

## Article

# The Contemporary Shamanic Healing: A Case Study of the Daur Shamanic River Spirit *los* Ritual

Minna Sa

School of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Minzu University of China, Beijing 100081, China; minna.sa@muc.edu.cn

**Abstract:** In traditional shamanism, the sacred mission and responsibility of a shaman is to provide healing and salvation for individuals. Today, with continuous advancements in science, technology, and medical expertise, the content and methods of shamanic healing are quietly evolving, alongside the upholding and preservation of traditional beliefs. The case study of the Daur shamanic *los* (river spirit) ritual in this paper discusses the concepts of actual disease and virtual disease in contemporary Daur shamanism. By briefly describing the key processes of this ceremony, including the involvement of shaman spirits and the main elements of divine songs, this paper analyzes the characteristics and functions of the modern-day Daur shaman river spirit ceremony. During the ritual dedicated to *los*, Daur shamans perform symbolic ceremonies while receiving oracles from their spiritual guides. The ceremony itself incorporates various unique healing techniques such as *domal*, *tærmit*, *xoræ-xoræ*, *arfan*, *altaj solo*; *kotor bojin*, taboo, etc. These distinctive methods aim to achieve preventive healing as well as realistic healing on both the individual and collective levels. In summary, the *los* ritual itself serves as a transformative process that encompasses diverse forms of healing through its ceremonial practices.

**Keywords:** Daur shamanism; *los* (river spirit) ritual; shamanic healing; actual disease and virtual disease (实病和虚病); *domal* (symbol); *tærmit* (symbol); *xoræ-xoræ* (converge); *arfan* (spiritual water); taboo



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## 1. Introduction

The research perspective on healing may not appear significant, yet it consistently remains the primary responsibility of shamans, and a central component in shamanic rituals across diverse regions and ethnic groups worldwide. Shamanic rituals and healing activities have also deeply attracted the attention of many scholars.

According to Eliade, shamans embody the roles of medicine men, spirit healers, and sorcerers. In the expansive regions of Central and North Asia, shamanism serves as the core religious practice within society. Shamans hold prominent positions in these societies, with their mastery over ecstatic experiences being regarded as the most profound form of religious experience. Eliade cites the shamans from North and Central Asia as an exemplary illustration, highlighting their ability to amalgamate various elements found independently elsewhere in the world into a cohesive ideology that effectively manifests a distinct religious technique (Eliade 1989, pp. 4–6).

In addition to Eliade, numerous scholars have engaged in meaningful and valuable discussions on shamanic therapy from various perspectives. Since the 1970s, the “Neo-shamanism” movement has thrived in North America, advocating for the utilization of ancient shamanic experiences and methods within modern psychological medicine. This aims to enhance the physical and psychological well-being of contemporary individuals, unlock human potential, and transform spiritual perspectives. The theory of “neo-shamanism” has increasingly exerted a profound influence across research domains such as medical anthropology, psychiatry, and psychological counseling (Guo 2007, pp. 98–99).

Research on shamanism in China has experienced a significant upsurge in recent years, beginning in the 1980s. Since the 2000s, with the backdrop of identifying and safeguarding local intangible cultural heritage, as well as witnessing a revival of shamanistic practices among various ethnic groups, an array of books and papers exploring shamanism and its healing techniques from diverse perspectives have emerged. According to Tong, the healing method employed by Xibe shamans takes place within the context of their trance practice (known as *tiaoshen*, 跳神), which incorporates elements such as song, dance, and music. Throughout this process, the divine songs sung collectively by the shaman himself, his assistants, and others serve both psychological and medical functions for patients (Tong 2004, pp. 188–94).

The statement by Guo posits that shamanism, as a medical system, encompasses two dimensions: firstly, the integrative function of collective psychology during shamanic rituals; and secondly, the inherent healing capacity within shamanism itself (Guo 2007, p. 98).

Urenqiqige explores the traditional Mongolian *Andai* (安代) healing ritual from an ethnic psychiatric perspective, while also examining the evolution of Mongolian traditional osteopathy in contemporary society (Wurenqiqige 2009).

Wu explores the four predominant perspectives on disease and treatment methods within Shamanic culture, highlighting how each ethnic group has developed distinct views on diseases and unique approaches to treatment throughout their cultural histories (Wu 2014, pp. 69–73).

Meng and Wu delve into the realm of diseases and treatment phenomena within the cultural worldview of shamanism. It examines the etiological concepts present in shamanic culture, along with their associated methods for disease prevention and treatment, adopting a multidimensional approach encompassing biology, psychology, and society. Additionally, it introduces the concept of a “shaman-healer,” while also exploring the unique characteristics and societal role of shamans as healers (Meng and Wu 2015, pp. 107–22).

Qiu analyzes shamanic treatment from the perspective of medical psychology and highlighted that shamanic behaviors pertaining to medical treatment are primarily manifested in two procedures: “treating” and “healing”. The procedure of “treating” exemplifies the role of shamans as intermediaries facilitating communication between humans and spirits, while “healing” leans more towards the therapeutic function of symbolic religious rituals (Qiu 2018, pp. 5–8).

According to Shirokogoroff, shamans employ various methods such as sleep, imbibing substances, drumming, dancing, and other techniques to enter a state of ecstasy during treatment sessions while utilizing suggestions and hypnosis on patients (Shirokogoroff 1935, pp. 330–32). These ecstatic practices have a profound impact on the patient’s psychology by reinstating their confidence and restoring mental equilibrium (Yu 2021, pp. 136–43).

The Daur is one of the ethnic minorities that believe in shamanism in northeast China. A thorough investigation revealed that Daur shamanism has managed to preserve its original form relatively intact. The inheritance principle of Daur shamans continues to strictly follow the paternal bloodline (Sa 2019, p. 6 of 19). Furthermore, contemporary Daur shamans still exhibit phenomena such as possession and the presence of shamanic spirits. This sets Daur shamanism apart from other northern Chinese ethnic minority shamanisms, making it truly unique. With the continuous progress and development of medical science, the concept of disease within contemporary Daur shamanism has evolved with the times, resulting in a diverse range of healing connotations. Shamanic rituals and songs sung after being possessed by shamanic spirits are employed to achieve healing purposes and functions. Moreover, there is an even greater variety of shamanic healing methods utilized during these ritual processes. This paper takes the example of the Daur shaman’s river spirit *lvs* ritual as an example to briefly describe, analyze, and explain shamanic healing.

In contemporary Daur shamanistic rituals, the shamanic spirits convey to the shamans,<sup>1</sup> “Regardless of your choice to administer treatment and facilitate healing or

not, it is imperative that you guide your spirits towards benevolent conduct”.<sup>2</sup> This underscores the sacred mandate and responsibility of a shaman to provide remedies and restore well-being, an enduring principle within the belief system and ceremonial practices of Daur shamanism.

On 23 June 2012 (May 5th in Chinese Lunar Calendar), Shaman Onon (鄂嫩萨满) and Shaman Wo (沃萨满) jointly held the first *los takabe* (river spirit worship) ceremony to worship the Yimin River (伊敏河) on the grassland south of Bayantuohai Town (namely Nantun) in Ewenki Autonomous Banner, Inner Mongolia. This marked a significant event as it was the contemporary Daur shamans’ first river spirit worship ceremony since 1949. On 12 June 2013 (also May 5th in Chinese Lunar Calendar), Shaman Onon, assisted by Shaman Wo, performed the second *los* ritual. Subsequently, on 2 June 2014 (May 5th), they held the third ceremony dedicated to *los*. It is worth noting that I actively observed and participated in these consecutive three years of *los* rituals.

In 2015, Shaman Onon initiated the *los takabe* (river spirit worship) ceremony of the Hailar River (海拉尔河), which was subsequently held for three consecutive years, continuing in 2016 and 2017. Due to time constraints, I only attended the *los* ritual on 30 May 2017 (May 5th). It should be noted that the site of this worship ceremony dedicated to the Hailar River is situated in Bayanburide Gacha (巴彦布日德嘎查), a village within Huhenoer (呼和浩特) Town in Chenbarhu Banner, Inner Mongolia. Based on the currently translated and organized materials, it can be observed that the two *los* rituals of both Hailar River and Yimin River share similar content and practices.

Taking a comprehensive look at the various ceremonies dedicated to the river spirit throughout these years, the contemporary Daur shaman’s first ceremony of the Yimin River spirit worship in 2012 showcased distinctive characteristics. It uniquely revived the traditional customs of worshiping the river spirit and initiated the modern river spirit worship activities that have been followed until now. This article focuses solely on this particular ceremony, providing a brief account of its process and the content of shamanic chants, while summarizing the features and functions of worshiping *los* (dragon spirit, river spirit). Furthermore, it analyzes the traditional beliefs and ritual practices within contemporary Daur shamanism, particularly exploring their healing concepts and therapeutic behaviors.

## 2. The Meaning of River Spirit “*los*”

The Daur people believe that all things have spirits, and that rivers and lakes are governed by spirits. Each river has its own river spirit, each lake has its own ruler, and springs have their own masters. The spirits that govern these water systems are called *los* in the Dauric language.<sup>3</sup> According to Shaman Onon, *los* is actually a Mongolian word, while in the Daur language it is referred to as *ludžir* (short for snake spirit) or *ludžir barkən* (snake spirit).<sup>4</sup> The term *los* refers to both dragons in the sky and snakes on land. It encompasses serpent spirits found in grasslands, cliffs, and bodies of water. In addition to celestial dragons, it also includes snakes dwelling within mountains like *aol* (mountain) and *xad* (mountain cliff), as well as aquatic creatures such as fish and turtles. Shaman Wo adds that the scope of *los* extends to include species like the large carp known as *ʃi’ə kəltə’ə*, otters called *xalo*, and martens known as *balag*, among others.

In the collective concept of *los*, the worship of the *ludžir barkən* (snake spirit) by the Daur people is particularly special and prominent. According to the ancient folklore of the Daur, all rivers are related to the snake spirit, and are the springs that roll out of *ludžir barkən* and flow into the rivers, lakes, and seas (Sa 2014, pp. 63–68). Both paintings and idols of the snake spirit have been created; paintings are placed in homes, while idols are usually made for shaman initiation rituals and the Ominnan ceremony, where black-and-white snake dolls are tied to roots at “Indoor Toro Trees” (two white birch trees). The symbol of *los* is “*losi obə*” (river spirit obo),<sup>5</sup> which is generally built on slopes or grasslands near rivers by the *xal*—*mokun* (clan—branches of clan)<sup>6</sup> (Manduertu 1999, p. 298).

After participating in the 2013 *los* ritual, I specifically interviewed an elderly Daur man in Hailar who was nearly 80 years old. The elder said that *los* is the Dragon King (龙王爷), a

dragon spirit, and *los takabe* refers to the ceremony conducted to worship the Dragon King. In addition to conducting interviews and verification with Shaman Onon and Shaman Wo, I have translated and explicated the *los* ritual in the paper as a ceremony of making offering to “Dragon Spirit”.

### 3. An Overview of the Main Procedures of the River Spirit *los* Ceremony

#### 3.1. The Cause of a *los* Ceremony

On the morning of 23 June 2012 (May 5th in Chinese Lunar Calendar), the grand Daur shamans Onon and Wo jointly held the ceremony of *los* to worship the Yimin River on the banks of the Yimin River, south of Bayantuohai town, Ewenki Autonomous Banner, Inner Mongolia. It is said that 2012 was the Year of the Black Dragon, which is considered *katəŋ* (卡腾)<sup>7</sup> by the Daur. The purpose of this ritual was to bless the *xal*—*mokun* family members, as well as ensure peace and health for everyone living in this region. In 2013, the Year of the Snake, which is also a *katəŋ* year, they continued with another *los* ceremony on 12 June (May 5th). Onon served as the main priest while Wo assisted her. In 2014, during the Year of the Horse, Onon and Wo conducted a third dragon spirit worship ceremony by the Yimin River. According to Shaman Onon, just like with oboo ceremonies, once they start worshipping *los*, it must be done continuously for at least three years.

Before the *los* ritual in 2014, I had another interview with Shaman Onon, who once again provided a comprehensive interpretation of the purpose behind conducting *los* ceremonies. Historically, the Daur people resided in close proximity to mountains and bodies of water, relying entirely on the surrounding natural resources while holding great reverence for them. The Daur people firmly believe that all things possess spirits every natural element is governed by deities; mountains are overseen by mountain spirits, and water is inhabited by water spirits. Consequently, it is imperative not to disrupt or contaminate these elements by disposing of any waste into rivers and lakes. By safeguarding their purity, one can invite prosperity and goodness into their lives. Each winter season witnesses miles of ice and snow as *los* (river spirit) slumbers peacefully. As spring arrives with blooming flowers and verdant trees, *los* awakens from its slumber. This auspicious time marks an opportunity to pay homage to *los* as the spirit commences bestowing blessings upon individuals’ well-being and tranquility throughout the year. Simultaneously, this practice instills a sense of appreciation towards all aspects of nature while discouraging excessive exploitation through over-harvesting or fishing activities, particularly emphasizing maintaining cleanliness within water sources.

#### 3.2. Preparation of the *los* Ritual

##### 3.2.1. Making Specialized Clothing—Shaman “Cloak” and Colorful Square Flags

In 2012, in preparation for the *los* ritual, Shaman Onon and Shaman Wo each meticulously crafted a grand cloak using date red satin with a black lining. Given the challenging year of the Black Dragon for young individuals, as guided by the ancestral spirits’ will, these two shamans allowed both *xal*—*mokun* members and the other clans to symbolically seek refuge under this protective cloak. Consequently, during the entire ritual of offering to *los* in 2012, they abstained from wearing their shaman costume *sama:fək* (萨玛仕克) and instead donned these distinctive cloaks.<sup>8</sup>

Shaman Onon and Shaman Wo each created a set of vibrant square flags known as *targas*, which come in seven colors: red symbolizing good fortune, blue representing the sky, green signifying flora and fauna, yellow denoting the sun, white embodying purity and benevolence, pink representing *los*, and black symbolizing the road of night.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the field research pictures of the river spirit *los* rituals are shown in Appendix A.

##### 3.2.2. Selecting a Sacred Ceremonial Site

It is widely acknowledged that the *los* holds a strong affinity for cleanliness. Hence, it becomes imperative to carefully choose a pristine riverside meadow as the sacred cer-



emonial site. The shaman ought to pay homage to *łos* in an environment abundant with unpolluted water and lush grasslands. Several days prior to the ceremony, Mr. Bateer (Shaman Onon's husband) led her male disciples on a journey to Bayantuohai, where they meticulously selected an open meadow on the north bank of the Yimin River as their designated ceremony location.<sup>10</sup>

On 12 June, at daybreak, Mr. Bateer and his assistants arrived promptly and encircled the pre-determined ceremonial grounds with vibrant flags, effectively demarcating this hallowed space reserved exclusively for performing rituals dedicated to *łos* worship. Shaman Onon, accompanied by her family and disciples, reached the ceremony site around 7 a.m.

### 3.2.3. Preparing and Arranging Offerings as Tributes

On the eve of the ceremony, family members of Shaman Onon and Shaman Wo, disciples of Morin-Dawaa, and disciples of Chenbarhu Banner visited Hailar's supermarkets to purchase a variety of pastries, sweets, and dairy products. In the morning of 12 June, men set up tents while women began arranging offerings. Initially, three rectangular offering tables were placed side by side along the north bank of Yimin River in an east-west direction. Due to the abundance of offerings, preparations were made both inside and outside the tent. Inside the tent, Shaman Onon personally guided the placement of offerings which included diverse plates showcasing dairy products, snacks, fruits, and wine, as well as other items. Decorative pastry plates followed by homemade fried dessert plates and fruit plates were successively brought to be displayed on the riverside table. A total number of twenty-seven wooden bowls, divided into three groups, with each group containing nine wooden bowls, were filled with dry milk, milk curd, milk crust, white cream, and yellow cream alongside nine other types of milk products; additionally, two flat plates contained grains. Outside the tent area on a large plastic sheet in northern meadowland lay offerings arranged by Morin-Dawaa's disciples and their families under guidance from Shaman Wo, who was overseeing this process attentively. Their contributions consisted of tall fruit dessert platters, accompanied by two rectangular plates of walnuts, dates, rock candy, almonds, dried fruit, cheese slices, hawthorn roll and candy. Additionally, a few bottles of red wine, canned fruits, mixed congee, and a large watermelon cut into two halves were arranged neatly and beautifully. In a large porcelain bowl, there were 27 boiled eggs without shells. After everything was set up nicely, they were gradually brought to the table by the riverside.

As the faint "Sang" (桑) smoke wafted from *łosi xvræ* (enclosure of river spirit), Shamans Onon and Wo had already prepared their offerings. Local people from various ethnic groups who came to participate in the ceremony began to take out their own offerings, mostly dairy products, and place them on or around the main altar.

The offering table was placed in the southwest corner outside the ceremony site, adjacent to the upper Yimin River, where a variety of fruits, snacks, milk, and other offerings were carefully arranged. It is said that these offerings were for *gadzir ædžin* (local spirit)<sup>11</sup> of the venue where the ritual took place, signifying a gesture of borrowing someone else's space to hold a ceremony for one's own ancestral spirits. Therefore, it is important to show respect and gratitude towards the local deity.

### 3.2.4. Setting Up a Willow Branch Fence

While the women were busy laying out their offerings, the men were setting up a willow garden—the *łosi xvræ* (enclosure of *łos*), a temporary dwelling built for the *łos*.<sup>12</sup> In the southwest of the tent, on a grassy area almost level with the table by the river, men wove and fastened together three interconnected low square enclosures using branches and twigs from willow trees. This formed a rectangular enclosure with a length three times longer than its width. Eight willow branches were vertically placed as stakes at each corner and along the long sides, while two square willow fences were horizontally set in the middle to divide it into three connected square enclosures. Each small enclosure had

nine red bricks laid on its grassy ground, with an iron basin placed on top of each brick, emitting wisps of *Sang* smoke.

### 3.2.5. Symbolic Sacrificial Offering and Releasing of Animals

Shaman Onon prepared in advance by having his disciples invite their families to make nine small sheep out of flour. These adorable little sheep were made using white flour as the skin and “*Gangga*” (刚嘎) grass as the filling, resulting in a lifelike and endearing appearance. At the start of the ceremony, assistants placed these dough-made lambs on *losi xvræ*, with each grid containing three sheep.

Before the ceremony began, there was a ritual performed involving the releasing of live fish into the Yimin River section of the ceremony venue. Most participants bought loaches from the market for this purpose. It is said that releasing living creatures into water signifies doing *bōjin* (博音), which means performing a good deed. In the middle of the ceremony site, assistants laid down a large red carpet on the grass between the main offering table on the north side of the riverbank and an east-side tent. This would be the place where the two shamans would come together to chant prayers and invite spirits to descend.

### 3.3. The Main Rites and the Spirits Be Invoked

The preparations are complete. The *los* (river spirit) ritual is about to commence.<sup>13</sup>

#### 3.3.1. Offering and Prayer to *los*

Shaman Onon and Shaman Wo wore bronze mirrors, prayer beads, and shamanic headdresses outside of their ethnic costumes. Shaman Onon informed *ənən xal*, *uərə xal*, *likən xal* mokun family men, and the disciples of Tungusi Ewenki, Balhu Mongol of Chenbarhu Banner of the specific ritual procedures. The *ənən xal* and *likən xal*, *uərə xal*, and Chenbarhu Banner disciples were divided into three groups, and nine people selected from each group would represent the mokun family to offer milk to *los*.

Shaman Onon and Shaman Wo donned their ceremonial cloaks after a brief respite. They secured the vibrant square flagpole behind the drum with a rope, allowing the colorful flag to unfurl from its edge and gracefully dance in the wind. These distinctive garments worn by them held equivalent significance to shamanic attire, symbolizing that the ceremony was about to commence officially.

Standing upon the red carpet facing the main altar table and Yimin River, they first bowed towards the south while rhythmically shaking the drum. Subsequently, they shook it in three directions—east, west, and north—before turning back to face south again and playing the drums together in unison. Shaman Onon initiated with an evocative prelude called “*Di-gu-ya*”, followed by a profound prayer.

At the same time, the chosen members of the *xal*—*mokun* family ceremoniously poured milk towards the flowing waters of the Yimin River. The foremost individual in each team held a substantial bowl filled with milk and delicately sprinkled it from a small spoon, directing it towards the river’s course, commencing from the southeast and concluding at the southwest, for a total of nine cycles. Subsequently, they passed on the bowl to their successor, who followed suit in this circular motion until all nine individuals within the team had offered their portion of milk. Shaman Onon elucidated that each team comprised precisely nine participants, with each person consecrating nine spoonfuls of milk. This multiplication of nine by nine symbolizes 81 offerings—an auspicious number imbued with positive connotations—epitomizing the unwavering devotion exhibited by the *xal*—*mokun* family towards *los*.

#### 3.3.2. Shaman Onon Possessed by the Shaman Spirit

The ancestral shamanic spirit “*la: saman*” (La Shaman)<sup>14</sup> was summoned with “*imin goli ǎdžin*” (Yimin River spirit).<sup>15</sup>

After the three mokun families and the Chenbarhu Banner's people had served the milk and Shaman Onon had finished singing the sacred song, she began to dance in circles while beating the drum. She turned counterclockwise, then clockwise, then counterclockwise again before bouncing up twice and falling on her back. When Shaman *vygor*<sup>16</sup> arrived, an assistant helped her sit on a stool. Shaman Onon started to hit the drums and sing the preamble "*De-me-yang-gu*". The ancestral shamanic spirit *la: saman* (La Shaman) came first, then she sang the preamble "*De-gu-huo-ni-de-gu*" in a different tune, meaning another *vygor* "*imin guli adzin*" (Yimin River spirit) was to come.

Shaman spirit *imin guli adzin* descended, introduced himself, and spoke to 11 groups of people. The *xal*—*mokuns* and the animal signs of the summoned people were as follows:<sup>17</sup>

(1) the *uərə xal* (沃热哈勒) *xodzor jad'an* (mokun shaman),<sup>18</sup> and a child born in the Year of the Pig.

(2) the *gv:bəl xal manna əla* (郭博勒哈勒满那爱拉)<sup>19</sup> child born in the Year of the Dog, the *gv:bəl xal nəjintfen* (郭博勒哈勒乃音浅) child born in the Year of the Snake, and the child born in the Year of the Tiger came from Morin-Dawaa (莫力达瓦).

(3) the *ənən xal* (鄂嫩哈勒) child born in the Year of Ox, and the children born in the Years of the Horse, Sheep, Ox, and Rat.

(4) the *ənən xal* son-in-law and his children.

(5) the *gv:bəl xal manna əla* children born in the Year of the Tiger, the Pig, another boy born in the Year of the Pig, and his wife born in the Year of Rat, and their children born in the Year of the Dog, Tiger, Snake.

(6) the new shaman candidate, a girl from Japan.

(7) the *avla xal deyteke əla* (敖拉哈勒登特科爱拉) granddaughters born in the Year of the Monkey and Tiger.

(8) the *xa:xər xal* (哈赫日哈勒) of Ewenki girls born in the Year of the Dog, Horse, and Rat, and son born in the Year of the Sheep.

(9) the *avla xal deyteke əla* someone.

(10) the *gv:bəl xal* (郭博勒哈勒) child born in the Year of the Pig, who found the place and came here.

(11) the *su:du:r xal urkun mokun* (苏都日哈勒乌日昆莫昆) daughter-in-law born in the Year of the Monkey, and the son born in the Year of the Dog.

Finally, Shaman Onon beat the drum and said: "when the *ənən xal xodzor jad'an* (mokun shaman) was a little tired, the *vygor* (shaman spirit) wanted her to rest and hurried to leave".

### 3.3.3. Shaman Wo Possessed by Her Ancestral Shamanic Spirit

As soon as the Shaman Onon's *vygor* (shaman spirit) left, Shaman Wo stood up and turned in a circle, then fell to the ground. Her ancestral shamanic spirit "*guj jad'an*"<sup>20</sup> came, and the assistants helped her sit on a stool. Shaman Wo beat the drum and sang the prelude of the divine song "*Gu-wei-ke*", narrating the origin of her own road and expressing a joyful mood. She spoke to three groups of people. The *xal*—*mokun* and the animal signs of the summoned people were as follows:<sup>21</sup>

(12) the *likən xal* child born in the Year of the Pig, the "*undu:s xodzor*" (man of mokun).<sup>22</sup>

(13) the *ənən xal* grandsons born in the Year of Ox.

(14) the *uərə xal* great-grandson born in the Year of the Pig.

The ancestral shamanic spirit of Shaman Wo summoned three groups of people from three *xal*—*mokun* families, representing the ceremony jointly held by *likən xal*, *ənən xal*, and *uərə xal*. Shaman Wo consumed white milk offered by these families to express joy and bestow blessings upon them. Subsequently, she announced the arrival of another *vygor*. Following this announcement, she stood up and leaped a few times before sitting back down again. Another *vygor* descended.

### 3.3.4. Shaman Wo Possessed by Another Shamanic Spirit

Shaman Wo's *uṅgür* "xar bōdʒi lusōṅ" (Black Boerji River Spirit)<sup>23</sup> arrived. The assistants helped Shaman Wo sit on her stool, and Wo began to beat the drum and spoke to 10 groups of people. The *xal*—*mokun* and their animal signs of the summoned people were as follows:

(15) the *likən xal* (李肯哈勒) grandson born in the Year of the Rabbit.

(16) the *ənən xal xōdʒor jad'an* (mokun shaman).

(17) the *mərdəṅ xal sibōʃtʃfen* (莫日登哈勒西博奇浅) great-grandson born in the Year of the Dog, the *mərdəṅ xal si'a mərdəṅfen* (莫日登哈勒西额莫日登浅) great-grandgirl born in the Year of the Rooster, and the *mərdəṅ xal nir'itfen* (莫日登哈勒尼日耶浅) great-grandgirl born in the Year of the Monkey.

(18) the *avla xal dənteketfen* (敖拉哈勒登特科浅) great-grandson born in the Year of the Tiger, and the *avla xal dō:əntfen* (敖拉哈勒多恩浅) daughter-in-law.

(19) the *gū:bəl xal* great-grandson born in the Year of the Ox, who lead *xōdʒor barkən* (ancestral spirit),<sup>24</sup> and *gaxutʃa jeje* (*gaxutʃa saman*)<sup>25</sup> followed him.

(20) the *avla xal* great-grandson born in the Year of the Monkey.

(21) the *mərdəṅ xal alaktʃanʃfen* (莫日登哈勒阿拉克昌浅) boy, the child born in the Year of the Snake.

(22) the *likən xal* great-grandson born in the Year of the Pig, the great-grandson-in-law born in the Year of the Tiger, and the great-granddaughter born in the Year of the Rabbit.

(23) the *uərə xal* great-grandson born in the Year of the Pig, his son born in the Year of the Monkey, and the great-grandson born in the Year of the Dragon.

(24) the *avla xal* great-grandson born in the Year of the Dragon.

Finally, the shaman spirit said:

*To the great-grandchildren born in the Year of Dragon, spray you all with white milk and spray spring water on you.<sup>26</sup> Come before me, my grandsons and great-grandsons born in the Year of Dragon, and those who were born in the Year of Snake or Dragon.*

The young men born in the Years of the Dragon and Snake of all mokuns came and knelt down in front of Shaman Wo. An assistant gave her a big sip of milk, which she sprayed out with a puff sound twice. Then she beat the drum and said, "Bring me the spring water". Her assistant gave her a big sip of mineral water, from which Shaman Wo sprayed three times onto the faces of the kneeling children while uttering auspicious blessings. After that, she quickly beat her drum until gradually becoming sober again and opened her eyes. Shaman Wo's *uṅgür* (shaman spirit) departed.

### 3.3.5. Shaman Onon Possessed by Another Ancestral Shaman Spirit

After Shaman Wo's *uṅgür* left, Shaman Onon rose to her feet, engaging in drumming and spinning movements as another *uṅgür* was descending. The assistants seated her onto her stool, and she began to sing the divine song overture "De-bi-le".<sup>27</sup> The assistants joined in singing the same melody. Soon after, the arrival of *ənən xal* "xōdʒor lō: gutajiti" (a female ancestral shaman spirit)<sup>28</sup> was announced. The ancestral shaman spirit began seeking out individuals and communicating with five groups of people. The summoned people were as follows:

(25) the Balhu Mongolian people, who came from Chenbarhu Banner.

(26) the Tungusi Ewenki people, who came from Chenbarhu Banner.

(27) the Solon Ewenki people, who came from Nantun, Ewenki Autonomous Banner.

(28) the Daur people of *ənən xal* and the *avla xal* (敖拉哈拉), who came from Nantun, Ewenki Autonomous Banner.

(29) the Buryat Mongolian people, who came from Nantun, Ewenki Autonomous Banner.

After speaking to the people, Shaman Onon stood up, circled and beat the drum, and then her *uṅgür* left.

### 3.3.6. Shaman Wo Possessed by Her Shaman Spirit

Shaman Wo stood up and jumped up twice, then fell to the ground and rolled around, and the assistants promptly assisted her in settling onto her stool. With rhythmic drumming and melodic vocals, she commenced the divine song overture “Ya-gei-ya”, and said:

*Generations have followed one after another, following the footsteps of dolo mardəŋ (seven mardəŋ).<sup>29</sup> Mardəŋ tajti (mardəŋ xal ləsoŋ əbə: ədʒin),<sup>30</sup> my body came down. Although the time is short, I am glad to come in. The xəɖʒor barkən (ancestral spirit) of ənən xal makes me happy! I followed the xəɖʒor barkən (ancestral spirit) of uərə xal, followed the grandchildren came, I am happy! So, coming with joy, I would like to say three or five words to my children and grandchildren.*

Then, the shaman spirit spoke to the shaman groups.<sup>31</sup> The animal signs of the summoned people were as follows:

(30) The mardəŋ xal fiboŋfifən great-grandson born in the Year of the Dog.

(31) the mardəŋ xal fi'ə mardəŋfən great-granddaughter born in the Year of the Rooster.

(32) the mardəŋ xal nir'ifən great-granddaughter born in the Year of the Monkey.

Finally, Shaman Wo's ŋygor “mardəŋ tajti” said:

*However, today, people are happily going about business and letting go of all the negatives associated with mokun. I will not be angry with you on such a splendid day. As time grew scarce, it became imperative for me to depart. Whether you belong to my Daur ethnic group or other ethnic communities, may the roads ahead be smoother for each and every one of you! Cast away your formidable obstacles into the waters of Yimin River and let your minor hindrances vanish before returning home. Discard all your tribulations and hardships prior to your homeward journey. Now, as time draws near, it is time to do the dōmāl (symbolic ritual).<sup>32</sup> It is time for me to leave.*

After saying that, Shaman Wo quickly beat the drum, and her shamanic spirit left.

### 3.3.7. Entering the Protection of “muduri xwarm”

The xal—mokun members participating in the ceremony symbolically entered the muduri xwarm (the hem of the Dragon Spirit's robe),<sup>33</sup> which was a crucial component of the ləso ritual of 2012.

The assistants organized the queues according to Shaman Onon's instructions, with men lining up on one side and women on the other. Shaman Onon and Wo discussed seating arrangements that allowed for easy access under their cloaks. Positioned in the west, Shaman Onon faced south, while Shaman Wo stood in the east, creating a distance between them. Three assistants stood slightly behind Shaman Onon on her west side, forming a space between her and Shaman Wo. Together, they three raised high the hems of the cloaks worn by the two shamans. As Shaman Onon and Shaman Wo began drumming and singing, men crawled from left to right under their raised cloaks, moving from west to east. While people passed by underneath, Shaman Onon drummed sideways over their bodies while Shaman Wo drummed sideways over their heads as they drilled and climbed through. This process was repeated three times for complete protection before women started drilling and climbing from right to left (east to west), which was also repeated three times for full protection.

Those initiated shamans had both shamans patting heads, shoulders, and touching hands. Both shamans held the sacred drums above their heads and swung at or stroked the drums a few times.

### 3.3.8. Blessing Ceremony “xwæ- xwæ”

The participants in the ceremony congregated around the altar, each taking their offerings and a portion of what was presented by the chief shamans. Shaman Onon and Shaman Wo positioned themselves facing south towards the Yimin River, standing united on the northern side of the altar while engaging in synchronized drumming and chanting. The two shamans recited several invocations before exclaiming thrice xwæ- xwæ (gather



and gather).<sup>34</sup> Those individuals standing behind them echoed this call *xwæ- xwæ* three times. Simultaneously, people held snacks, milk, and fruit in their hands while drawing clockwise circles with their gestures.

After the blessing ceremony, the devout people knelt down and bowed three times facing the water of the Yimin River.

### 3.3.9. Shamans Sending Back the Spirits

Shaman Onon and Shaman Wo faced south, gently beating the drum on the banks of the Yimin River, silently singing prayers to bid farewell to the spirits.

### 3.3.10. Symbolic Sacrifice of “White Sheep” Ceremony

Shaman Onon held a plate of dough-made lambs and said a few prayers by the banks of the Yimin River. She then entrusted her disciple Narengerile to release the “sheep” into the river, allowing them to flow downstream. Narengerile explained that traditionally, the sheep should be “ascended” over fire, but in this case, releasing them into the water symbolized offering lambs as sacrifices to *łos*.

Afterwards, people began cleaning up the ceremonial site. Men started dismantling canopies and tents while women tidied up and washed dishes. Then, everyone loaded all their belongings onto vehicles. Finally, together, they picked up any litter on the grassland, including bottles and scraps of paper. After concluding the ritual, there was no trace of garbage left on the lawn; only some footprints remained.

## 4. A Brief Analysis of the *łos* Ritual

### 4.1. The Characteristics of the River Spirit *łos* Ritual

#### 4.1.1. The *łos* Ritual Fully Restored the Tradition of Daur Shamanic Ceremony of Presenting Offering to River Spirit

According to existing literature records, there have been no public and large-scale ceremonies dedicated to the water deity represented by the dragon spirit in Daur shamanism since at least the 1930s–1940s.

During the ritual of worshiping the Yimin River in 2012, the shaman spirit *xar bōrdzi losōŋ* (Black Boerji River Spirit) said:

*The place of dolo mardəŋ, you should sprinkle seven bowls of milk! You should sprinkle colored wine (red wine or fruit wine)! This place katəŋ bəlwud (when it became famous),<sup>35</sup> ŋgər xytəla (numerous shamanic spirits)<sup>36</sup> all came, and were they not all sitting there enviously watching? It has been many years since they had not seen the losōŋ (łos, river spirit) ritual for many years, so they were sitting and watching happily.*

It is evident that the *łos* ritual in 2012 marked the revival of the traditional Daur shamanic ceremony of worshiping and presenting offerings to the river spirit.

#### 4.1.2. The *łos* Ritual Is a Unique Kind of Contemporary Daur Shamanistic Ceremony That Does Not Involve Killing or Sacrificing Animals

The offerings of the *łos* ceremony are very special, mainly consisting of *ɣagan idə*: (dairy products) and *tubue: idə*: (fruits).<sup>37</sup> Other offerings include various pastries and homemade pasta. In addition to milk, the beverages for the ceremony also include red wine (fruit wine) and spring water. The Daur people living in the pastoral areas of Hailar primarily offer dairy products, while those living in the agricultural areas of Morin-Dawaa offer hard-boiled eggs in addition to dairy products. Nowadays, people also add a variety of snacks according to their preferences and habits, such as dates, walnuts, raisins, hawthorn cakes, and candies.

It is said that *łos* is particularly fond of cleanliness. The offerings for *łos* must not contain any meat; neither are animals sacrificed during the ritual. Therefore, the ritual of worshiping *łos* is unique among Daur shamanic rituals as it does not involve killing or sacrificing animals.

#### 4.1.3. The *łos* Ritual Is a Rare Kind of Ceremony in Which Shamans Invoke Spirits without Wearing Shamanic Costume

Prior to the formal initiation ceremony, Daur shaman candidates usually make a cloak instead of a shamanic costume. Some novice shamans are unable to wear shamanic attire due to the absence of shamans in the previous generation or their own insufficient level of attainment. They instead don special cloaks and partake in an initiation ritual, which involves wearing these shamanic garments, playing shaman drums, and singing sacred songs to summon ancestral and assisting spirits. This is a longstanding tradition among Daur Mokun shaman known as *xođor jad'an*, who conduct various shaman rituals.

In 2012, during the ceremony aimed at allowing people to symbolically enter the protection of “*muduri xəarm*” (the hem of the Dragon Spirit’s robe), Shaman Onon and Shaman Wo did not wear shamanic costume during the *łos* ritual. Instead, they substituted them with unique shamanic cloaks that allowed individuals to pass through their wide hems. Such a deviation from wearing shamanic attire while invoking *vygər* (shaman spirit) is exceedingly rare in other rituals performed by these two Mokun shamans.

#### 4.2. The Functions of the River Spirit *łos* Ritual

##### 4.2.1. The *łos* Ritual Has Multiple Specific Functions

##### The Function of Protecting the Natural Ecological Environment

The Daur people believe that all things have spirits. They devoutly worship and respect the mountains, rivers, lakes, and seas, resulting in many traditions such as not polluting the river waters, and moderation of fishing and hunting.

During the *łos* ritual, the shaman spirit *imin göli ədžin* (Yimin River Spirit) said to the *uərə xal* boy born in the Year of the Pig:

*Do not eat fish on the fifth day of each month; be careful not to make the water dirty; do not wash things in the river on the fifth day; do not eat fish (3.3.2.-1).*

And said to the *gə:bəl xal* young man born in the Year of the Tiger, who came from Morin-Dawaa:

*When the grass and trees turn yellow, you should pay attention not to eat the meat of wild animals, not to saw the trees, not to go to the place where the blood of the car accident occurred, and to hide from the mouth (3.3.2.-5).*

And said to the *su:du:r xal* (苏都日哈勒) boy born in the Year of the Snake:

*Do not eat the flesh of *gurə:s* (wild animal);<sup>38</sup> do not cut down flowers and trees (3.3.2.-11).*

People who are warned often keep in mind the taboo requirements within a year, or even longer. After the ceremony, the shaman instructs participants to clear the site of any debris and restore the grass to its natural state. These statements and practices of *łos* rituals hold significant positive implications for preserving the ecological integrity of the natural environment.

##### The Function of Praying for Blessing *xal*—*mokun* Members

The Daur people have a long-standing tradition of presenting offerings to the river spirit and beseeching for rainfall. In ancient times, the folk ritual known as “*duəd garbe*” (“Go To Wild”)<sup>39</sup> involved Mokun or village women praying for rain in the river by dousing each other with water. Originally, these offerings were made to ensure favorable weather conditions, abundant rainfall, prosperous livestock and grain harvests, representing the fundamental aspects of this traditional ceremony dedicated to rain and shamanic worship of water spirits.

The *łos* ritual in 2012 also served as a means to pray for good weather. During the rite, the shaman spirit *xar bərdži losəŋ* used milk and spring water to sprinkle blessings upon individuals born in the Years of the Dragon and Snake (3.3.4.-24).

At the conclusion of the ceremony, two shamans played drums and chanted prayers while everyone held food items and exclaimed “*xwæ- xwæ*” (gather and gather), invoking prosperity and bestowing wishes for a wealthy and beautiful life upon all participants (3.3.8).

Furthermore, through its accompanying shamanic songs, the ritual imparts various methods for seeking good fortune while warding off evil influences. Thus, not only does it seek rain but also encompasses blessings within its expanded ceremonial significance. These details will be further analyzed below.

### Comprehensive Function of Educating and Persuading Mokun Members

Modern Daur shamanic rituals often have multiple integrated functions, including advising, warning, and educating members of the Mokun families. During the *lvs* ritual, shaman spirits taught the *xal*—mokun members to pay attention to daily ethical principles and norms of conduct.

The shaman spirit *mərdəŋ tajti* (*mərdəŋ lvsəŋ əbə: ədʒin*, namely the river spirit oboo master of *mərdəŋ xal*), said to the grand-daughter-in-law of the *mərdəŋ xal* born in the Year of the Snake:

*Clothes that are too long will wrap around your legs and feet (xwərm ɔrt bəlsə kuli kɔʃibe), and a long tongue can wrap around your neck (xəli ɔrt bəlsə kvami kɔʃibe) (3.3.6.-30).*

And said to the *mərdəŋ xal* grandson born in the Year of the Dog:

*The wine in the pot makes you crooked (kɔ:ti ər'i kɔŋkɔli'bij), and the wine in the cup makes you wobbled (ʃɔmɔ:ti ər'i ʃɔntʃɔli'bij) (3.3.6.-30).*

These two lines in Daur language are rhymed verse, vividly depicting profound wisdom. The first line advises people to be cautious with their words and actions, avoiding gossip and slander. The second line warns people to cherish their health and not indulge excessively in drinking.

Shamanic spirits instruct young people to respect their parents, to distinguish right from wrong, and to keep good company. The shaman spirit *imin goli ədʒin* said to the *likən xal* people born in the Year of the Pig:

*Do not drink, it is not good for your body. If you really love your mother, do not let her suffer heart-broken pains, your mother is loving you with her life, she is carrying your life, taking you back and forth (3.3.2.-4).*

The shaman spirit *xar bərdʒi lvsəŋ* told the *uərə xal* young people born in the Year of the Monkey:

*There is a small black-faced guy, and a slightly fat pale guy, you should not walk together with these boys (3.3.4.-23).*

The *lvs* ritual is highly prominent in educating and instructing the Mokun family members. The shaman spirit *imin goli ədʒin* said to the *uərə xal xwəʃɔr jad'an* (Mokun shaman), raising expectations:

*You should walk as sturdy as the hub of a Daur cart, with a firm determination like the spokes. While holding onto a heart as soft as the rim, you should walk attentively and strategically like the wheel spokes. I'm telling you that. You should take charge like the yoke of a cart, walk justly like the axle, and possess an upright road like the carriage pole (3.3.2.-1).*

The Daur shaman spirits use the traditional handmade wooden large cart as a metaphor. They regard health, determination, attentiveness, planning, initiative, fairness, and integrity as the character requirements for Daur *xwəʃɔr jad'an* (Mokun shaman). Only with such qualities can shamans bear people's hardships and engage in comprehensive and multi-dimensional healing for both individuals and the Daur group. They assist the Daur people in constantly progressing upwards and actively striving forward to ensure prosperity for future generations. In short, shamans face greater pressure and carry heavier burdens.

In 2012, there were only two Mokun shamans in shamanic attire among the Daur people, along with a few *barf* and *bagfi*. Some of the disciples and candidates who have entered the “*mokun kurā*” (Mokun Circle)<sup>40</sup> of the Shaman Onon may have lacked sufficient training, and their determination was not yet firm. Therefore, during the *lōs* ritual, shamanic spirits generally paid more attention to shamanic groups, seemingly constantly making requests and expressing hopes, even offering criticism and education. In reality, this was also a form of healing for them, providing encouragement and guidance. The *imin goli ādžin* gave recommendations for a new shaman candidate:

*When you desire to enter this “kurā” (circle) and proceed towards the road of barkən xōdžor (ancestral spirit). If you request uərə xal xōdžor jad’ən (mokun shaman) to facilitate your passage, it will be necessary for you to perform a kowtow ritual in reverence to her ancestral spirit (3.3.2.-6).*

The *imin goli ādžin* also encouraged the *awla xal deŋteke əla* granddaughters born in the Year of the Tiger:

*If you want to walk on the road of jad’ən (shaman), you must be determined and strong to walk your own road (3.3.2.-7).*

#### 4.2.2. The *lōs* Ritual Has a Full Range of Healing Functions

The *lōs* ceremony possesses comprehensive and multi-faceted healing capabilities, making it a quintessential representation of contemporary Daur shamans’ unique shamanic healing practices. Furthermore, considering the traditional concept of shamanism and the content of ritual chants, these three functions can indeed be included within the broader scope of healing.

Shamans have been healers since the day they were born. In Eliad’s view, shamans are both warlocks and doctors (Eliade 1989, p. 4). *The Study of Shamanic Medicine in Anthropological Perspective* puts forward the view that the shaman is a “healer in shamanic culture” (Meng and Wu 2015, pp. 107–33).

The ritual structure of Daur shamanism includes both the travel of the shaman’s soul and the invoking of the ancestral spirit and assistant spirits to enter the shaman’s body, namely “spiritual possession” (神灵附体). There are two ways in which a Daur shaman embarks on a soul journey.

In the first case, the soul of a shaman travels to the underworld for healing purposes in search of a lost soul. This ritual of going to the underworld was called walking the “*dolbur*” road by the Daur people, commonly known as “Guo Yin” (过阴) in Chinese, and it had to be performed late at night. In past Daur shamanic practice, the *dolbur* road seemed to be a relatively common phenomenon. Humphrey and Onon also documented this. They referred to *dolbur* as the “Night Road”. *Dolbor* (*dolbur*) was the shaman’s night journey to fetch a soul from the other world. It was done very rarely, and generally only when a patient seemed to be hovering between life and death. *Dolbor* was performed as a ritual with set episodes, but it could be followed by other magical actions to extinguish or get rid of spirits diagnosed as attacking the patient’s body (Humphrey and Onon 1996, p. 227). I have interviewed a Daur shaman. She said that in the first few years after her initiation ritual, she walked the *dolbur* road twice to treat seriously ill patients. The *dolbur* road, she said, was not only hard work for shamans, but also very dangerous. Later, she gradually gave up the *dolbur* road and instead primarily took up traditional and modern shamanic treatment methods, including the various healing methods that I summarized and analyzed in my manuscript. Of course, the Daur shamanic remedies go beyond that. Said to be the most dangerous of the shaman’s journeys, *dolbor* leads through the dark and through realms where the shaman’s life is also threatened (Humphrey and Onon 1996, p. 227). The occurrence of this has diminished in modern times.

The second case of “soul travel” is the shaman flying on the divine drum. In the early stages of becoming a candidate or a new shaman, the ancestral spirit leads them flying and traveling in the sky and teaches them. Ōmachi also recorded this legend in his survey report; that is, the Daur people have the idea of shamans flying through the air on

divine drums (Ömachi 1995, p. 74). Another Daur shaman told me her legendary story. Once, being in a semi-unconscious state, she looked down from the sky. A family on the ground was holding a sacrifice ceremony. The ancestral shaman spirit, her grandfather, said, “Look, the head and tail of the pig they offered hung down from the table (referring to the fact that the pig was very big), and the apples they offered were big and red”. At the time, she said, she did not know she was flying on a drum. She explained that this was her grandfather teaching her to choose the best sacrifices and offerings for gods and spirits.

However, in fact, in contemporary Daur shamanic rituals, a large number of phenomena exist that involve shamans invoking their spirits and declaring oracles, as I have documented and analyzed in this paper.

The *dolbur* road is particularly arduous and dangerous, and not every shaman has the experience of flying on a sacred drum. With the progress of medical science, the contemporary Daur shamans have gradually given up the mode of “soul travel” treatment, and have adopted the unique shamanic treatment method. Among them, common and extensive healing is done in various rituals while being possessed by shamanic spirits. Therefore, some knowledgeable individuals in Daur culture often say “it is done”, meaning that the ritual has ended. Apart from small private healing rituals, a prevalent phenomenon in contemporary Daur shamanic practice is shamans conducting various ceremonies by invoking their spirits. During the ceremony, in the state of being spiritually possessed, Daur shamans make judgments, provide guidance, and offer healing for physical and mental health as well as life difficulties to members of the Mokun family and participants in the ceremony.

In Daur shamanism, the primary responsibility of the shaman is to alleviate the issues faced by both *xal—mokun* members and the Daur ethnic group. During the shamanic ceremony, the divine song sung by the shaman spirit often emphasizes “Repair Road” (修路) as a metaphor for healing. The concept of the “Repair Road” holds extensive and comprehensive meaning within this context. The most important and concerning part for people during the specific process of rituals is when shamans communicate messages from spirits according to *xal—mokun* and animal signs (属相). These messages cover various aspects of people’s production and daily life, including various approaches to deal with diseases, hardships, and tribulations. Different approaches and strategies are adopted based on different groups of people or situations.

#### Diseases Are Divided into Actual Diseases and Virtual Diseases

Health is the perennial subject of utmost concern for individuals, as it constitutes a fundamental human necessity. The primary responsibility of the Mokun shaman (*xudzor jad’an*) lies in safeguarding the well-being and security of Mokun members. Consequently, shamans exhibit profound solicitude towards people’s health, and consistently advocate for attentiveness to one’s physical condition. As medical science is constantly advancing, contemporary Daur shamans keep up with the times by proposing a relatively scientific view of diseases, categorizing them as either “actual disease” or “virtual disease”. Actual diseases require seeking treatment at hospitals and taking official medications; virtual diseases, on the other hand, fall within the realm of shamanic diagnosis and treatment. This term broadly refers to categories and content that are beyond human control and grasp.<sup>41</sup>

Contemporary Daur shamans have many unique healing methods, adopting different approaches based on specific conditions. In various shamanic rituals, shamans engage in collective and individual healing, and preventive and remedial treatments. Shamans often employ symbols and symbolic actions to achieve the goals and effects of healing. It can be said that contemporary Daur shamanic rituals themselves, as well as the main content of these rituals, are filled with means and methods of shamanic healing.

Some diseases have nothing to do with ancestral spirits or ghosts and supernatural things and it is required that patients see a doctor and take medicine.

The shaman spirit *xar bordszi luson* said to the *uərə xal*, the grandson born in the Year of the Pig:



*Go to fetch spring water from my seven springs, wash your eyes and wash your fingers with spring water, so that your blood may become thinner and your eyes may become brighter. Don't you have some illnesses? Well, you have to take some medicine. And you have to take some medicine for your throat in autumn, take some herbs (refers to Chinese herbal medicine) (3.3.4.-23).*

The shaman spirit *mərdəŋ tajti* said to the *mərdəŋ xal* great-grandson born in the Year of the Dog:

*I have a granddaughter-in-law born in the Year of Snake. Let her take some herbs. Doesn't she have many illnesses that needs to take medicine? Although her "mu:ruŋkuj tajti" (a female ancestral spirit)<sup>42</sup> followed her, she could not move these illnesses. So, you need to take some official medicine (3.3.6.-30).*

These are all actual diseases that can be cured by modern medicine. There are many diseases that cannot be explained or cured by current medical science and are referred to as "virtual diseases" by the people. The meaning of "virtual diseases" in Daur shamanism is even broader than just being caused by spirits or external evils; it includes various obstacle "*kartfi duka*:" (disaster or calamity)<sup>43</sup> and tribulations "*džəblaŋ duka*" (suffering and tribulation),<sup>44</sup> and even life crises or challenges "*ami kartfi*" (life and death calamity),<sup>45</sup> etc.

In Daur shamanic rituals, shaman spirits often mention "Repair Road", which encompasses the treatment of all types and fields of virtual disease. The *lvs* ritual in 2012 provides many ways to invoke "Repair Road" to deal with virtual disease, mainly including "*tərmit*" (shamanic healing method or symbolic ritual),<sup>46</sup> "*dəmāl*" (symbolic object, method, or ritual),<sup>47</sup> "*arfan*" (Spiritual Water, or Divine Water),<sup>48</sup> "*altəŋ sölö*" (Shamanic or Divine Dream),<sup>49</sup> and "*kətor böjin*" (wealth and blessedness),<sup>50</sup> as well as using spring water for cleaning, behavioral, and linguistic taboos, and releasing captive animals (release of life),<sup>51</sup> etc. Among them, the method of "*tərmit*" is varied, and the method of "*dəmāl*" is ever changing.

### There Are Many Types of Shamanic Healing

According to different healing contents, shamanic healing can be divided into preventive healing and realistic healing.

Preventive healing focuses on the difficulties and hardships of the future, while realistic healing focuses on the troubles and problems of the present.

The shaman spirit *imin göli ədžin* said to the *uərə xal* boy born in the Year of the Pig:

*In the season when the grass and trees turn yellow, your body will be suffering from an illness. You need to wash yourself with spring water. Go to Borong Oboo Mountain, pick some "xəŋ'ə ilə'a" (a kind of flower) to let your xədžor jad'an (mokun shaman) bless you with "tərmit". Then boil water from seven springs and drink it for seven days. After that, you should seek treatment from doctor (3.3.2.-1).*

This is both a preventive treatment and a comprehensive treatment method for actual and virtual diseases. It has a method to treat actual diseases—boiling *xəŋ'ə ilə'a* in spring water, followed by seeking medical treatment from doctors. At the same time, there is also a method to treat virtual diseases—asking the shaman *tərmit* to infuse divine power into the spring water.

Based on the number of people being healed, shamanic healing can be divided into collective healing and individual healing.

Collective healing can be divided into treatment for an entire group and treatment for specific individuals, while individual healing refers to treatment targeted at one person. In the ritual of *lvs* ceremony, shamans symbolically have all participants enter a specially designed cloak, which represents collective treatment for the whole group. When a shaman gathers a few individuals associated with a certain problem to talk and provide warnings or advice, it falls under partial treatment within the collective healing process. Individual

treatment involves a shaman speaking privately with one person, providing education or instructions, or conducting special personalized therapy.

According to the different healing subjects, shamanic healing can be divided into individual healing for ordinary people and collective healing for shamanic communities.

For the general population, healing primarily manifests as concern for health, safety, and well-being. However, for the shamanic community, healing goes beyond that and emphasizes the recognition of their unique identity and sacred mission. In the *lős* ritual, several shaman spirits constantly urged and advised shamans, including *barf* (bone-setter) and *bagfi* (healer and priest), and new shaman candidates to remain steadfast in their determination to walk on the road bestowed upon them by ancestral spirits. This reflects a profound focus on the comprehensive healing of shamans in contemporary Daur shamanism.

The shaman spirit *imin göli ədžin* said to the *uərə xal xəđžor jad'an* (Mokun shaman):

*Aren't you the only one or two jad'an (shaman) with đžawa: (shaman costume)?<sup>52</sup> You must pave the way for the development of the Daur mokun be opened up, you should let the xal—mokun flourish and move forward, you should occupy the gates of the courtyard and the doors of the house, you should hold the lifeblood of the Naven River and the Nuomin River, you should keep offering oboo and lős ... For the sake of countless people, you must constantly strive. As "jad'an person" (namely shaman), you should bear the suffering of others and be willing to face future criticism. You need to pay attention to your own body and move forward, pushing away diseases and epidemics. You must continuously "waking up" (means build up) the sacred oboo mountain (3.3.2.-1).*

These words emphasize the special identity of the Mokun shaman, requires the Mokun shaman to fearlessly fulfill his sacred mission, and encourages him to strive on the shamanic road for the sake of the Mokun and Daur ethnic group. Before the initiation ceremony, almost all shamans-to-be experience various torments of "shaman illness". This kind of "shaman illness" is also a virtual disease, which can potentially develop into a physical disease if one cannot undergo shamanic practices for an extended period. Contemporary Daur shamans, like ordinary individuals, often suffer from different ailments after enduring prolonged hardships before undergoing their initiation ceremonies. Moreover, they face higher expectations and standards set by the shaman spirits and are entrusted with great hopes and expectations by their *xal—mokun* members. Thus, the shaman groups also need encouragement and reassurance.

#### A Wide Variety of Shamanic Healing Methods Are Employed

In the process of worshipping *lős*, the shaman primarily employs symbolic techniques and shamanic divine songs for healing purposes. The former encompasses symbolic ceremonies, symbols, and symbolic methods, while the latter mainly refers to the curative approaches mentioned in the divine songs. Naturally, there is often an intertwining of both symbolic methods and the content of divine songs in healing practices. Whether it pertains to group or individual healing, as well as preventive or realistic healing, Daur shamans employ two main categories of healing methods: rituals and divine songs. Healing rituals may encompass complete shamanic rituals, specific symbolic rituals within them, as well as various symbolic methods and symbols. Healing through divine songs particularly involves the content sung by shamans in a spiritually possessed state. During the *lős* ritual in 2012, the shamans initially conducted healing for different groups with numerous symbolic methods. Subsequently, they led participants through a unique symbolic ceremony which was never repeated in the future *lős* ceremonies. Within these two primary types of healing lie group and individual healing forms, along with realistic and preventive approaches, which frequently overlap with one another.

To adapt to economic and social development alongside advancements in medical science progressions, shaman functions are also evolving and developing over time. While adhering to traditional shamanic belief concepts, contemporary shamans continuously innovate and modify their modern ritual practices. primarily concerning changes in methodologies, techniques, and contents utilized in healings.

(1) Symbolic ceremony—entering the protection of “*muduri xwarm*”

In the 2012 ceremony to worship *los* of the Yimin River, Shaman Onon and Shaman Wo did not wear shamanic costumes but instead each wore a specially made cloak. At the end of the *los* ritual, a *domal* ceremony was held. That is, the *xal*—*mokun* members and other ethnic groups, all participants in the ceremony, crawled under shaman cloaks three times, symbolizing the *muduri xwarm* (the hem of the Dragon Spirit’s robe). Passing under the cloaks of the shamans meant that the participants would receive the *xarmlabe* (protection and blessing)<sup>53</sup> of the river spirit. It symbolized that people were protected by the river spirit *los* and would overcome the difficulties in the Black Dragon Year. It was not only a collective healing process, but also a preventive healing method. In the ceremony, this symbolic activity was crucial and carried significant meaning. To date, no other type of Daur shamanic ritual has included a typical symbolic healing ceremony in the subsequent ceremonies. Additionally, during the divine song performed by the shaman after being possessed, there were multiple mentions encouraging people to participate in this symbolic ceremony.

The shaman spirit *imin goli adzin* told the *gɔ:bəl xal manna əla* boy born in the Year of the Dog:

*You should take care of your health. You must pay attention, and you must be careful! I want to take away your frustrations of wagging of tongues. You shall pass under the hem of the robe (refers to shaman’s cloak) of the xɔdʒɔr jad’an (mokun shaman) of ənən xal and uərə xal (3.3.2.-2).*

And said to the son-in-law and his children of *ənən xal*:

*Your son born in the Year of Pig, son-in-law born in the Year of Tiger, great grandson born in the Year of Tiger, daughter-in-law born in the Year of Dog, daughter born in the Year of Rabbit... You have to pay attention. And You are to pass three times under the xwarm of the two shamans (3.3.2.-4).*

And told the other *gɔ:bəl xal* boy born in the Year of the Pig, the daughter-in-law born in the Year of the Rat, and their sons and daughters-in-law:

*Pay attention to the disease, pay attention to your body, pay attention to wagging of tongues, and remove some wrongs. The person born in the Year of Rat will have disease bumpy in October and have to “Repair Road”. The boy born in the Year of Tiger should pay attention on August 1, and 4, on October 13, and do not go out by car on November 19. The daughter-in-law born in the Year of Snake has a life barrier, when the time comes, and have to go into the *muduri xwarm* (3.3.2.-5).*

(2) Symbols and symbolic methods “*domal*” —to prevent and heal, or remove and dissolve

The meaning of “*domal*” (多姆勒) is very broad and carries symbolic significance; one could say it is a form of sorcery. The *domal* sometimes refers to some supernatural power; other times, it denotes the ability to correct skeletal alignment or perform massages, and at times it symbolizes evil or signifies minor harmful sorcery, among other things. Occasionally, it refers to the sorcery methods used by shamans for healing and disease prevention. In ceremonial chants, items or methods that cause harm to people are also referred to as “*domal*”. In this article, *domal* generally refers to symbolic rituals, symbols, or symbolic methods.

The shaman spirit *imin goli adzin* said to the *uərə xal* child born in the Year of the Pig:

*Those who want to gather your kɔtɔr bɔjin (wealth and good fortune), want your wealth and life, occupy your barkən xytələ (spirits) in their own courtyard gate and house door, grab soadəl (blood vessels, lifeblood) of Naven River and Nuomin River, and do a *domal* and put it there, those people have a smattering of knowledge (3.3.2.-1).*

And exhorted the *ənən xal* son-in-law:

*Granddaughters born in the Year of Tiger and the daughters-in-law, you should “repair road”, and pay attention to the *domal* being done at the gates of your courtyards and houses. You have to pay attention. Think kindly, and you tell your “old lady” (refers to*

*the shaman) to beat the drum three times, and shoot the arrows northwest and west to remove the kartfi sumu (setbacks and tribulations).<sup>54</sup> (3.3.2.-4).*

And told another *gɔ:bəl xal* children born in the Year of the Pig and his wife, the daughter-in-law born in the Year of the Rabbit, and their children:

*The daughter-in-law's body born in the Year of Snake has a life barrier, you should have to enter the muduri xoarm walk, let xɔdʒor barkən (ancestral spirit) happy to go, remove your body's life barrier need to do dɔməl (3.3.2.-4).*

The shaman spirit *xar bɔrdʒi lɔsɔŋ* asked the *likən xal* grandson born in the Year of the Pig to offer milk, then asked him:

*You're doing business on houses. The door faces west? I told you to make a little arrow and put it there. Did you do it? Is your Road smooth? Is your business going well? Have you saved up kotor bɔjin (wealth and blessedness) yet? In the autumn, your kotor bɔjin will gather. You should continually to sprinkle milk on the gates of your courts and houses. Well, your road will continue to be bright (3.3.4.-22).*

The shaman spirit *mərdəŋ tajti* said to the *mərdəŋ xal* great-granddaughter born in the Rooster Year:

*Don't talk too much, don't inquire about everything, and the person who does dɔməl to you will more easily do dɔməl from the gap of your words ... You ask the two xɔdʒor jad'an (mokun shaman) of uərə xal and ənən xal to do tərmit and sprinkle them, so that your road will become bright and no one can harm you. The dɔməl can't get in when you're in home, and it's troubling you as soon as you leave the house (3.3.6.-17).*

These *dɔməls* are symbols and symbolic behaviors that seek to harm the lives of others and possess their wealth, and are also preventive and deciphering methods conveyed by shamans. They all fall within the realm of shamanic healing. For instance, tapping the drum three times or shooting an arrow while placing a small arrowhead on a west-facing door are different types of *dɔməl* which shamans employ as symbolic strategies to address crises and often utilize as therapeutic approaches among the Daur people.

(3) Symbolic ceremony “*tərmit*” —to prevent, heal, and bless

The “*tərmit*” (泰日米特), is originally a kind of grass seed, which is called *Qianli Xiang* (千里香) by local people. This grass has a special fragrance, which shaman use for healing, “Repair Road”, and blessing people.

In the *tərmit* ceremony, shamans consume milk, water, or wine to sprinkle on the face of the individual they call upon to pray for and bless in the presence of shamanic spirits. In daily life and shamanic treatments, apart from milk, water, and wine, shamans also prepare *tərmit* tea (*tərmit tʃe*), where they use their mouths to infuse prayers into the tea. It is believed that *tərmit* tea can safeguard people's health and well-being. *Tərmit* wine (*tərmit ær'i*), which possesses divine power, is solely used for sprinkling rather than consumption, whereas *tərmit* milk (*tərmit su*) and tea are typically consumed.

The general pattern of this healing method involves shamans uttering words of blessing towards Mokun members after “*tərmit*”.

Shaman spirits (*ɔŋgɔr*) also conduct “*tərmit*” for people born in the Years of the Dragon and Snake, sprinkling milk and spring water on their heads, faces, and hands. It is believed that this practice holds particular significance for individuals born in the Year of the Dragon or Snake, especially during 2012, the Black Dragon Year, which poses additional challenges. This ritual can be viewed as a form of collective healing or targeted physical healing for specific populations.

After speaking to the *avla xal* people and telling them what to pay attention to, the shaman spirit *xar bɔrdʒi lɔsɔŋ* performed *tərmit* for the great grandchildren born in the Years of the Dragon and Snake present at the ceremony, then uttered words of blessing:

*You should walk as effortlessly and brightly as the Nawen River! You should surge and flow like the Nuomin River, with broadened minds and ascending aspirations! You should move forward lightly and brightly like a spring, with illuminated roads for you to*



*tread upon, ensuring a prosperous life for your descendants! Your illnesses will be carried away by these three rivers, while your major obstacles diminish into insignificance and minor hurdles disappear completely! Your hardships and struggles will be left behind! In the future, your roads will all become better! You must faithfully worship losŋ (river spirit) then you can stride forward as brilliantly as losŋ himself! When your offspring are reborn in generations to come, they will all possess intelligence and cleverness (3.3.4.-24)!*

During the shamanic ritual, the shamanic spirits also respond to people's requests, providing answers and guidance. They sometimes directly engage in shamanic healing by offering *tærmit*, which is milk or spring water, to those seeking advice. Alternatively, they may impart methods of *doməl* as a solution.

(4) Symbolic ceremony “*xwæ- xwæ*” —to gather wealth and blessedness

The “*xwæ*” originally means accumulation or gathering. The phrase “*xwæ- xwæ*” (gather and gather) signifies the act of collecting and gathering. It is also a symbolic ritual that represents the accumulation of wealth, happiness, and prosperity.

The *lŋs* ritual concludes with a blessing ceremony that aligns with the context and concept of shamanic culture, serving as both a collective and preventive healing. “*xwæ- xwæ*” symbolizes gathering wealth and blessedness, representing a symbolic blessing ceremony for living a prosperous life. In this specific context, this form of blessing is suggestive and healing, instilling people with confidence and courage to move forward, thus making it an essential part of the shamanic healing process.

(5) Symbolic ceremony “*arfanlabe*” —entering “the sacred water” to “Repair Road” or heal  
The “*arfan*” (阿日善) means spiritual water, or sacred water.

In the *arfan* ceremony, shamans use some pebbles, a small copper mirror, and *Gangga* grass to boil butter and milk in a large iron pot, forming a liquid called *arfan*. The shaman typically uses a brush to sprinkle the mixed liquid onto various parts of the body such as the head, face, chest, back, and palms. This ritual is known as *arfanlabe* (阿日善勒贝), signifying cleansing with sacred water. The *arfan* ceremony is an essential traditional healing method for Daur shamans, who often hold such rituals on the first and fifteenth day of each month to purify and pray for blessings. In the rituals of initiation and Ominaan, the *arfanlabe* ceremony is often performed. Shaman Wo holds the *arfan* ceremony for people on the first and fifteenth day of each month, to cleanse them of evil, alleviate suffering, and bless them. This is also a form of “Repair Road” in Daur shamanism and a common and important healing method.

The shaman spirit *imin goli ædʒin* told the *gʊ:bəl xal* young man born in the Year of the Tiger from Morin-Dawaa:

*You will got a big bumpy. You have to kowtow to your ancestral spirit xwɔʒor barkən. You need to enter three times into the “arfan”<sup>55</sup> of the uərə xal “xwɔʒor jad’ən” (mokun shaman), and you shall ask her to repair your roads (3.3.2.-4).*

(6) The divine dream “*altəŋ sölö*”

The “*altəŋ sölö*” (阿勒腾·索罗) means a shamanic or divine dream, namely a dream coming from spirits.<sup>56</sup>

The shaman spirit *imin goli ædʒin* said to the *gʊ:bəl xal* middle aged man born in the Year of the Tiger:

*You have a difficult fate with your body. You must pay attention to your kartfi duka: (disaster or calamity), and you are to kowtow to your xwɔʒor barkən (ancestral spirit). You should prioritize taking care of your body. Be mindful of the shamanic dream altəŋ sölö, which will remove your ami kartfi (life crisis), and repair your roads (3.3.2.-2).*

The shaman spirit *xar bərdʒi losŋ* told the *likən xal* great-grandson born in the Year of the Pig:

*Whatever you do, don’t forget to pay tribute to gəajil xad losŋ (gəajil mountain cliff river spirit), and don’t forget to pay tribute to nir’i losŋ (river spirit).<sup>57</sup> I will keep repairing*



roads for you, and when you go to here and there, I will keep giving you *altəŋ sɔlɔ*, you should pay attention to your *altəŋ sɔlɔ* (3.3.4.-22).

The shaman spirit *mərdəŋ tajti* said to the *mərdəŋ xal* great-granddaughter born in the Year of the Rooster:

*When I told you about altəŋ sɔlɔ, you didn't understand. How can you be so thoughtless? How many times have I told you this man! How come you don't know anything about it (3.3.6.-31)!*

#### (7) Taboo objects and taboo behaviors

There exist numerous taboos in Daur shamanism, and during various shamanic ceremonies, shamans frequently caution or persuade individuals to be mindful of prohibited behaviors or languages. As previously mentioned, a shaman spirit instructed an individual born in the Year of the Pig not to consume fish on the fifth day of the fifth month and avoid polluting water sources.

The shaman spirit *imin gɔli ədʒin* spoke to the *əwla xal dəŋteke əla* young man:

*I am alleviating significant adversities and minor challenges for you, assuming the burden of suffering on your behalf; therefore, it is crucial that you prioritize self-care. Refrain from venturing into uncharted territories or engaging in contentious discourse. Exercise caution with your words and actions as there is someone seeking to impede your progress by closely scrutinizing you (3.3.2.-9).*

The shaman spirit *xar bərdʒi lɔsɔŋ* exhorted the *uərə xal* grandson born in the Year of the Pig:

*You're digging in the dirt. You're building the house for the *xunnur barkən*.<sup>58</sup> This year, please refrain from shedding too much blood and avoid killing living beings. Do not slaughter black pigs or red cows. Instead, continuously pour milk and wine as offerings. Keep sprinkling milk on *əbɔ: əwla* (Oboo Mountain). Put 7 layers of eggs and 9 layers of snacks in the dug site, and kowtow sincerely, so that the *lɔsɔŋ* (*lɔs*, river spirit) will not be angry (3.3.4.-23).*

And said to the *uərə xal* grandson and great-grandson born in the Year of the Dragon:

*This year is the Year of the Black Dragon, right? So, don't wear red clothes and avoid lighting fires. Instead, you should properly offer milk and wine to *lɔsɔŋ* (river spirit), and walk along the spring water while pulling it gently. By doing so, your road will be auspicious (3.3.4.-23).*

And said to the *mərdəŋ xal* great-grandson born in the Year of the Tiger:

*On May 26 do not enter the house where the wedding takes place. If your body gets dirty, the *barkən* (spirit) will no longer accompany you. Going to that place will lead to gossip and conflicts, knives would be lifted from table. Pay attention in any case (3.3.4.-17)!*

In general, there are various types and contents of taboos. In the belief system of Daur shamanism, adhering to various taboos regarding food, travel, and places is seen as a way for people to avoid disasters and suffering. Overall, there are a wide range of taboos in the ritual of worshipping *lɔs*. These taboos have rich content, and also serve as healing practices.

#### (8) Worshipping ancestral spirit and river spirit *lɔs*

Mokun shamans (*xɔdʒɔr jad'an*) follow the road of the ancestral spirit (*xɔdʒɔr barkən*), fulfilling the sacred mission and responsibilities bestowed upon them by the ancestral spirit. They continuously educate and advise Mokun members, emphasizing the importance of properly worshipping the ancestral spirits, as well as natural spirits such as *lɔs* (river spirit) and *əbɔ: (oboo)*. During the ritual to worship *lɔs*, a number of shamanic spirits repeatedly instructed *xal*—mokun members to sincerely worship the ancestral spirits, worship *lɔs*, and sprinkle milk and wine for them.

The shaman spirit *imin gɔli ədʒin* told the *ənən xal* children to enshrine and worship their ancestral spirits:

Children born in the Year of the Snake, and descendants of those born in the Year of the Snake, please take note as you enter your animal sign year. You should pay respects to “xairs barkən”<sup>59</sup> by bowing down to him. Offer milk and wine to your ancestral spirit xəɖʒor barkən, and bow down to your ancestors on Dragon Day. Those born in the Year of the Ox may face health challenges. Descendants of those born in the Year of the Snake, avoid going south on June 8th or 18th, as well as August 18th. On Red Dragon Day in November during the Dragon year, do not leave your home; instead, offer prayers silently to your ancestral spirit. Children born in the Year of Sheep should also kowtow to the ancestral spirit. Young ladies born in the Year of Ox should offer milk and wine due to illness challenges they may face during seasons when plants turn yellowish. And for young ladies born in the Year of Rat, you should make offerings to xəɖʒor barkən (3.3.2.-3).

The shaman spirit xar bəɖʒi ləʂəŋ said to the likən xal great-grandson born in the Year of the Pig:

*You have to go to ɣəjil xad ləʂəŋ əbə: (mountain cliff river spirit oboo)<sup>60</sup> and worship it, so that your road will be better. They will Repair Road for you, and they will gather kətor bəjin (wealth and blessedness) for you. Therefore, in any case, do not forget to pay tribute to ɣəjil xad ləʂəŋ (mountain cliff river spirit), and do not forget to pay tribute to nir'i ləʂəŋ (river spirit) (3.3.4.-22).*

#### (9) Kowtow to the Big Dipper

This is a method of “Repair Road” to overcome major obstacles, ʃiʔa kəɖfi (hardships), and ami kəɖfi (life-threatening disasters). It essentially involves praying and seeking assistance from the celestial deity, Heaven God (təŋgər, 天神), while kowtowing to the Big Dipper, which represents the Heaven God. This is because the Heaven God “təŋgər” does not possess any idols.

The shaman spirit xar bəɖʒi ləʂəŋ said to the uərə xal great-grandson born in the Year of the Dragon:

*This year, don't you have any obstacles? Isn't it the Year of the Black Dragon this year? You should properly offer milk and wine to ləʂəŋ (river spirit). You should walk along the spring water. In that case, your road will be smooth. You have to Kneel down and kowtow to the Big Dipper. Your vehicle should run smoothly so that your obstacles can be avoided. In November, do not travel southwest and walk on ice. Otherwise, you will encounter obstacles (3.3.4.-23).*

#### (10) Performing kətor bəjin: gathering and accumulating wealth and blessedness

The “kətor bəjin” (阔托日·博音) means wealth and blessedness. The kətor (阔托日) is similar to a container for storing things, but invisible, and the bəjin (博音) means wealth. In certain rituals, shamans tell someone that they have a kətor (container or box), but their bəjin (wealth) cannot be gathered or accumulated. Therefore, gathering kətor bəjin for people is also a responsibility and mission of the shaman.

The shaman spirit xar bəɖʒi ləʂəŋ said to the likən xal great-grandson born in the Year of the Pig:

*You have to go to ɣəjil xad ləʂəŋ əbə: (mountain cliff river spirit oboo) and pray upon it, so that your road will be better. They will Repair Road for you, and they will gather kətor bəjin (wealth and blessedness) for you. In the autumn, your kətor bəjin will gather. If you keep pouring milk on the gates of your courts and houses, then your roads will keep brightening (3.3.4.-22).*

And said to the likən xal grandson-in-law born in the Year of the Tiger:

*The uərə xal “xəɖʒor jad'an” (mokun shaman) will continue to sprinkle for you. Do not worry, your road will become better, your kətor bəjin (wealth and blessedness) will accumulate. You should continuously and sincerely sprinkle milk and wine to ləʂəŋ əbə: (river spirit oboo) and ɣəɖʒir əbə: (place oboo). You should always and sincerely sprinkle milk to bo:roŋ əbə: (oboo) and ləʂəŋ əbə: (river spirit oboo). You should always sincerely*

*sprinkle milk to the Nuomin River and the Naven River. That way, they will all help you to make your road better (3.3.4.-22).*

#### (11) Using spring water to “Repair Road”

The Daur people believe that spring water can prevent and treat diseases. In the shamanic healing concept, spring water on 5 May is like holy water, which can enlighten one’s mind, maintain purity, ward off evil spirits, and be beneficial for the healing of various illnesses. It can even directly cure diseases.

The shaman spirit *xar bōrdži lōsōj* said to the *avla xal* great-grandson, born in the Year of the Monkey, and others:

*This year, you should open seven springs, and then your road will be better. Seven springs water, you should boil them and drink them for seven days, then your road of barf (bone-setter), your hands and feet will be better. Your fingers with doməl will be more doməl power (3.3.4.-20).*

The shaman spirit *mərdəj tajti* said to the *mərdəj xal* great-granddaughter born in the Year of the Monkey:

*Isn’t this (Black Dragon Year) a harder year? You shall make my grandchildren open up the spring eyes, so that they can walk brightly. I will turn the yellow trees green, bringing them back to life, and make the decaying trees bloom again, restoring their prosperity (3.3.6.-32).*

#### (12) Treating diseases with flowers and plants

Daur shamans not only possess magical and symbolic healing methods, but also utilize various herbal remedies derived from flowers and plants. During the *lōs* ritual, the shaman spirits provided several herbal remedies for the people.

The shaman spirit *xar bōrdži lōsōj* said to the *likən xal* great-grandson born in the Year of the Pig:

*You have to go to goajil xad lōsōj əbō: (mountain cliff river spirit oboo) and pray upon it, so that your road will be better. Go to goajil xad (cliff) and pick the yellow flowers with its roots, and then use them to boil water and drink. By that way, your disease will be alleviated (3.3.4.-22).*

#### (13) Inspiring words and good wishes

The shaman ancestral spirit *guj jad’an* said:

*Generation after generation, I follow in their footsteps and come. I have walked along the banks of the Naven River and crossed over the Nuomin River to finally arrive at the shores of the Yimin River. When ənən xal and the likən xal worshipped lōsōj (river spirit), I led the ancestors of uəra xal to receive the offerings together. Looking at the mokun kura (Mokun Circle), I am so happy!*

The shaman spirit *xar bōrdži lōsōj* spoke to the *avla xal* great-grandson born in the Year of the Monkey, and expressed joy, thanks, and blessings to the crowd:

*You led so many xōdžor barkən (ancestral spirits) came. Even if not my Daur ethnic groups, who led their ancestral spirit to come, we are all grateful to you! Your children and grandchildren will be fine! All of them can become the master of their own xal—mokun, and gather up the mokun kura (Mokun Circle) and restrain them (3.3.4.-20)!*

These inspiring words and well wishes are a great source of comfort and encouragement for everyone attending the ceremony, and are touching and uplifting.

## 5. Conclusions

The *lōs* ritual in 2012 marked the revival of the Daur shamanic tradition of sacrificing to water spirits (river spirits), without harming or sacrificing animals. It is a rare ceremony in which contemporary Daur shamans invoke spirits without wearing shamanic costumes.

The ritual holds symbolic significance and serves specific functions. Various ceremonial offerings are made by the shamans, accompanied by divine songs that encompass

shamanic healing methods and contents aimed at promoting physical and mental well-being among members of the *xal—mokun*. These rituals provide diverse solutions and coping mechanisms for various ailments, hardships, confusion, while emphasizing people's health, safety, happiness, and blessings. In particular, during the *los* ritual, a special symbolic ceremony took place where all participants passed through the shaman's cloak to symbolically enter into *muduri xwarm* (the hem of the Dragon Spirit's robe) protection. This classical symbolic ceremony has not been repeated in the later *los* rituals.

The contemporary Daur shaman divides diseases into actual diseases and virtual diseases in accordance with the trend and progress of the times. The multitude of healing methods employed during the *los* ritual, along with its accompanying divine songs, offer great spiritual solace and psychological comfort to individuals seeking relief from their afflictions. Consequently, it can be said that the *los* ritual epitomizes and showcases how contemporary Daur shamanic rituals possess inherent healing capabilities.

To summarize, both the shamanic rituals themselves as well as their accompanying divine songs within the context of the *los* ritual are replete with effective healing methodologies. Therefore, the act of performing the *los* ceremony itself is a therapeutic process.

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## Appendix A. Field Research Picture



**Figure A1.** Offering milk to *los* (23 June 2012, *los* ritual, the Nantun, Ewenki Autonomous Banner). Photo: Minna Sa, 2012.





**Figure A2.** Offering milk to *los* (23 June 2012, *los* ritual, the Nantun, Ewenki Autonomous Banner). Photo: Minna Sa, 2012.



**Figure A3.** Facing the Yimin River, beating drums, singing prayers, and invoking shamanic spirits (23 June 2012, *los* ritual, the Nantun, Ewenki Autonomous Banner). Photo: Minna Sa, 2012.





**Figure A4.** Shamanic spirit descending (23 June 2012, *lus* ritual, the Nantun, Ewenki Autonomous Banner). Photo: Minna Sa, 2012.



**Figure A5.** Shamanic spirit descending (23 June 2012, *lus* ritual, the Nantun, Ewenki Autonomous Banner). Photo: Minna Sa, 2012.



**Figure A6.** Entering the “*mudur xoarm*” (the hem of Dragon Spirit’s robe) (23 June 2012, *los* ritual, the Nantun, Ewenki Autonomous Banner). Photo: Minna Sa, 2012.



**Figure A7.** Entering the “*mudur xoarm*” (the hem of Dragon Spirit’s robe) (23 June 2012, *los* ritual, the Nantun, Ewenki Autonomous Banner). Photo: Minna Sa, 2012.



**Figure A8.** *fagan ida* (dairy products) offerings (30 May 2017, *los* ritual, Chenbarhu Banner). Photo: Minna Sa, 2017.





**Figure A9.** *ṡāgan idə* (dairy products) and *tubue idə* (fruits) offerings (30 May 2017, *los* ritual, Chenbarhu Banner). Photo: Minna Sa, 2017.



**Figure A10.** *losi xoræ* (temporary dwellings for river spirit) (30 May 2017, *los* ritual, Chenbarhu Banner). Photo: Minna Sa, 2017.



**Figure A11.** Facing the Hailar River, beating drums and singing prayers (30 May 2017, *los* ritual, Chenbarhu Banner). Photo: Minna Sa, 2017.



**Figure A12.** Shamanic spirit descending (30 May 2017, *los* ritual, Chenbarhu Banner). Photo: Minna Sa, 2017.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The Daur shaman groups include a Shaman (*jad'an*, 雅德恩), Healer and Priest (*bagfi*, 巴格其), Bone-Setter (*barf*, 巴日西), Healer of Child (*otofi*, 翰托西), and Midwife (*baræffen*, 巴日耶浅) (Sa 2019, pp. 3–4 of 19).
- <sup>2</sup> This is what Wo's shamanic spirit "*duka: barkən*" (means Door Spirit, 门神) told the shaman disciples during the Ominaan (翰米南) ritual in 2011.
- <sup>3</sup> *los* (罗斯) is the name used by the Daur people in Hailar to call dragon spirit, namely river spirit. It comes from the Mongolian language. Daur people in Morin-Dawaa call it *losəŋ* (罗松). Both terms appear in this article indicating the same meaning.
- <sup>4</sup> *ludžir barkən* (鲁吉日·巴日肯) or *nudžir barkən* (奴吉日·巴日肯), snake spirit, one of the main deities commonly worshipped by the Daur people.
- <sup>5</sup> *losi obo*: (罗斯依·敖包), Morin-Dawaa *losəŋ obo*: (罗松·敖包), namely river spirit oboo.
- <sup>6</sup> *xal—mokun* (哈勒-莫昆) is the equal clan of basic unit of Daur society. A *xal* (哈勒) is a clan, and *mokun* (莫昆) means branches of *xal*. The *xal—mokun* system is based on blood ties, and members share a common patriarchal ancestor, common living areas, common economic life, and social and cultural activities.
- <sup>7</sup> *katəŋ* (卡腾), denoting hardship or difficulty, also connotes the strength and capability of individuals when describing someone as *katəŋ*.
- <sup>8</sup> Shaman Onon mentioned that her ancestral spirit had appeared in a dream, instructing her to create a cloak before she became a shaman. However, due to the circumstances prevailing at that time, she was unable to fulfill this task. In the Daur shamanism tradition, the cloak holds significance as it serves as both a shamanic garment and is referred to as *sama:ʃək* (萨玛仕克). During initiation rituals, certain aspiring shamans known as *jad'an* (雅德恩) are not yet permitted to wear full shamanic attire but can don the cloak.
- <sup>9</sup> Shaman Onon stated that she refrained from incorporating a black flag into the vibrant square banner. The shaman's bronze mirror is adorned with a black silk cloth, while 108 prayer beads are worn, symbolizing her ability to navigate the night road and confront the enigmatic realm of elves.
- <sup>10</sup> Bateer, Shaman Onon's husband, from *likən xal* (李肯哈勒) of Mongolians. He is Shaman Onon's most powerful and strongest assistant.
- <sup>11</sup> *gadžir ədžin* (嘎吉日·额金), or *gadžir ədžilŋ* (嘎吉日·额吉楞), means the local deity. *gadžir* (嘎吉日) means place, or earth. *ədžin* (额金), means king, emperor, master, ruler, etc.
- <sup>12</sup> *xore* (霍日耶), is a noun that refers to the enclosure or cage for livestock. *losi xorə* (罗斯依·霍日耶), specifically denotes temporary dwellings for *los*, which is constructed with willow branches in the form of a square fence. It can be seen as *los*'s makeshift shrine or altar. As a noun turned verb, *xore* signifies the act of gathering, accumulating, or amassing.
- <sup>13</sup> For the main rites and the complete text content of divine songs, please see (Sa 2021, pp. 241–70).
- <sup>14</sup> *la: saman* (La Saman, 拉·萨满) is believed to be the great grandfather of Shaman Onon, her predecessor *mokun* shaman.
- <sup>15</sup> *imin goli ədžin* (伊敏·果里·额金), Yimin River spirit (namely *imin los*). *goli* (果里) means river, *ədžin* (额金) means king, emperor, master, ruler, etc.



- 16 *oŋgɔr* (翁果日), shamanic spirit. Please see [Neimenggu Zizhihu Bianjizu \(1985, p. 250\)](#). *Dawoerzu Shehui Lishi Diaocha* 达斡尔族社会历史调查, “温果尔” namely “翁果日” (*oŋgɔr*).
- 17 When Shaman Onon’s *oŋgɔr* wants to talk to someone after coming, she usually calls them girl or boy by the animal sign and his/her *xal—mokun* (哈勒-莫昆).
- 18 *xoɖʒɔr jad’an* (霍卓日·雅德恩), *mokun shaman* (莫昆·萨满). Please see [Neimenggu Zizhihu Bianjizu \(1985, p. 249\)](#). *Dawoerzu Shehui Lishi Diaocha* 达斡尔族社会历史调查, “霍卓尔” namely “霍卓日” (*xoɖʒɔr*). *xoɖʒɔr* (霍卓日), means the root, here referring to both the ancestor and ancestral spirit.
- 19 *gɔ:bəl xal manna æla* (郭博勒哈勒满那爱拉), namely *gɔ:bəl xal manna mokun* (郭博勒哈勒满那莫昆), 爱拉 *æla*, village, means *mokun* (莫昆).
- 20 *guj jad’an* (贵·雅德恩), the grandfather of Shaman Wo, the *Mokun shaman* of the previous generation, *uərə xal ʃuokulə məkun* (沃热哈勒绰库勒莫昆).
- 21 When Shaman Wo’s *oŋgɔr* wants to talk to someone after coming, she usually calls them grandson, great-grandson or granddaughter, great-granddaughter from some animal sign and certain *xal—mokun*.
- 22 *undu:s xoɖʒɔr* (温杜斯·霍卓日), man of *Mokun* family.
- 23 *xar borɖʒi losɔŋ* (哈日·博日吉·罗松), the *losɔŋ* (*los*, river spirit) of the Black Boerji River, namely the Black Boerji River spirit.
- 24 *xoɖʒɔr barkən* (霍卓日·巴日肯), ancestral spirit, namely the *mokun* ancestral spirit. *xoɖʒɔr* (霍卓日), refers to ancestor, or ancestral spirit. *barkən* (巴日肯), means spirit.
- 25 *gaxoɖfa jeje* (嘎胡查·爷爷), namely *gaxoɖfa saman* (嘎胡查·萨满), the famous great shaman of the *gɔ:bəl xal manna mokun*, is widely worshipped by the Daur and *manna mokun* in Hailar. Please see “The Legend of Garhucha (*gaxoɖfa*)”, [Neimenggu Zizhihu Bianjizu \(1985, p. 260\)](#), *Dawoerzu Shehui Lishi Diaocha* 达斡尔族社会历史调查.
- 26 This is a very important and common method of Daur shamanic healing.
- 27 “*De-bi-le*” (德比勒) is the divine song sung by the ancestral spirits of Shaman Onon when they come.
- 28 *xoɖʒɔr lɔ: gutajti* (霍卓日·老·姑太提) is one of the shaman ancestral spirits of the *ənən xal bɔsəkʃen* (鄂嫩哈勒博斯克浅). It is said to be the shaman of the previous generation of *la: saman* (拉·萨满), who married a Buryat Mongol. So, when coming to speak someone, she said Buryatia Mongolian language.
- 29 *dɔlɔ mardəŋ* (多罗·莫日登), means “seven *mardəŋ*”, namely seven parts of *mardəŋ xal* (莫日登哈勒), including *ʃəvutɔrsuʃen* (寿儒托日苏浅), *ʃibotʃiʃen* (西博奇浅), *ʃi’a mardəŋʃen* (西额·莫日登浅), *uʃikən mardəŋʃen* (乌其肯·莫日登浅), *xoitɔr mardəŋʃen* (会托日·莫日登浅), *urkun mardəŋʃen* (乌日昆·莫日登浅), *nir’iʃen* (尼日耶浅). The seven parts belonged to original *mardəŋ xal ʃəŋolo mokun* (莫日登哈勒崇翰罗莫昆). “*ʃen*” (浅) means the branch, which was later known as *Mokun*.
- 30 *mardəŋ tajti* (莫日登·太提), meaning the grandmother of *mardəŋ xal*, is also known as *mardəŋ ətau* (莫日登·额头乌), namely respectfully called Old Lady of *mardəŋ xal* ([Neimenggu Zizhihu Bianjizu 1985, p. 256](#)). *Mardəŋ tajti* had a dual identity, as she was both the ancestral spirit of *mardəŋ xal* and the *losɔŋ əbɔ: əɖʒin* (罗松·敖包·额金), the master of river spirit oboo of *mardəŋ xal*.
- 31 Among the shamans are mainly the healers and priests *bagʃi*, and bone-setters *barʃ* of *mardəŋ xal*.
- 32 *doməl* (多姆勒), generally refers to a symbolic object, method, or ritual. Here it refers to the symbolic ceremony- entering the “*muduri xɔarm*” (穆都日依·华日么), shamanic cloaks.
- 33 *muduri xɔarm* (穆都日依·华日么), *mudur* (穆都日) is dragon in Daur language; *xɔarm* (华日么) is the hem of the Daur ethnic costume robe. *muduri xɔarm*, can be literally translated as the hem of Dragon Spirit’s robe; here it refers to the cloak worn by the shamans. This is a symbolic statement.
- 34 *xɔrə- xɔrə* (霍日耶!霍日耶!), means gather and gather. It is a symbolic ceremony, symbolizing the gathering of wealth, happiness and blessedness.
- 35 *katəŋ* (卡腾) means hard, difficult, also means that people are powerful and capable. Here, saying this place *katəŋ bəlwud* (卡腾·博勒乌德) means that the place has becoming famous.
- 36 *oŋgɔr futul* (翁果日·旭特勒) means numerous shamanic spirits.
- 37 *ʃagan idə:* (查干·伊德) means dairy products, and *tubue: idə:* (图布耶·伊德) means fruits.
- 38 *gɔrə:s* (古热斯), wild animal.
- 39 *duəd garbe* (多德·嘎日贝), literal translation is “Go To Wild”, means “worship the river spirit for rain”, 祭河神求雨. Please see [Neimenggu Zizhihu Bianjizu \(1985, p. 257\)](#).
- 40 *mokun kurə* (莫昆·库热), means “*Mokun Circle*” (莫昆圈). *xal-mokun* is the clan organization in the traditional society of Daur. “*mokun*” is the branches of *xal*, “*kurə*” means circle. “*mokun kurə*”, translated literally as the “*mokun circle*”, is often used in rituals to indicate the extent and boundaries of the *mokun* family, or to refer to all *mokun* members.
- 41 “actual disease” (实病) and “virtual disease” (虚病), please see ([Sa 2021, p. 449](#)).
- 42 *mu:ruŋkuj tajti* (木荣奎·太提), the ancestral spirit worshipped by the *tugədu:n xal* (涂格敦哈勒) of Ewenki, which is one of the surnames of the Ewenki.
- 43 *karʃi duka:* (卡日其·杜卡), disaster (劫难), or calamity (灾难).



- 44 *dzoblay duka* (卓布楞·杜卡), suffering and tribulation (苦难和磨难).
- 45 *ami karfi* (阿米·卡日其), life and death calamity (生死劫), or life tribulations (生命磨难).
- 46 *tærmit* (泰日米特) is originally a kind of grass seed, which is called *Qianli Xiang* (千里香) by local people. In this article, it refers to a shamanic healing method and symbolic ritual.
- 47 *domal* (多姆勒) generally refers to a symbolic object, method, or ritual.
- 48 *arfan* (阿日善) means Spiritual Water, or Divine Water.
- 49 *altəŋ solv* (阿勒腾·索罗), means a shamanic or divine dream, namely a dream coming from spirits.
- 50 *kotor bujin* (阔托日·博音) means wealth and blessedness.
- 51 release of life (放生), originally a Buddhist term. The meanings and practices in shamanism are similar.
- 52 *dzawa*: (扎瓦), shaman costume, another name for shaman costume *sama:ʃak* (萨玛仕克).
- 53 *xarmlabe* (哈日莫拉贝), protection and blessing.
- 54 *karfi sumu* (卡日其·苏姆), setbacks and tribulations.
- 55 *arfan* (阿日善), means Spiritual Water or Divine Water. To enter into the “*arfan*” refers to washed with Spiritual Water or Divine Water.
- 56 See note 49 above.
- 57 *nir'i loson* (尼日耶·罗松), *nir'i* river spirit.
- 58 *xunnur barkan* (混奴日·巴日肯), means “High-Order God”; here it refers to Buddha.
- 59 *xairs barkan* (海日斯·巴日肯), spirit worshipped by *ənən xal* (鄂嫩哈拉). It's said to be a kind of mountain spirit.
- 60 *goajil xad loson abo*: (拐勒·哈德·罗松·敖包), mountain cliff river spirit obo.

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