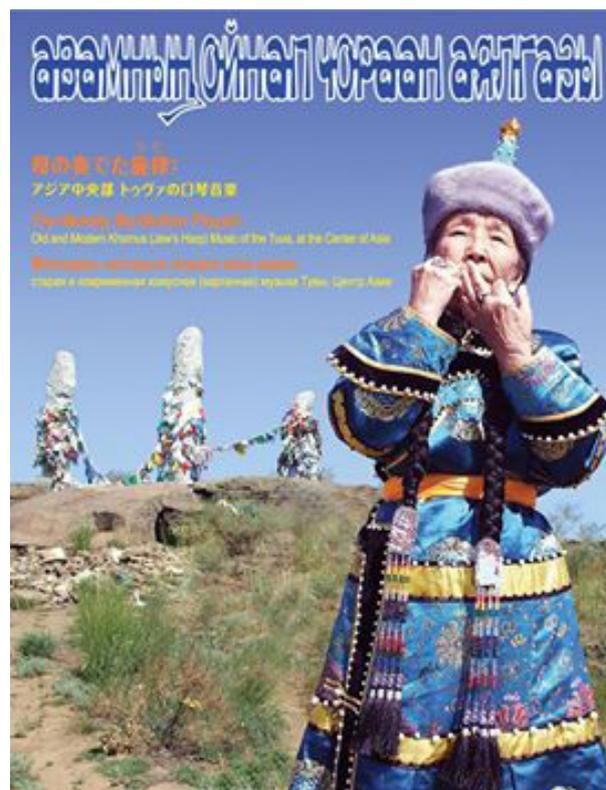


Fig. 7. CD “Авамның ойнап чораан аялгазы / The Melody My Mother Played: Old and Modern Khomus (Jew’s Harp) Music of the Tuva, at the Center of Asia.” Opal Shuluu on the jacket.

Рис. 7. Обложка компакт-диска «Авамның ойнап чораан аялгазы / The Melody My Mother Played: Old and Modern Khomus (Jew’s Harp) Music of the Tuva, at the Center of Asia» с фотографией Опал Шулуу.



pleasantly agreed to hold a presentation of the CD during the Festival. So packing a bunch of copies of the sizzling CD in my suitcase, I headed to the Tyva Republic once again. Rejoicing at the meeting with the musicians who took part in the project again, I was thinking that at last I could fulfill my responsibility to the Tuvan Jew's harp music.

In the booklet accompanying to the CD, Valentina and I decided to reprint a photo of Dezhit Tozhu, a woman shaman from southwestern Tuva. The photo was taken by Sev'yan Izrailevich Vainshtein (1926-2008) a famous Russian ethnographer, archaeologist and historian, during his expedition in 1983 (Вайнштейн, 1991: 255). It really was a precious evidence of the use of the iron Jew's harp as the tool used during the *kamlanie* — shamanic ceremony. But we couldn't include the sound of the Jew's harp played by any shaman in our CD, as we had no chance to record it.

It is usually said that the Jew's harp and shamanism is strongly linked in different cultures in the world. For instance, the Sakha people in northeastern Siberia think that the Jew's harp *khomus* has a strong power to call the summer after severe long winter, not only because it can produce the different sound of nature including dripping of melting ice, birds' chirping, the clatter of horse hooves and so on, but also since it is made by a blacksmith. Thus they are sometimes thought to have more power than shamans. In Tyva, once I was told that it is dangerous even to touch the *demir-khomus* for common (non-shaman) people. But how does a shaman use the Jew's harp, and what kind of sound or music do they play on it specifically during a ritual? It had been a long-time issue for me to be witnessed.

Some days later, I learnt that it was possible to see the episode where Dezhit Tozhu herself played a Jew's harp, most probably during a *kamlanie*, in the film "Сшитые стрелы [Stitched Arrows]" a documentary film by Leonid Kruglov (1999), which was by chance the appendix to the same "Dictionary" that made me work hard to produce the CD¹. This film is a story about finding the "last" shamans in Tuva, along the 'road of Vainshtein.' Inserting Vainshtein's monologue as narrations, and some excerpts in black and white taken from the film about Republic of Tyva that Kruglov found in several dusty boxes in the archives of the Russian Academy of Sciences, he showed us some of his own encounters with the Tuvan shamans.

¹ Also known as «Сшитые стрелы: Путешествие в страну шаманов [Stitched Arrows: Journey to the Country of Shamans]" on Youtube for example:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTTeRwrOO-g> (retrieved 01 Apr. 2017).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYJNk1Iq4JU> (retrieved 01 Apr. 2017).



Around the 25th minute from the beginning, there is an approximately 3 minutes' scene with Dezhit Tozhu. In the background, ran a monologue by Vainshtein, which is very similar to the sentences from the book “Мир кочевников центра Азии [The World of Nomads of the Center of Asia]” (Вайнштейн, 1991: 254–255), not exactly the same but somehow arranged with additional information. Here, Vainshtein describes how he met this woman shaman, and what she told him.

It goes as follows: when he went to the village Kungurtug in southwestern part of Tyva to make research on the ancient Uyghur archaeological site, he met an ordinary (at first glance) old woman called Dezhit Tozhu. People told him that she had nine great shamans in her ancestors, but when the conversation came to shamanism, she tried to divert his attention to another topic. After finishing his main task, he came to her to say goodbye. But she told him that he would not leave her that day. He couldn't believe it as he knew that the small plane is waiting for him with its engine running. However, it had left without passengers.

Being surprised, he came back to Dezhit, and then she gave him remarkable information: While she is executing *kamlanie*, she plays the *khomus* with her eyes closing. Listening to its song, she calls out her *eeren* helping spirits calmly. For her, the *khomus* is a red deer that can fly like a bird, with which she flies along the Middle World, and she calls it “*chagaa daiym* – small horse.” She only flies between the mountains in the Middle World, unlike the other shamans who reach to the Upper World using frame drums to fly...

According to the fact that the scene with Dezhit Tozhu is in color, it might be proper to understand that it was shot by Kruglov in 1998. If so, she should be 87 years old, but she looks not much changed, 15 years after Vainshtein's photo. Though the clothes she wears are not the same, her appearance, especially her posture of playing the *khomus*, and the object (wooden case of the instrument?) held in her left hand is exactly the same. And also, there is a scene in which she shows her small models of different kind of tools - a knife, shovel, axe and scraper made of iron, and these “weapons” to fight against evil spirits are exactly the same as the ones illustrated and depicted in Vainshtein's book (Вайнштейн, 1991: 255–256).

On the sound track of the scene, we hear the melody of “Arty-Saiyr”, a well-known song frequently used as a motif for the *khomus* playing by many performers, which is also recorded in our CD by different musicians. In the film, after short introduction, this tune is executed very calmly, first time in lower range, and then repeated one octave higher. This might be the real *khomus* playing during a shamanic ceremony. I was excited.



However, when I got a little bit calming down, some questions arose in my mind. Is it really popular melodies like “Arty-Saiyr” (which is played by even the beginner of the *khomus*) played during a *kamlanie*? When I look at the scene very closely with doubtful eyes, I noted that the movement of Dezhit Tozhu’s right index finger and the sound of the *khomus* are not perfectly synchronized (though attempted with some effort). This means that the music on the sound track is not the one recorded during the film shooting, but recorded separately (most probably afterwards). Moreover, it is impossible to know that the music was played by her or not — it could be someone else’s fantasy that was played to accompany the picture.

Consequently, we come to a conclusion that it is still unknown what kind of music or sound she played on the *khomus* during a shamanic ritual, unfortunately. It is understandable that this film has insertions — like reindeers (not red deer), taking off airplane (without passengers?), blinks of lights (which indicates the coming of *eeren*) and aerial camera works (as if the audience flying into the sky), as it is an art work by a director. But the Jew’s harp sound by Dezhit Tozhu is the most important element in the scene (at least for me). I want to know the fact. Were the real sounds recorded at the film shooting, or probably at any of her playing during a *kamlanie*¹?

The other mysterious issue is the object in her left hand. It could be thought that it is a *khomus* case, according to how it partly protruded from her hand. But what is that in her left hand? Why is she holding it like that, both in the photo from 1983 and in the film shot in 1998? Is it the device for the players who lost their teeth to hold the *khomus* — like a hammer or axe explained by Tatyana Sorzhu (Suzukei, Tadagawa 2013: 08, 25, 35)? If so, is this object is made of metal? Is there no photo of this artefact?

So for me, there are still reasons to visit Tyva as there are so many questions waiting for answers.

Speaking of myself, I’m still flying around the Middle World with the Jew’s harps, so to say, “holding” it. My earlier travels were to visit the people from different parts of former Soviet Union whom I encountered at the Jew’s Harp

¹ As for the recording called “Khamnin khomuzu (Shamanic call)” played by Papizan Badar (also written as Bapizan, Papisan or Pavizan, 1957-2016), a Tuvan man living in Bayan- Ölgii province, Mongolia, can be heard on a CD “An Anthology of Mongolian Khöömii” (Curtet, 2016). In the liner notes, it is explained that his ‘Jew’s harp evokes the sounds of the water and mountains.’ Actually, combining the *khomus* playing and *sygyt* simultaneously, it seems to me that he is producing some fragments of a melody. But if he is a shaman or not is not mentioned, no matter how the title of the tune is.



Congress in Yakutia, 1991 — Tyva, Sakha, Khakassia, Altai, Bashkortostan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Amur basin. And also to know more Jew's harp cultures, I've visited not only countries in Asia and Europe, but also different districts inside Japan. In addition to these spatial travels, I started temporal travels to visit excavated Jew's harps from different places — mainly in Asia. The oldest reliably dated bow-shaped iron Jew's harps are from two archaeological sites in Saitama prefecture, next to Tokyo. These are dated to the first half of 10th century AD, from the circumstances of the find¹. On the other hand, one of the oldest lamellate harps made of bone is from Aimyrlyg XXXI, Tyva (2nd century BC), and now kept in the Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg (Tadagawa, 2016: 62–63)².

Also from time to time, there are friends visiting me “flying with the Jew's harp.” Especially, it was my great pleasure that I could invite Valentina and her sons to our place in Saitama in 2016 during her stay in Japan for a Conference organized by Toyo Ongaku Gakkai — The Society for Research in Asiatic Music.

When I play the Jew's harp, I feel like I'm exploring wide “inner space” of the simple single tone of the instrument. But at the same time, the Jew's harp is a tool with which I fly along the Middle World, in actual sense as well.

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¹ In Europe, the reliably dated bow-shaped Jew's harp excavations start around 12-13th centuries AD (Kolltveit, 2006).

² For the moment, the oldest lamellate harps are from Liaoning province, China (22-11th centuries BC). Other excavations are from; Xiajiadian, Inner Mongolia, China (8-4th centuries BC); Jundushan, Beijing, China (8-5th centuries BC); Morin Tolgoi, Mongolia (3-1st centuries BC); Sakhsar, Khakassia, Russia (4-5th centuries) (Tadagawa, 2016, 2017).



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