

# CAT SPIRITS IN NORTH-WESTERN CHINA: WORSHIP PRACTICES, ORIGIN, AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS

ILYA GRUNTOV

Senior Researcher

Uralic and Altaic Studies Department, Institute of Linguistics  
 Russian Academy of Sciences  
 Bol. Kislovsky per. 1/12, 125009 Moscow, Russia  
 e-mail: altaica@narod.ru

OLGA MAZO

Assistant Professor

National Research University Higher School of Economics  
 st. Myasnitskaya 20, 101100 Moscow, Russia  
 Research Fellow  
 Department of East Asian Studies, Tel Aviv University  
 P. O. Box 39040 Ramat Aviv, Tel Aviv 69978, Israel  
 e-mail: mazoolgamm@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the cult of cat spirits in north-western China and their veneration by the Han Chinese, Tibetans, and Monguors. These spirits are revered as family spirits and guardians of wealth and property, but possess resentful and revengeful personalities. The paper explores the origins of the cult, local worship and summoning practices, protection methods, and links with other vernacular traditions in the region. The study uses a combination of research methods, including analysis of Chinese historical sources, published modern narratives, and the authors' own fieldwork in Mongolia. The paper employs a qualitative and comparative approach to identify invariant features of cat spirits across various local traditions and highlights the assimilation of the cult into different traditional belief systems where it is enriched with new traits. The paper sheds light on the rich and complex tapestry of beliefs and practices associated with cat spirits. The article suggests that the cult of cat spirits may have had non-Han and non-Tibetan origins, possibly connected to Proto-Mongolic tribes.

**KEYWORDS:** cat spirits • family spirits • demonology • China • Han people • Tibetans • Monguors • folklore

## INTRODUCTION

North-west China is a region where dozens of ethnic groups, each speaking their own language, live side by side, resulting in fascinating combinations, and mutual influences, of local traditions. In Qinghai and Gansu provinces of People's Republic of China (PRC), people from different ethnic communities believe in cat spirits that bring wealth and protect family members.<sup>1</sup> Tibetans, Monguors,<sup>2</sup> and the Han people in the region have different names for them. They are mainly invisible, but in certain circumstances they appear as big cats or as long-haired children, or rarely in other forms. They are greedy and aggressive. They protect the family's wealth and harm strangers. They may even take revenge on their hosts if they suspect any lack of respect. In the article we analyse narratives about this spirit and discuss its functions, appearance, summoning, expulsion, and worship practices, as well as the possible origin of the spirit. It is important to note that for the people of Qinghai and Gansu interaction with these spirits is considered part of their daily life experience, and thus the practice varies greatly across the villages of those regions. We bring together narratives about these spirits that are scattered across various Chinese historical sources and studies of modern folklore and compare them to the data from neighbouring regions and our own fieldwork in Mongolia.

### THE EARLIEST ATTESTATION

The Chinese *History of the Northern Dynasties*<sup>3</sup> (Li 1639: 1204–1205) and the *Book of Sui*<sup>4</sup> (Wei 1635: 1153–1155), which refer to events in the late 6th century, contain stories about *maogui* (Chinese 'cat evil spirit'). According to the texts, a relative of the emperor, Dugu Tuo,<sup>5</sup> was found guilty of using a cat spirit, *maogui*, to sicken the empress and the wife of General Yang Su in order to obtain money, wine, and other things. On Dugu Tuo's orders, his maidservant recited spells to send the *maogui* to do the job. During the investigation of his crime, she summoned the cat spirit to the outer chancellery and offered it a plate of fragrant gruel. She struck it with the spoon and said: "Lady cat, come back, don't stay in the palace". Soon her face turned dark and she moved so slowly as if someone were dragging her and she said: "The *maogui* is already here".

After this incident, the emperor ordered that the families guilty of sending the *maogui* should be exterminated. *The Book of Sui* (Wei 1635: 524) mentions that in the fifth month of the 18th year of the Kai Huang era (598), the emperor issued an edict to send those families who had *maogui*, produced poison *gu*, commanded ghosts or practiced wild and barbaric rituals to the outermost frontiers of the four cardinal directions.

The texts do not say anything about the appearance of the spirit, only about its gender as the servant called it lady cat (*maonü*). The worshipper was also a woman (Dugu Tuo's mother's mother or the maid). The sacrifices were made at night on the day of *zi*, because *zi*, the first of the twelve earthly branches, corresponds to the rat, the prototypical object of a cat hunt. When the spirit returns, it seems to possess the devotee (the servant's face becomes dark, she moves as if someone is dragging her, and she feels the return of the cat). It can be sent to other people's houses to make them sick or kill them and secretly bring their possessions to the devotee's house.

According to the text from *Draft Notes from the Court and the Country*<sup>6</sup> (cited in *Taiping Guangji* 2006: 1004) over a thousand families worshipped cat spirits in the Sui period (581–618). The disease caused by the spirits was known as *maogui* disease (*maogui ji*), and the fact that all of Emperor Wen's doctors made the same diagnosis suggests that the disease was well known and widespread. Later, during the Tang period (618–907), people who worshipped cat spirits were also sentenced to death. *The Tang Code with Commentary* states: "The person who raises, hosts or gives to anyone evil cat spirits (*maogui*) or anything of the kind, and those who provoked and taught such actions, shall be punished by strangulation" (Zhangsun 1983: 337, commentary to paragraph 262 of chapter 18 "Production and Storing of *Gu* Poisons"). The description of *maogui* disease can be found in many medieval medical works. *General Treatise on the Cause and Symptoms of Diseases* (7th century), for example, says that *maogui* is the spirit of an old wild cat that turns into an evil spirit and can be a servant of man. Man feeds and worships it. It is similar to the use of evil magic *gu* (poison made of poisonous insect).<sup>7</sup> *Maogui* is used to harm and poison people. The symptoms of *maogui* poisoning are stabbing pains in the heart or stomach. This evil spirit eats human intestines, causing the person to vomit blood and die. (Chao1997: 122) The famous medical treatise *Compendium of Materia Medica* (16th century, see Li 1996: 1201) gives various methods of treating these ailments.

*Records of Things Heard Nearby* (Yongne jushi 2005: 8) contains an interesting account of the worship of *maoguishen* (Chinese 'cat evil spirit deity') in Gansu near Liangzhou in the 19th century. The change of name from *maogui* to *maoguishen* is important as it reflects the intention of including *gui*, i.e. evil spirit, in the *shen* class, i.e. the class of deities that could be worshipped (as opposed to *gui*). The text has two parts. The first describes the process of creating the ghost and its modus operandi. The second part is a story about the spirit's trick and its expulsion. In contrast to the Dugu Tuo texts, anyone can create a spirit with the help of a cat's corpse and a magic ritual. The worship of the spirit, like that of any other Chinese *shen*, requires a tablet with its name. However, unlike these, the tablet should not be placed on the house altar, but outside the house. This may be due to the intermediate status of this spirit: half-*shen*, half-*gui*. Such a tradition of making offerings to the spirit outside the house still exists in some regions today. Unlike the *maogui*, the *maoguishen*'s only ability is to steal secretly a large quantity of beans or rice with the help of a small bag. This may seem strange, but Yongne jushi (2005: 8) points out that it is only possible because of the magical power of the *maoguishen*. The devotee becomes rich very quickly, and there is no information that the spirit is obeying his commands. It seems to act on its own. The important point is that it is possible to overcome the evil spirit through humiliation and punishment alone: "In court, a wooden board was condemned to a heavy punishment of 40 lashes, and its owner was also lashed with thin bamboo sticks and sent out laughing" (ibid.). The way of exorcism also needs the commentary of the author, who even quotes philosopher Zhu Xi (1130–1200) as saying that only sincere belief makes the spirit strong. Since the damage caused by *maoguishen* is not as great as in the Sui period, and there is no fatal illness or death, the punishment for the practitioner is not as severe as in previous periods. Such punishment corresponds to the one attested in the *The Great Qing Code* (*Da Qing lüli*: Article 386).

The story in *Records of Things Heard Nearby* does not mention the appearance of the spirit and the only connection to cats is the way in which it was summoned (by killing the cat). Today, the tradition of summoning the spirit with the help of the cat or its corpse also exists, but it usually excludes the killing. The practice of killing black kittens in Ledu and Minhe Counties (Gansu), as described by E Chongrong (2012: 8), is an exception. Thus, a comparison between the earliest and the later texts shows the evolution of the evil spirit as it becomes less dangerous to humans and its ability to bring wealth is reduced.

#### LOCAL NAMES OF CAT DEITIES AND THEIR PLACE IN LOCAL PANTHEONS

Today, the various ethnic groups of north-west China worship a family spirit with similar functions under different names. In various parts of the Qinghai and Gansu regions Han Chinese, Tibetans and Monguors call this spirit by the Chinese name *maoguishen* (Liu 2004; Schram 2006 [1957]: 480; Yang 2007; Liang 2011; E 2012; Xie and Jin 2012; Tai 2016; Yuan 2016). The Han people may also call it *maoshen* or *maogui* (Liu 2004: 38). In the Monguor dictionary by Albrecht de Smedt and Antoine Mostaert (1933: 245) the same word is recorded as *mu:gešag*. The authors also note that although the first syllable originally means cat, it is reinterpreted as Mongghul *mu*, 'bad'. In later Mongghul dictionaries, compiled at the end of the 20th century, the first syllable is *mau*, with the same meaning. The variants of the spirit names are *maukixag*, *maugishag*, *mauguishi* (Li 1988: 318), *maukishag* (THDZCH 1982: 41), and *maukešag* (Hasbaatar 1985: 118).

The Mongghuls of Huzhu County, Shdara Township, and Ledu County (Qinghai) refer to the spirit as *modaya*,<sup>8</sup> which is an adaptation of the Chinese *maodaye*, 'cat-grandpa' (Limusishiden and Stuart 2010: 80; Limusishiden et al. 2014: 164; Limusishiden 2015: 34, 38). Some Monguor families in Qinghai believe in the *sturlong* spirit, which guards the family's wealth and doesn't allow them to take anything away (Shram 2006 [1957]: 480). Mangghuers from Minhe County call this spirit *duguli* or *duguerli*. This name derives from the surname Dugu, a family that hosted *maogui* in the Sui period. (E 2012: 27, 29)

In Amdo, Tibetans refer to the same spirit by the Tibetan name *the'u rang*. This name originally referred to a different character in Tibetan mythology (see, for example, de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993: 282–283), although Tibetans in the Qinghai and Gansu regions have adapted it to refer to the family cat spirit. In Smug po community (Xinghai County, Qinghai), *the'u rangs* are considered by the elders to be a special class of protector deity (*srung ma*) that is more malicious than others. There are many different *srung ma* in this area, including Dpal ldan lha mo, a female Buddhist deity. Each tribe has its own protector deity and each family in a tribe makes offerings to their protector deity, who won't allow the family to borrow anything and will bring disaster if he is not satisfied with the family's worship (Chos bstan rgyal 2014: 63–64). In the following, we will consider these terms as different names for the same folklore figure and analyse their characteristics together (although in the narratives we will indicate what the local name for the spirit is).

## ORIGIN

According to Louis Schram (2006 [1957]: 478), the cult of the *sturlong* spirit was introduced to the country long ago by an old lama, Sung-chan-i (P'ing-fan hsien). There are several legendary versions of the origin of *maoguishen*. Liu Yongqing (2004: 38–39) cites several stories about the origin of the spirit that are popular among Tibetans, Monguors, and Han Chinese in Hehuang (Qinghai): General Jiang Ziya<sup>9</sup> gave the rank of *maoguishen* to his wife (Huangzhong district) or to one of his commanders (Huzhu County); the intestines of the hermit Wuliang, who tried to attain immortality but committed suicide, turned into a *maoguishen* (Minhe County). In Wangchuan town (Tianshui city, Gansu), people claim that the *maoguishens* are the souls of family members who have died improperly. One can invite the spirit by making offerings at the *maoguishen's* temple or by going to the family of the *maoguishen* worshipper and asking their permission to invite their spirit (Wang and Lu 2009: 4–5).

Certain features of the old and new narratives about the spirit might suggest that it was not originally part of Chinese (Han) mythology, but was introduced by some other ethnic group. Below are some arguments that can be used to support this theory. Although Chinese culture is rich in various mythological characters, the story of *maogui* from the *History of the Northern Dynasties* (see Li 1639) quoted above stands out. It is a unique account in Chinese literary texts of the use of cat spirits for black magic. The characteristics of this spirit are different from any other. Evil spirits can be called *gui*, but they were not worshipped. People worship various gods and spirits, but they cannot order them to fulfil their wishes or kill others. Many sacred animals (foxes, weasels, mice, hedgehogs, snakes, etc.) the cults of which appeared in the Qing period (1636–1912) can also bring good or bad luck to people, although they behave according to their own will and don't obey the worshipper (Li 1948). Even the name *maoguishen*, which was later used for the spirit, shows its specific position in the demonology system. Most of the Chinese spirits are either *gui* or *shen*, but not both. Additional support for this suggestion comes from the fact that the Dugo Tuo family was of Xianbei (a proto-Mongolian tribe) origin, although we have no exact data on the origin of Dugo Tuo's grandmother, who was the main worshipper of the cat spirit.

Although *maogui* is mentioned in legal and medical books, we do not find any other stories or tales about the spirit that are not related to the case of Dugu Tuo. There are various stories about other cat spirits (*maojin*, *maoxiao*, etc.),<sup>10</sup> although their functions and abilities differ from those of *maogui*. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that according to the law, the practitioner and his family should be punished, so people prefer not to discuss these issues. On the other hand, it may be another indication that this spirit was alien to Han culture, originally belonging to the folklore of other ethnic groups, and remained the local folklore character of the north-western regions of China. According to Liu (2004: 38) and Yang Wei (2007: 30), the *maoguishen* cult is most prominent in the Hehuang region of Qinghai. The Monguor worship *maoguishen* more than the Han Chinese.

Certain motifs in the legends also suggest a possible foreign origin for the cult. Some Han people in Gansu Province (Sun village, Tianshui city; Langnan city, Chenxian County) believe that *maoguishen* is the spirit of Tanguts or Mongols killed by Chinese soldiers (Xie and Jin 2012: 61–62; Tai 2016: 24–25). The Mongghul of Huzhu County

(Qinghai) believe that *modaya* are messengers for the deity Qurixjang, a brother of Genghis Khan, “who was sent to the area of present-day Qinghai to suppress a rebellion. When he returned home after completing his mission, he was killed by an assassin’s arrow. The Mongols regard him as a deity”. (Limusishiden 2015: 38) These arguments are by no means decisive, but the localisation of the cult within a region where the Han people had long been the minority along with the above-mentioned data at least allows us to include the possibility of the spirit having a non-Han origin.

#### APPEARANCE

Although the spirits in question are most often invisible or visible as cats, this is by no means their only manifestation. The spirit can be a big cat (Qingyang and Pingliang, Gansu; see Yuan 2016: 99); a big black cat (Huzhu, Qinghai; see Yang 2007: 30–31); a big red cat (Qinzhou, Gansu; see Wang and Lu 2009: 5); a cat, that is visible to the family it serves (Huzhu, Haidong, Qinghai; see Limusishiden et al. 2014: 164; Limusishiden 2015: 38); a cat that is visible to people with special abilities (Xiahe, Gansu; see Sa mtsho skyid and Roche 2011: 266–267); a cat that is different in size from normal cats (bigger or smaller) and has human-like facial expressions.

In Wushan, Gangu and neighbouring counties (Gansu), *maoguishen* is a house spirit with the body of a human and the head of a cat. It can be red, black or grey. When a person sees it, he or she will feel dizzy and confused, as if in a dream, and may even lose consciousness (E 2012: 9). In Guide County (Qinghai), people often hang pictures on their doors to protect them from *the’u rang*. In these pictures, the spirit is depicted as a three-legged cat or a strange creature with a human head, long hair and a cat’s body dressed in a brown dress. It is also believed that the cat always crosses the courtyard in the same way, which is why you can see a trace of three paws on the courtyard wall. There are several classes of cat spirit. The most powerful are the black ones, then the red ones, then the white ones, etc. (E 2012: 28)

There are two main types of humanoid manifestation of these spirits (apart from the cat–human hybrids mentioned above). The first is a long-haired child, and the second is a beautiful woman or young man whose face is not clearly visible, but who can seduce humans. The Tibetans of Labrang describe *the’u rangs* as long-haired children (Liu 2018: 165). In Xiahe County and Hezuo City (Gansu), interviewees said that *the’u rang* looks like a long-haired four- or five-year-old child who never grows up and walks in the air one *chi* (33 cm) above the earth’s surface. A 36-year-old Tibetan from Xiahe County explained that the *the’u rang* has tried to improve itself, but in the process of self-perfection it has not achieved the necessary result because it has done everything wrong. That is why it has such an appearance. (Ibid.) A monk from Labrang Monastery in Xunhua County (Qinghai) recalls that in his youth there was an old woman in his village who, when she was a child, used to play with a long-haired child. This child often gave her toys and food, many things she had never seen before. The monk assumed that this child was a spirit (Liang 2011: 81). In Huzhu County (Qinghai), it takes the form of a naked child who disappears when a shepherd whips it (ibid.: 80). In Datong County (Qinghai), *maoguishen* also has the appearance of a child (Liu 2004: 42). Popular images that used to protect people from these spirits depict the victory of a monkey over a *the’u*

*rang* in the human form of a man or child (Liang 2011: 81; Liu 2018: 166). Han people in Chengxian County (Gansu) depict three male figures in Chinese dress: the middle one in yellow, the right one in green, and the left one in red (Tai 2016: 25). “The seventy-two different manifestations of *modaya* include a beautiful lady, a handsome man, a goat, a sheep, straw ash, a donkey, a dog, colourful cloth, and glass beads” (Haidong Municipality, Qinghai) (Limusishiden 2015: 38).

It is important to note that several accounts describe the spirits as having certain physical anomalies, as this is often an indication that such an object does not belong to the human world (Neklyudov 1988: 13–15). According to Schram (2006 [1957]: 480), *sturlong* has only one eye. A person from Hezuo (Gansu) claimed that *maoguishen* can transform into a three-legged horse that cannot cross water (Liu 2018: 165). Finally, Mangghuers from the Guanting area (Minhe County, Qinghai) believe that the spirit is invisible and no one has seen it (E 2012: 27–28).

### PERSONALITY AND ABILITIES

Various sources claim that this spirit is resentful, vindictive and ill-tempered: it is selfish, narrow-minded, extremely sensitive and unforgiving. If it perceives the slightest breach of its rules, it will immediately begin to wreak havoc, spoil things and make a mess. The spirit has an exceptionally keen sense of hearing, so it secretly overhears all conversations about itself. If it hears something disrespectful about itself, it immediately takes revenge and the person suffers a series of miseries (Liang 2011: 80; Limusishiden 2015: 38; Yuan 2016: 98; Liu 2018: 165).

However, apart from these common features, in local traditions these spirits (venerated by different names) might have peculiar abilities and characteristics. In Hezuo City (Gansu) and Tongren City (Qinghai), it is said that all *the’u rangs* are of the same type. In Xiahe, however, people classified *the’u rangs* into three types: 1) those who bring wealth to the family 2) those who lead the family to the destruction of property 3) evil spirits who like to make a mess. If a person quarrels a lot, they are said to have a *the’u rang* of the third type in their house (Liu 2018: 165).

The Mongghuls of Huzhu County (Qinghai) believe that illness can be caused by many spirits, including *modaya* (Limusishiden 2015: 38–39). *Modaya* can have wives of their own kind and prefer to live with rich families. They may live in groups: “several *modaya* usually live together on the top floor of two-storey houses” (ibid.: 38). In Hanyan County (Qinghai) there is a story about a person who has a couple of *maoguishen*, one male and one female (Liu 2004: 40).

*Maoguishen* can cover a long distance in a day (Liang 2011: 79) and are good for finding lost cattle or objects. The owner of the lost object pays the *maoguishen’s* devotee and the spirit finds the lost object and tells the devotee the location (Liu 2004: 40; Yang 2007: 31; Liang 2011: 79). In Songnshu district (Minhe County, Gansu), people believe that usually *maoguishen* protects the house and accumulates wealth, but when it unites with the wandering soul of the dead person, it becomes very evil and harmful (E 2012: 8). In the Smug po community (Xinghai County, Qinghai), *the’u rangs* are considered to be a most malicious subclass of the protective deities *srung ma*. Locals carefully and discretely inquire about the *srung ma* of a prospective spouse before agreeing to mar-

riage. People believe that if the families have different *srung ma*, the new couple will not get along (Chos bstan rgyal 2014: 63–64). Below we will show how these (and other) characteristics of the spirit's personality are manifested through the spirit's interaction with its host (devotee), external people, and other spirits, according to local belief.

#### RELATIONS WITH HOSTS (DEVOTEES)

Some stories emphasise the loyalty of the spirits to their devotees and their hostility to outsiders, but very often it is claimed that these spirits are highly dangerous even to the family in which they live. They are very easily offended and take revenge for the slightest act of disrespect by sending all sorts of misery and misfortune. One person may be constantly ill or the family may go bankrupt. In such a case, either the family moves away from that place or the host should make more offerings to the spirit. (Liu 2004: 40–41; Yang 2007: 31; Liu 2018: 165–166; Limusishiden et al. 2014: 164; Tai 2016: 25)

The host can give orders to the cat spirit, and if someone offends the host, the spirit takes revenge, or sometimes the offended host can ask the spirit to take revenge (Xie and Jin 2012: 63). As revenge, the cat spirit may steal or spoil things, throw stones, cause intestinal problems, or try to kill people (Yang 2007: 31; Liu 2018: 168). In Guinan (Qinghai), if a cat worshipper quarrels with someone, the cat will pee on their head and they will go bald (Liu 2004: 41). In Wushan, Gangu and other counties in Gansu, people believe that *maoguishen* does not harm those who worship it, only those who do not. He takes great pleasure in harming women and children. If adults do not keep an eye on their children, it can throw them down the well or hide them far away in the mountains (Wu 2004: 68).

The cat spirit sometimes forms a personal bond with a particular member of the family in which it lives. Only one member of the family, usually a woman, contacts it, makes offerings, etc. This person then passes the knowledge to her (or his) heir (Liang 2011: 79). *The'u rang* can even delay the time of death of its follower if he or she becomes old and ill (Liu 2018: 166). Schram's records (2006 [1957]: 480) suggest that the relationship between the spirit and the host may be even more intimate: "*Mao-kui-shen* 'cat spirit' [...] is a male spirit for which young women prepare a blanket at night, and which they 'serve'."

The main driving force of this spirit is the passion to collect wealth for the family in which it lives and to protect it from other people. Hence their eagerness to harm people who take something from the devotee's home or eat there (reducing the family's food supply) or who have an intense relationship with the devotee. Usually, the devotee can send the cat spirit to bring food or valuables, and the spirit obeys (Yang 2007: 31; Liang 2011: 79; Tai 2016: 25).

In Tongren (Qinghai), gamblers and businessmen like to have *the'u rangs* because it is an easy and quick way to get rich. *The'u rangs* can steal other people's wealth and luck. However, if you treat it improperly you will not get rich and will be unlucky and ill. The wealth of such families is regarded by others as indecent, having been achieved by witchcraft. The proper way to get rich is to pray to a wealth deity. (Liu 2018: 169)

The cat spirits' concept of property protection is very wide. They not only acquire property by stealing from neighbours and protecting the family from thieves, but they



also do not allow other people to borrow anything from the house or eat there or even get a dowry for a bride. They will pursue such a person trying to bring things back (Liu 2004: 40–41; Tai 2016: 25–26; Liu 2018: 169).

In the Smug po community (Qinghai), where the cat spirit *the'u rang* is regarded as a kind of protective deity, *srung ma*, borrowing certain items can provoke its anger. Metal objects, especially jewellery, and knives, as well as wooden objects, should never be borrowed. Disaster strikes when a *srung ma* is dissatisfied with a family. In such cases, the *bla ma* (Tibetan 'lama') will identify what the borrowed object is, advise that it be discarded, and determine the direction in which it should be discarded. For example, a woman once borrowed a lambskin robe to wear to a wedding party. She accidentally put the robe over her sleeping daughter. The daughter cried all night and went blind a few days later. The girl's father went to ask a *bla ma* for help and was told that a borrowed robe had caused the problem. (Chos bstan rgyal 2014: 63–64) In Minhe County (Gansu), a man borrowed pork from a *the'u rang* host family, and when he returned home he found that his wife had a severe stomach ache (Liu 2004: 40). When it is necessary to sell something or give the dowry to the bride the cat spirit's devotees try to distract the spirit in the process (Schram 2006 [1957]: 480).

An interesting situation was recorded in Sun village (Tianshui City, Gansu). People cannot take gifts from the village because *maoguishen* possesses them and makes them return the gift or takes revenge. Brides are also afraid to take things from their parents' house. But people can exchange gifts within the village because everyone worships *maoguishen*. This leads to the isolation of the village and difficulties in finding spouses (Xie and Jin 2012: 63–64).

In many places, people tell stories about the spirit stealing grain, food, objects and instruments from neighbours (see for example Limusishiden and Stuart 2010: 80; Liu 2018: 169). In Guinan and Menyuan (Qinghai), it is said that when guests arrive and there is no food in the house, you must tell the spirit. It will go to another house, swallow the prepared food, come back, spit it into the host's pot,<sup>11</sup> and make many further trips to the neighbours like this (Liu 2004: 40). The Monguors of the Hung nai valley believe, that

on the tenth moon the spirit steals grain and brings it to the granaries of its devotees. If guests arrive unexpectedly at noon and the food prepared is not sufficient, it is so potent that it can add food enough for all the guests by unknown means. (Schram 2006 [1957]: 480)

According to Tibetans from the village of Phug sde (Gansu), spirits steal the harvest and bring it to the devotees, justifying themselves by saying that they only steal from lazy people (Sa mtsho skyid and Roche 2011: 266–267). "When thieves come at night, it spirits away the things they intend to steal" (Schram 2006 [1957]: 480). If somebody steals something from the house, the thief will have trouble and the *the'u rang* will return the things to the owner (Liu 2004: 40).

The spirit notices all visitors and watches to see whether some evil intent is not lurking behind the visit. It is said that when an undesired guest lingers waiting for dinner, Sturlong causes him tremendous intestinal troubles so that the guest has to run away. (Schram 2006 [1957]: 480)

If you eat something prepared in the house where a spirit lives, you'll have problems with your stomach (such as pain or diarrhoea). In addition, if the food you have just prepared rots, it could be the action of a cat spirit (Smedt and Mostaert 1933: 245; Snying bo rgyal and Rino 2009: 104; Liang 2011: 80; Liu 2018: 168). In the Smug po community (Xinghai County, Qinghai), if smoke from a family with a *the'u rang* wafts from its chimney and mixes with the smoke from another family's chimney, the latter family will suffer misfortune (Chos bstan rgyal 2014: 63–64).

Sometimes *maoguishen* can leave the house with a particular family member. Mongghuls believe that it can follow the family member (a woman who moves to her husband's house after marriage) and settle in the new house, causing illness and calamities to the new relatives (Limusishiden 2015: 39). In the family in Minhe County, the spirit left the family with the bride and moved to another village. It then made a mess of both houses until they called in a magic specialist to suppress it. After that, the cat spirit did not return (E 2012: 28–29). E (ibid.: 23–24) also quotes the story of a spirit changing families several times. Another story from Minhe County suggests that the spirit may also leave the family if metal objects (a gun or a tractor) are given to another family (ibid.: 28).

Despite the unpleasant personality in certain locations, people believe that *the'u rangs* love and protect children. In southern Gansu and western Sichuan, Tibetans and some of the Han people regard *the'u rangs* as the protectors of children (Wu 1994: 108). In Damai (Xiahe County, Gansu), villagers believe that *the'u rangs* like families with many children. Near one village there is a mountain slope where *the'u rangs* live. Before inviting a *the'u rang* to the family, the medium asks him: "Will you go to the family?" And the *the'u rang* answers: "Are there many children in the family?" If there are three or more children, the *the'u rang* will go to live in that house, if there are fewer, it won't. So the families with *the'u rangs* can be identified by their wealth and numerous children. (Liu 2018: 166)

#### THE ATTITUDE OF LOCALS TOWARDS FAMILIES WHO HOST CAT SPIRITS

A family that hosts cat spirits is usually rich, but they are rogues in their village. The locals tend to ignore them. They do not allow their children to play with the children of cat spirit host families, nor do they allow them to marry members of such families, as their wealth is considered impure and their lineage unclean. Moreover, it is too easy to offend the cat spirit in some way and get into all kinds of trouble as a result (Schram 2006 [1957]: 480; Yang 2007: 31; Snying bo rgyal and Rino 2009: 104; Limusishiden and Stuart 2010: 80; Liang 2011: 80–81; Limusishiden et al. 2014: 164; Rka phug and Stuart 2014: 57–59; Liu 2018: 170).

Liu Junjun (2018: 170), speaking of *the'u rang* cat spirits, suggests that such an attitude may be due to the perception of *the'u rangs* as the hostile Bon deities and consequently the sources of all possible misfortune. We suggest that the reverse may also be true. First, the Tibetans encountered the unpleasant, ill-tempered family spirits introduced from another region and ethnic group, and later the Tibetans associated them with the *the'u rangs*, their pre-Buddhist deities that brought misfortune.

T Tibetans in Xiahe County (Gansu) believe that there are two types of *the'u rang*: *yod the'u*, which makes the family wealthy, and *med the'u*, which causes poverty. However, all such families are considered unclean and their members are said to have the evil eye: if such a person looks at milk or yoghurt, it will spill out of the container; if he or she praises a horse, it will soon die (Sa mtsho skyid and Roche 2011: 266–267; Liu 2018: 165–166).

In Hainan Prefecture (Qinghai), Tibetans do not marry girls from families that have the cat spirit, even if the girls are smart and pretty, because the spirit would follow them into a new family and they would have to worship it. Then the cat spirit would wander between the two families and protect them (E 2012: 28).

## POSSESSION

Based on material collected in the Hehuang region (Qinghai), Liu (2004: 41) notes that it is difficult for a *maoguishen* to become visible and express its will. But it can speak through a person. Therefore, when the spirit bites a person, the person begins to speak gibberish, moves his or her arms and legs unwillingly, and that person's mind becomes confused: these are the symptoms of the spirit's possession. Monguors also claim that the possessed person speaks gibberish, and his or her mind is confused. Based on these hardly discernible discussions the family members understand where the spirit comes from, its intentions, etc. They then see the spirit off properly according to its instructions (Yang 2007: 31).

Possession is also typical of some Chinese spirits, such as sacred animals, which cannot speak but can possess a person or statue in order to manifest their will. However, unlike the *maoguishen*, their language was unclear to ordinary people, and in the first half of the 20th century only special shamans called *xiangtou* could communicate with them (Li 1948: 12–16; 25–27). Today this is also the function of Taoist priests.

Tai Wenyi (2016: 26) describes the typical symptoms of possession: the upper part of the body is paralysed, while the legs tremble involuntarily. The mind is confused, especially in women and children. They often have nightmares at night. People also make strange movements and actions, talk nonsense, run to and fro, and curse for no reason. Strong spirits can make the person run naked. Tai also notes (*ibid.*) that doctors cannot cure such illnesses, and so people invite Taoist monks from the Zhengyi school to heal them.

E (2012: 24) recorded a narrative in Xining in which a fortune teller helped a sick person suffering from nightmares and suffocation. He discovered that the cat spirit had merged with the spirit of a person who had died of starvation and had already killed several people. The fortune teller passed a *hadag* (Mongolian ritual scarf) through a peachwood bead<sup>12</sup> and ordered it to be hung in the room to protect the man from being possessed. In this narrative, *maoguishen* is not a god of wealth, but an evil spirit that can cooperate with others to harm or even kill people. Thus, he has lost his main function and has become a wandering harmful spirit.

Not only specialists can help the possessed person. In Qingyang (Gansu), for example, the spirit is afraid of being hit with the left boot (Yuan 2016: 99) or with women's underwear (Yang 2007: 31). In a narrative recorded by E (2012: 23), a doctor in Ledu

County (Qinghai) acted as an exorcist. In 1978 she was called to see a sick girl who had a fever and was delirious. She gave her acupuncture. As she inserted the needle twice, the girl spoke to her: "I am a *maoguishen* from the village of G. Please, have mercy on me, I will not come back." She continued with the acupuncture, the spirit left and the girl recovered. (Ibid.)

## ALCOHOL

Many sources mention the specific attraction of cat spirits to alcoholic drinks. These drinks are included in the regular offerings to these spirits (Liu 2004: 40; Liu 2018: 166). Sometimes cat spirits visit other houses to secretly drink their alcohol (Limusishiden 2015: 38). In Lushar (Huangzhong, Qinghai), on New Year's Eve, people offer food and drink to the cat spirit and make a bed on a *kang* ('bed stove'). When the cat gets drunk, it appears in the shape of a big cat. When it becomes sober, it disappears. (Liu 2004: 40) The visible drunken cat spirit can be easily killed, as in a story popular among Han Chinese in Huzhu County (Qinghai). A Monguor daughter-in-law found two large drunken cats. Thinking they were evil spirits, she threw the cats into a pot, put it on the fire, closed the lid, put a big stone over the lid and sat on the lid herself. Thus, the cats were roasted. (Yang 2007: 30–31) In a similar story collected in Jianzha County (Qinghai), a daughter-in-law threw the cats into the fire. As a result, all members of the family fell ill and died. (Rka phug and Stuart 2014: 58) In Huzhu, Datong and Gonghe counties (Qinghai), people believe that a drunken spirit becomes visible and takes the form of a big cat, and can then be killed (boiled in a pot or beaten with a stick) (Liu 2004: 42). A similar method was used to exorcise the *maoguishen* from a possessed girl in Huangzhong County (Qinghai) who was sitting naked on the concrete floor and making copulatory movements. The exorcists put wine in the girl's room and played *huaquan*<sup>13</sup> in the next room, provoking the spirit to drink. Soon the girl calmed down and they caught the spirit, put it in the bottles for evil spirit *gui* and carried it to a crossroads in another county (E 2012: 23–25).

Alcohol plays an important role in revealing the true personality of the spirit. The Tibetans of Gansu distinguish two types of *the'u rangs*: *yod thevu* 'good *the'u rang*' and *med thevu* 'bad *the'u rang*'.

To learn the type of spirit you should go into the forest with it, taking wine, two glasses and a knife. Pour the wine into both glasses, drink one of them and pour the second one on the ground for *the'u rang*, then talk to it. *The'u rang* will give you its hand as you speak. Grasp it, do not let go, and ask: "Are you *yod thevu* or *med thevu*?" If it is a good one, ask it to visit your home, otherwise do not invite it. The bad *the'u rang* will bring misfortune. If a bad *the'u rang* insists on going with you, stab it with a knife. (Liu 2018: 165–166)

The motif of giving alcohol to the spirit in order to summon it is also found in Mongolian and Tuvan folklore. In these traditions, the spirit, whose name derives from the Tibetan *the'u rang* (Mongolian *ti:ren* and Tuvan *di:ren*), became a kind of anthropomorphic, troublesome, magical helper. During our fieldwork among Mongols and Khamnigans in Mongolia we collected several such narratives. Here is one of them.<sup>14</sup>

Fill a vessel with water and find a rock facing north. Pour vodka into another cup. I will go to such a place and play chess with myself. That's how I create a *ti:renj*. This is a ritual. *Ti:renj* will move figures, then a finger will appear moving figures, then the whole figure will become visible. It will drink! (FM 2015: Jalkhaijavín Lhagva, 72, blacksmith)

## SUMMONING METHODS

Because cat spirits bring wealth, some people wish to settle the spirit in their family. In the Hehuang region, several methods are known (Liu 2004: 39). *Maoguishen* can be made from a cat's head (Maqin and Huangzhong Counties, Qinghai), from a dead cat's corpse (Huangzhong County, Qinghai), or from a living cat (Ledu County, Qinghai). *Maoguishen* can be summoned by making offerings and burning incense. For example, in Gonghe County (Qinghai), people believe it is an evil spirit. They put an offering cup on the gate or in a corner of the house; every day before eating they fill it with food and burn incense. If the food disappears, it means that the spirit has taken up residence in the house. In Xunhua County (Qinghai), people believe that if the pet cat has starved to death and the owner is unaware of it, the cat can turn into a demon and harm the host, causing the family to lose its fortune and be ruined. If someone then calls the spirit and makes offerings to it, the spirit will become his or her *maoguishen*.

Liu (2018: 165–166) recorded the following ways for a *the'u rang* to start living with a family: the spirit can be inherited from the family's ancestors (Xiahe County, Gansu; Tongren County, Qinghai); the spirit can be invited by a person who drinks wine with it in the forest in the evening (Xiahe County, Gansu); or the spirit can be invited by a medium (Xiahe County, Gansu; Tongren County, Qinghai). Another way to invite the spirit is to hang highland barley and something tasty at the top of a ladder. When a *the'u rang* descends from the ladder to the ground after eating the barley, someone should say pleasant words for and praise it. In this way, the person makes friends with the spirit and makes it obey (Hezuo, Qinghai). The spirit can also come to the family of its own free will (Xiahe County, Gansu; Tongren County, Qinghai). The last case is the most dangerous, because if the family members do not serve it properly, the spirit can cause misfortune and disaster.

In the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Qinghai) "leaving even a small amount of food in a bowl after eating is also considered inappropriate, because it may attract a *the'u rang* that might create problems for the family" (Rka phug and Stuart 2014: 39–40).

In Ledu and Minhe counties (Gansu), people choose a black kitten about three months old, cut off its head on a moonless night and worship the spirit for seven days. Then the *maoguishen* can serve the worshipper and bring food and other things, but not money (E 2012: 8). Mongghuls believe that an old woman originally trained her cat to become the first *modaya* (Limusishiden 2015: 38). In Rma lho village (Huangnan Prefecture, Qinghai), people invite the spirit by first scattering popped barley at the crossroads and then taking it in a bag to a special room in the house. They worship the bag as the residence of a *the'u rang*. (Rka phug and Stuart 2014: 57) Monguors from the Hehuang region (Qinghai) say that when a *maoguishen* wants to move into a new house, he first places a pile of seven kinds of grain and legumes on a cupboard in the central

room. If the family does not want to invite the spirit, they should dispose of the pile at a deserted crossroads far from their house. (Yang 2007: 31)

#### WORSHIP PRACTICES

The general practice of worshipping cat spirits involves daily offerings of food and/or alcohol at a designated place in the house, or near the gate. Sometimes there is a designated family member who makes the offerings and contacts the spirit. This person passes on their knowledge to another family member when the time comes (Liu 2018: 166).

Usually the gender of the worshipper is important, but in different places there are different opinions about who should make offerings to the spirit and where the offering place should be. Monguors in Minhe County (Qinghai) build a special room on the roof of the house and set up an altar. The offerings are made only by male members of the family. Women are not allowed to participate. In Menyuan County (Qinghai), the altar is placed in the middle of the central hall or a special white carpet is prepared for the deity and no one is allowed to sit on it. The offerings are made by women only (Liu 2004: 39). In Lanzhou, only women (often elderly) who live apart from the family make offerings to *maoguishen*. They offer food, or in some cases wine, before each meal (Liang 2011: 79). In Xunhua County, the local people worship *the'u rangs* as a superior family protector. When a spirit lives in a family, only one person in the family knows about it. This person lives alone in a separate room and spends the night with the spirit. Every time before a meal, the first portion of food should be given to the spirit, otherwise it will get angry and take revenge, i.e. make the food tasteless and inedible (Liu 2004: 39). In Amdo, Tibetans believe that *the'u rang* should be served with the first cup of each meal. It may be worshipped in a special room, or the cup may be placed in the corner of the yard, outside the gate, near the stove, etc. (Liu 2004: 39–40; Liu 2018: 166)

In some places, there are mutually exclusive opinions about how to properly worship the cat spirit. On the one hand, they like cleanliness, so the house must be clean at all times. Their images hang under the table and the first portion of the meal is given to the spirit (it is placed near the fireplace or behind the door) so as not to offend it. It likes to drink alcohol, so every few days it is offered with the meal. On the other hand, it is an evil and impure spirit, so it likes the smell of burnt rubbish, smelly socks, people's hair and excrement. Sometimes people should burn all these things as incense to please the spirit (Liu 2018: 166). Monguors believe that *maoguishen* live in clean and rich houses (Yang 2007: 31). In Ledu (Qinghai), people are supposed to clean the house and burn incense every day (Liu 2004: 40). This difference may correlate with the distinction between two classes of *the'u rang* (good and bad) mentioned above.

In some stories, there are cat or human images at the places of offerings. Han people in Chengxian County (Gansu) have a shrine in the kitchen. The picture of the spirit shows three male figures in Chinese dress, the middle one in yellow, the right one in green and the left one in red. Only women worship him. Every time they have a meal, they put out some food for the *maoguishen*. He particularly likes eggs, so on New Year's Eve or when the worshipper wants to please him, they give him three boiled eggs (Tai 2016: 25).

The image of the *sturlong* spirit is not worshipped in the living room, but behind the entrance gate to the courtyard (Schram 2006 [1957]: 480). In Jingchuan County (Gansu), people worshipped a cat image on the shrine and made offerings. The spirit protected them from misfortune and disaster. But if they did not worship it well enough, it would pee into the kettles containing rice or flour and harm people's health. There is a story that it caused a young girl to go half mad, lying naked in bed, laughing and crying at the same time (Zhou 2001: 105–106). In the towns of Pingliang and Qingyang (Gansu), only rich families worship the cat spirit. During the day it dreams in the attic, and a special person brings it food. In the evening, it goes hunting and brings home textiles, silk, gold, silver, etc. (Yuan 2016: 97–100). In Gonghe County (Qinghai), people there believe that *the'u rang* is an evil and impure spirit. However, they used to put a cup in the corner or outside the gates, and every day before meals they put food in the cup and burn incense. If the food disappears, it means that the spirit has taken up residence in the house. (Liu 2004: 39)

#### PROTECTION AND EXPULSION METHODS

People are afraid of revengeful cat spirits and use various methods to protect themselves from their harm. In addition, even families who worship these spirits sometimes want to drive out the troublesome spirit. In general, people prefer not to talk about *the'u rangs*, especially after sunset,<sup>15</sup> because they can hear and take revenge (Liang 2011: 82; Liu 2018: 166).

Among the protective measures against these spirits, monkeys play the most important role. Liu (2018: 167–168) notes that according to Bon texts, a monkey is the protector of faith and effectively suppresses evil spirits. (For a detailed analysis of the relationship between Tibetan *the'u rang* spirits and their monkey enemies, see Berounský 2010.) Some people also associate the monkey with the legendary monkey king Sun Wukong (Liu 2004: 41).<sup>16</sup>

One of the popular protective measures is to put a picture of a monkey on the door. There are several variants of the picture. In Xiahe and Tongren counties, it is said that the spirit is afraid of the golden snub-nosed monkey (*Pygathrix roxellana*) because this monkey can suppress it with its sharp teeth and claws. The paintings depict a monkey and a naked red-headed man, symbolising a *the'u rang*. The monkey, showing its teeth, is trampling on the man, holding him by the hair with one hand and holding a sword in the other hand with the intention of striking him. It is believed that after seeing this image, *the'u rang* will run away and hide (Liu 2018: 166). Other variants are used by the monks of Labrang Monastery (Gansu), and the spirit is depicted as a long-haired child (Liang 2011: 81).

A monk from Labrang Monastery in Xunhua County (Qinghai) believed that you could catch the spirit when in the form of a child by the hair and scold it with the dirtiest words until it begged for mercy. Then you can bargain and set your terms. When you have made it agree to your terms, then you should release it, cover your ears and go away so that you do not hear its voice, for it would be angry, it might take back its words and curse you. If you hear these curses, they will come true. (Liang 2011: 81)<sup>17</sup>

In Guide County (Qinghai), people believe that the monkey is an enemy of the cat, and to protect themselves from the spirit's harm they hang a picture of a monkey cutting off the cat's head on the door (E 2012: 28). In Huangnan (Qinghai), "families hang pictures of monkeys holding a *the'u rang*'s head or mutilated body over their courtyard gate, when they want to expel or prevent theft by *the'u rang*" (Rka phug and Stuart 2014: 57–58).

Another form of protection is monkey hair. In Hehuang, this is placed on the top of the main gate (Liu 2004: 41). In Xiahe and Tongren counties, monkey hair is put into the slit in the doorpost to increase the protective effect of monkey pictures (Liu 2018: 16); in Guide County, it is hung on the door (E 2012: 28). In Huangnan Prefecture, monkey eyebrows are used as lamp wicks to scare away spirits (Rka phug and Stuart 2014: 58). But monkey hair is not the only way to ward off evil spirits. In Guide County, people also place sheep or cow bones or monkey excrement on the wall for protection (E 2012: 28). In Qurang community (Gonghe County, Qinghai), it is believed that *tshi lkong* (the scruff of hair between a camel's ears), especially from an uncastrated camel, can repel *the'u rang* (Skal bzang tshe brtan 2021: 168).

Liu (2004: 41–42) describes other methods of suppression. A shaman may beat the possessed person with a special black cup to drive out the spirit. It is also useful to know that *the'u rang* cannot cross the ink line made by the carpenter's marker (Huzhu County). People believe that a carpenter's ink pen is a magical object, perhaps because it was invented by Lu Ban, the divine patron of carpenters. Thirdly, a *the'u rang* will be afraid if someone throws sand at it. The possible explanation is that this belief originates from a folk etymological proximity of two quasi-homonyms: *shā* 'sand' and *shà* 'evil spirit'. The latter character is often used on protective amulets, and the homonym 'sand' is believed to have the magical power to suppress *the'u rang*.

Yuan Haibao (2016: 98) mentions that if a spirit is beaten or otherwise harmed by a person, it will be afraid of them. One family became very rich because of *maoguishen*, but then decided to get rid of them. They ordered their cook to find a way to do it. He went upstairs and found seven huge cats sleeping on the high bed with soft pillows. He boiled rapeseed oil and poured it into each of the cats' ears. The cats screamed and ran off. After a long time, at sunset, the *maoguishens* asked from across the ditch: "Is your cook still alive?" The people on the other side of the moat replied: "Yes, he is alive." Since then they have not dared to enter the house.

As mentioned earlier, the Monguors believe that a drunken cat spirit will take the visible form of a cat and can then be killed (Liu 2004: 42; Schram 2006 [1957]: 480; Yang 2007: 30–31). Surprisingly, cat spirits can be trapped in physical objects, and not only when they are drunk (Tai 2016: 25). Closed doors are also an obstacle for a cat spirit (Schram 2006 [1957]: 480). To protect oneself from a *maoguishen*, in Cheng County (Gansu) one can hang a steelyard on the door. The steelyard was given by the spirit Taishangye. It has six stars of the Southern Dipper and seven stars of the Northern Dipper, so *maoguishens* are afraid of it. (Tai 2016: 25–26)

Cat spirits are considered by the Monguors to be half *gui* and half *shen* because they lose their power when a woman comes into contact with them. There are strict rules among the Monguors that forbid women from standing in front of temples or statues of gods, as they may contaminate them and bring disaster to the village. *Maoguishen* avoid impure objects. If a *maoguishen* possesses a person, the Monguors will beat the person



with a woman's underwear or put the underwear on the person's head. This confuses the spirit and it runs away. The underwear may knock off the person's hat, making an invisible cat spirit visible (Yang 2007: 31).

There are many stories in which people try to get rid of a spirit by deceiving it. Usually they send the spirit out of the house to get something that is not easily accessible and then prevent it from returning home. In Kajiadao township (Gansu), a lama advised sending a *the'u rang* for green barley at the coldest time of the year, then replacing the yellow flags on the gates with red ones and returning to the *the'u rang* shouting: "Fire in the house, everything is burnt down, run away!" (Liu 2018: 167) Sometimes, however, such attempts can lead to disaster. In Huangnan (Qinghai), although an attempt to exorcise the spirit was successful, all the family members died within a few years (Rka phug and Stuart 2014: 59). Schram (2006 [1957]: 480) notes that many Monguors are afraid to get rid of a spirit. Another way of expelling a *the'u rang* is to make it fight with another deity:

One family had been worshipping an evil *the'u rang* for several generations, but actually they no longer wanted to worship it any more, although they feared its revenge. They asked a 'living Buddha' (*tulku*) from Labrang for help. He recommended that they ask the *the'u rang* to steal the mountain deity's (*shanshen*) arrows. They did as they were told. The *the'u rang* replied: "It is no problem to steal the arrows. When I return, wait for me near the village. You'll see a white cloud in the sky chasing a black one. The white cloud is the Mountain God, and the black one is me. You should burn the most impure things: rubbish, smelly socks and human excrement. The Mountain God will smell this and will no longer be able to follow me". Then the Living Buddha advised us to burn the purest things instead: cypress, grain, milk, etc. When the person saw the two clouds, he burned the pure things. Lightning struck and the ghost shouted: "You are heartless!" So *the'u rang* was killed by the mountain deity (Xiahe County). (Liu 2018: 167)

This narrative is of special importance because it is widespread in Mongolia, Buriatia and Tuva (Dugarov 1993: 105–106; Taube 1994: 245–248; Illarionov 2010: 145–151; FM 2012–2019). There, the main way of expelling the spirit is to send it on a hard errand, and then to suppress the tired demon with fragrant incense instead of burning the unclean things. This is not the only account of good smells being dangerous to the spirit. Liu (2018: 168) also cites the assertion that "*the'u rangs* are dirty spirits and thus they are afraid of incense".

The host of the *the'u rang* can leave the house for several months and his name is taboo in the family for this period. The spirit decides that the person is lost and leaves the house to look for another family (Liang 2011: 81). Sometimes, the officials tried to protect their people from the cat spirits. Zuo Zongtang (1812–1885), a Chinese administrator and military leader, cut the image of a cat spirit and a possessed girl recovered. He also burned the image, wrote four characters "Drive away evil spirits, support what is right" and placed it near the entrance. All the inhabitants did the same and stopped worshipping the spirit. (Zhou 2001: 105–106)

There is a common belief that since cat spirits are not true *shen*-deities they cannot steal anything with Chinese characters on it, because characters have a heavenly origin and thus can suppress and drive away the spirits (Liu 2004: 40; Schram 2006 [1957]:

480). However, sometimes the reasoning might be different: in the past, some coins bore the Emperor's seal and thus *modaya* were afraid of incurring imperial censure for stealing them (Limusishiden et al. 2014: 164; Limusishiden 2015: 38).

Liu (2004: 40) mentions that there are many stories of *maoguishens* dying after trying to steal money. For example in Gonghe County, a *maoguishen* stole money and tried to enter the house through the crack in the door, but was crushed to death. In Haiyuan County, another story is popular: a man who has male and female *maoguishens* asks them to bring him money. The male *maoguishen* returned extremely tired and breathless and asked the man to go with him because they had stolen a lot of money. When they got to the place, there was a dead female *maoguishen* and a small brass coin. People use money to protect their property for example by hanging a bundle of coins on the handles of cupboards and precious objects (Liu 2004: 40; Yang 2007: 31; Yuan 2016: 98). In some places, people use sharp objects or dairy products to protect the harvest by placing them on top of a pile of grain sacks (Snying bo rgyal and Rino 2009: 104; Sa mtsho skyid and Roche 2011: 244).

## CAT SPIRITS AND OTHER VERNACULAR TRADITIONS

Although the *maoguishen* cult originated from the cult of *maogui*, a spirit presumably of non-Han and non-Tibetan origin, certain characteristics of the cat spirits suggest that other traditional beliefs of neighbouring ethnic groups were also involved in the formation of this mythological concept. Some of these characteristics are summarised below.

### *Chinese (Han) Influence*

Some features of the narratives of cat spirits may be the result of the possible influence of Chinese (Han) mythology, for example shape-shifting and the seduction of humans by a spirit, and ways of worshipping and expelling them. The ability to possess people is also a common feature of various Chinese spirits. However, as the earliest attestation of *maogui* also contains a description of possession by the spirit, it may be a separate phenomenon.

One of the characteristics of Chinese animal or plant spirits is their ability to transform into humans, male or female, and to seduce people. The result of such a relationship is in most cases harmful to humans (see for example de Groot 1907; Huntington 2000; Berry 2002). *Maogui* did not have this ability, although today in some regions there are narratives in which cat spirits can be shape-shifters. In such tales, a *maoguishen* does not act as a spirit of wealth, protecting its devotee, but as an animal spirit typical of Chinese folklore. This ability of the *maoguishen* may therefore be the result of cultural interaction.

In the Qingyang and Pingliang regions of Gansu, they form a special class of wandering spirit. The wandering spirit is more harmful, as it can take on a human appearance and then confuse and seduce people. No one has ever seen its true form. According to one story, a *maoguishen* who looked like a young man in a long black robe and a black hat, seduced a woman when her husband left home for business. The spirit had white

skin and golden rings on his fingers, but it was impossible to see his face. The woman felt weaker and weaker. When she was busy making food for the returning husband, it pissed in the pot and later strangled the man in the barn. (Yuan 2016: 98–99) In this story, two motifs link the spirit to the typical *maoguishen*: golden rings on the fingers as a sign of wealth, and pissing in the cauldron as a way of expressing dissatisfaction. The woman becomes weaker and weaker, the typical result of interaction with animal spirits in Chinese tradition, although the end of the story is different in that the angry *maoguishen* brutally kills the husband.

In Qinghai province, the *maoguishen* can also turn into a human. In Huzhu and Xunhua Counties, for example, they can take on the appearance of a young woman or a young man, seduce young girls and boys with little life experience and harm them (Liu 2004: 41). In Guide County, *maoguishens* are lustful. They often confuse and disturb pretty girls and young women (E 2012: 28).

Initially, the form of spirit worship was different from the Chinese tradition. In many regions this difference still exists, while in some places the ceremony has been deeply influenced by Chinese culture. The spirit may be represented as a tablet (Yongne jushi 2005: 8; Wang and Lu 2009: 5). It may be placed outside the house because *maoguishen* is not considered a true *shen* deity. The punishment of the spirit is carried out by the punishment of the tablet. Today in Gansu the image of the spirit can be hung above an altar. In Jingchuan County, the spirit is depicted as a cat (Zhou 2001: 105–106), and in Cheng County it is represented by three men in traditional Chinese dress (Tai 2016: 25). The other common feature is that *maoguishens*, like Chinese evil spirits, are afraid of peach wood (E 2012: 24).

### *Sichuan and Yunnan Traditions*

According to historical and medical books, *maogui*, along with stealing other people's belongings, could cause various diseases. Today, however, the spirits have acquired the new ability of poisoning anyone who eats or drinks in the homes of their followers, so that people avoid visiting such families. Spoiling the host's food is also a typical way of showing their dissatisfaction. The idea that the family spirit can be dangerous to guests through food poisoning may be related to or be influenced by beliefs attested in Sichuan and Yunnan, south of the main *maoguishen* area.

The Qiang and some neighbouring Sichuan peoples believe that some women are possessed by evil spirits. The Chinese name for such women is *dunyaomao* ('venomous cats'). The Qiang names for these creatures do not contain the word 'cat', but only various combinations with the word 'poison'. These women can transform themselves into various animals or objects and harm other people, including their own relatives. They have venom in their bodies and can poison people, sometimes involuntarily but generally by choice. For example, there is a narrative about a woman who involuntarily poisoned her daughter while preparing food for her wedding feast. In another story, a woman who was trying to be a good hostess accidentally poisoned her landlord. (Wang 2012: 18–21)

Another spirit associated with both poisoning and family fortune is the Tibetan Poison God of Deqin County (Diqing Prefecture, Yunnan). This god enters into a symbiosis

with a woman and causes her to poison anyone he directs. The fortune of the poisoned person goes to the poison god and the poisoner's family. The god has several manifestations: a snake, a frog, a centipede, but he is usually invisible and only the woman he possesses can see him (da Col 2012: 183). Cat spirits are also usually invisible and can only be seen by their followers.

The Yi people of Sichuan<sup>18</sup> worship a spirit with properties similar to *maoguishen*, called *amo* or *cim*. If there is a shortage of rice in the house, the spirit can fill the cauldron with rice. If there are no duck eggs, the spirit can steal them for the benefit of the hosts. If someone in the family disrespects the spirit, the spirit will take revenge on the host (E 2012: 15–16). Here, however, the direction of influence is unknown. Perhaps the cult of *maoguishen* somehow influenced the concept of *amo/cim*.

### *The Influence of Tibetan Mythology*

The Tibetans call the spirit under observation *the'u rang*, which is originally the name of a particular pre-Buddhist spirit that is one of the main actors of Tibetan mythology, but has functions other than the cat spirits of Gansu and Qinghai provinces. Motifs of monkeys being the enemies of evil spirits, the spirit's addiction to alcohol, and a special connection to gamblers may also be related to Tibetan tradition (for more details see Berounský 2010; Murakami 2014). The ability to move quickly and cover long distances in a very short time is also a typical characteristic of those spirits that may be inherited by *maoguishen*.

### CONCLUSION

The cult of the cat spirit is widespread, at least over the vast territory of Gansu and Qinghai provinces. In various communities, they are worshipped under different names, such as *maoguishen*, *the'u rang*, *modaya*, etc. This geographical distribution of such beliefs caused a considerable variance in local worship, protection, and summoning practices. However, several main invariant features can be determined based on the various local traditions.

Cat spirits are mainly family spirits, guardians of family wealth and property with highly resentful and revengeful personalities. They steal food and belongings from others, although they cannot take coins or other things with inscriptions. They are often too zealous in their efforts to protect a family's property. They not only guard the family wealth against thieves and steal from others, but they also do not allow their hosts to take anything out of the house, give presents to others, give away a bride's dowry or offer meals to guests. The spirits can fulfil the hosts' wishes to bring something or to take revenge on enemies. Most people consider them very dangerous creatures and do not want to marry any member of the cat spirit host family, as well as avoiding communication with such families. Moreover, these spirits are dangerous even for their host families, avenging the slightest act of disrespect or attempt to get rid of them. They are mainly invisible, although sometimes they can manifest as cats, or in rare cases children. Many sources underline the special effect that alcohol has on cat spirits, they

become visible and vulnerable to humans. Among the protection methods, the most popular is the use of monkey's hair or pictures of the monkey killing the spirit (monkeys are the main enemies of these spirits).

Quite often people believe that cat spirits can possess humans, take human appearance, seduce humans and cause illness and intestinal problems. In certain narratives, the cat spirits can change the family they live in by moving to another location with a newly married member of the family.

The first mention of cat spirits in China was recorded in the historical chronicles of the 6th century AD. The cult of cat spirits is attested now at least among the Han Chinese, the Tibetans, and the Monguors living in Qinghai and Gansu Provinces of China. There are arguments (although inconclusive) in favour of the suggestion that this cult was of non-Han and non-Tibetan origin and might be connected to Proto-Mongolic (Xianbei) tribes.

Given the fact that this area is a conglomerate of dozens of ethnic groups and languages, it is natural that the cult of cat spirits has been developing under the heavy influence of multiple local traditions. Every local culture tried to incorporate this cult into the system of traditional beliefs and in the process of assimilation consequently enriched the tradition with new traits in narratives circulated between the ethnic groups. In some Han and Monguor narratives, the mythological origin of cat spirits connects them to the legendary Jiang Ziya, thus integrating them into the traditional Chinese pantheon. Another Monguor tradition adopted the spirits into the ancestor cult. Tibetans related cat spirits to the *the'u rangs*, their pre-Buddhist atmospheric deities, protectors of gamblers and ancestors of the first Tibetan king. Some Han people associate these spirits with the souls of dead Tanguts or Mongols. The idea that the evil spirit may take an appearance of a human and seduce real humans most probably came from Han folklore, while the worshipping of spirits via special tablets also comes from traditional Han rituals. The connection of evil spirits with inedible or poisonous food is one of the important motifs in the Qiang people's folklore. In some regions, the cat spirit lost its original function and became a wandering evil spirit that causes illness and even death. Some motifs, for example about the expulsion of the spirit via impossible tasks, were introduced into other regions, for example Mongolia and Tuva, where Tibetan *the'u rang* spirits were reinterpreted as magic helpers and lost any connection with cats.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> These beliefs are attested at least in the following communities in eastern Qinghai: Huangzhong County, Huangyuan County, Datong County (Xining city), Ping'an district, Ledu district, Minhe Hui and Tu Autonomous County, Huzhu Tu Autonomous County, Xunhua Salar Autonomous County (Haidong City), Jianzha County (Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture), Haiyan County and Menyuan County (Haibei Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture), Gonghe County, Guinan County, Xinghai County and Guide County (Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture), Maqin County (Guoluo Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture), Tongren city (Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture). And in southern Gansu: Lanzhou City, Qingyang City, Pingliang City, Tianshui City, Yongjing County (Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture), Xiahe County and Hezuo City (Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture), Cheng County (Longnan City), Xihan river basin (the middle and upper reaches) (Liu 2004; Yang 2007; Snying bo rgyal and Rino 2009;

Limusishiden and Stuart 2010; 2015; Liang 2011; Sa mtsho skyid and Roche 2011; E 2012; Xie and Jin 2012; Chos bstan rgyal 2014; Rka phug and Stuart 2014; Limusishiden et al. 2014; Tai 2016; Yuan 2016; Liu 2018; Skal bzang tshe brtan 2021).

2 A Mongolic minority in China that consists of two ethnic groups, the Mongghul and the Mangghuer.

3 One of the official Chinese histories covering the period from 386 to 618.

4 The official history of the Sui dynasty of China (581–618), completed in 636.

5 In the same chapter of *Sui shu* it is also said that Dugu Tuo liked heterodox beliefs and the cat spirit moved to their family from the family of the Dugu Tuo's wife's mother, who had also served the spirit. Perhaps this means that the *maogui* was worshipped in both families, which would correspond to modern practices in Qinghai and Gansu (PCR), where families hosting the spirit relate by marriage only with families of their own kind.

6 *Chaoye qianzai* was a collection of stories by Zhang Zhuo. The book itself has not survived, although stories from it have been included in *Taiping guangji*.

7 The traditional preparation of *gu* poison involved sealing several venomous creatures (for example centipede, snake, scorpion) in a closed container where they would devour each other and supposedly concentrate their toxins in a single survivor, the body of which would be fed on by larvae until consumed. The last surviving larva contained the complex venom.

8 Li Keyu (1988: 318) in the *Monguor-Chinese Dictionary* gives the form *maudaaya* 'evil spirit'.

9 A general who helped Wu-wang of Zhou to conquer the Shang dynasty and who, according to the popular novel *The Investiture of the Gods* (Xu 2013), gave ranks to different deities and heroes.

10 Stories about cats are collected in *A History of the Cat*, by Wang Chutong (c. 1730–1810), and in Huang Han's (d. 1853) *Cat Garden* (see respectively Wang 2021 and Huang 2021).

11 Cf. the example of the word *mu:gešag* 'evil spirit', 'demon' in the Monguor dictionary: "this food resembles the vomit of the *mu:gešag*" (Smedt and Mostaert 1933: 245).

12 In China, the peach tree is believed to ward off evil spirits.

13 A game in which you have to guess how many fingers the other player is showing. The player who loses has to drink.

14 For similar Tuvan motifs, see Illarionov 2010: 148–149.

15 Han people have the same taboo about evil spirits (Liu 2018: 166).

16 Hero of the popular novel *Journey to the West* (Wu 2018).

17 There is a similar motif in Kazakh and Yellow Uighur narratives about *teiran* (the anthropomorphic spirit whose name goes back to the Tibetan *the'u rang*). After getting the things you wish from the spirit you should not listen to its speech, otherwise it will kill you (Zhanaydarov 2006: 185–186; Malov 1967: 35–36).

18 Yuexi County Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture and Xihe village Xicheng Xichang City Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture.

## SOURCES

- FM: Unpublished fieldwork materials from folklore and linguistic expeditions in which the authors participated.  
FM 2012: Mongolia (Zavkhan and Arkhangai Provinces)  
FM 2013: PRC (Inner Mongolia)  
FM 2014: Mongolia (Khovd Province)  
FM 2015: Mongolia (Bayankhongor)  
FM 2019: Mongolia (Dornod and Khentii Provinces)

## REFERENCES

- Berounský, Daniel. 2010. Opice a démon theurang: tibetské mýty a ochranné obrázky z Amda. – *Zoivřecí mýty a mytická zoivřata*, edited by Lucie Olivová. Praha: Academia, 28–47.
- Berry, J. Colleen. 2002. Animal Demons as Humans: Sex, Gender, and Boundary Crossings in Six Dynasties Zhiguai Literature. PhD dissertation. Indiana University.
- Chao Yuanfang. 1997. *Zhu bing yuan hou lun*. Shenyang: Liaoning kexue jishu chubanshe.
- Chos bstan rgyal. 2014. *Following the Herds: Rhythms of Tibetan Pastoral Life in Amdo*. *Asian Highlands Perspective* 32, edited by Gerald Roche.
- da Col, Giovanni. 2012. The Poisoner and the Parasite: Cosmoeconomics, Fear, and Hospitality among Dechen Tibetans. – *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (Special Issue: *The Return to Hospitality: Strangers, Guests, and Ambiguous Encounters*) 18 (1): 175–195. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2012.01771.x>.
- Da Qing lilii*. – *Chinese Text Project*. <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&chapter=805020#p47> (accessed March 20, 2022).
- Dugarov, Radna Nimayevich. 1993. Buryatskiye syuzhety o rolang i tkhireng. – *Istoriya i kul'tura narodov Tsentral'noy Azii*, edited by Shirap Bodieyevich Chimotdordzhiyev. Ulad-Ude: BNTs CO RAN, 102–106. [Дугаров, Радна Нимаевич. 1993. Бурятские сюжеты о роланг и тхирэнг. – *История и культура народов Центральной Азии*, отв. ред. Ширав Бодиевич Чимитдоржиев. Улан-Удэ: БНЦ СО РАН, 102–106.]
- E Chongrong. 2012. Chongbai yu kongju – Hehuang diqu duominzu xinyang maoguishende zongjiao renleixue fenxi. – *Dier jie zhongguo renleixue minzuxue zhongqingnian xuezhe gaoji yanxiuban lunwenji*: 1–30.
- de Groot, Jan Jakob Maria. 1907. *The Religious System of China: Its Ancient Forms, Evolution, History, and Present Aspect. Manners, Customs and Social Institutions Connected Therewith* 5. *On the Soul and Ancestral Worship* 2. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Hasbaatar. 1985. *Monggor helen-ü üges / Tuzuyu cihui*. Hohhot: Nei Menggu renmin chubanshe.
- Huang Han. 2021. *Mao yuan*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe.
- Huntington, Rania. 2000. Foxes and Sex in Late Imperial Chinese Narrative. – *Nan Nü: Men, Women and Gender in Early and Imperial China* 2 (1): 78–128. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852600750072312>.
- Illarionov, Vasiliy Vasil'yevich, ed. 2010 *Mify, legendy, predaniya tuvintsev. Pamyatniki fol'klora narodov Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka* 28. Novosibirsk: Nauka. [Илларионов, Василий Васильевич, ред. 2010. Мифы, легенды, предания тувинцев. Памятники фольклора народов Сибири и Дальнего Востока 28. Новосибирск: Наука.]
- Li Keyu. 1988. *Mongghul qidar merlong/Tu-Han cidian*. Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe.
- Li Shizhen. 1996. *Bencao gangmu*. Beijing: Zhongguo guoyixue chubanshe.
- Li Wei-tsu. 1948. On the Cult of the Four Sacred Animals in the Neighbourhood of Peking. – *Folklore Studies* 7: 1–94. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1177454>.

- Li Yanshuo. 1639. *Bei shi* 2.
- Liang Yan. 2011. Xibei diqu “maoguishen” xinyang yanjiu. – *Minjian wenhua luntan* 6: 78–83.
- Limusishiden (Li Dechun). 2015. Health and Illness among the Mongghul. – *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 36. *Mapping the Monguor*: 30–63.
- Limusishiden (Li Dechun) and Charles Kevin Stuart. 2010. *Mongghulni Jilaguni Da Adal: Mongghul Memories and Lives. Asian Highlands Perspectives* 8. Xining City: Plateau Publications.
- Limusishiden Jugui; Kelly Ward and Charles Kevin Stuart. 2014. *Fading Memories, Faded Lives: Mongghul (Tu) Photographs from Qinghai China. Asian Highlands Perspectives* 34.
- Liu Junjun. 2018. Xiangzheng renleixue shiyuxiade Anduo Zangzu terang xinyang yanjiu. – *Zongjiaoxue yanjiu* 3: 164–171.
- Liu Yongqing. 2004. Hehuang diqu maoguishen xinyang xisu shulüe. – *Qinghai shifan daxue minzu shifan xueyuan xuebao* 15 (2): 38–42.
- Malov, Sergey. 1967. *Yazyk zheltykh uyгурov: texty i perevody*. Moskva: Nauka. [Малов, Сергей. 1967. *Язык желтых уйгуров: тексты и переводы*. Москва: Наука.]
- Murakami, Daisuke. 2014. Aspects of the Traditional Gambling Game Known as Sho in Modern Lhasa: Religious and Gendered Worldviews Infusing the Tibetan Dice Game. – *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 29: 245–270.
- de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, René. 1993. *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities*. Kathmandu: Tiwari's Pilgrims Book House.
- Neklyudov, Sergey. 1988. Obrazy potustoronnego mira v narodnykh verovaniyakh i traditsionnoy slovesnosti. – *Vostochnaya demonologiya: Ot narodnykh verovaniy k literature*, edited by Nikolay Nikulin, Anastasiya Sadokova. Moskva: Naslediye, 6–43. [Неклюдов, Сергей. 1988. *Образы потустороннего мира в народных верованиях и традиционной словесности*. – *Восточная демонология: От народных верований к литературе*, отв. ред. Николай Никулин, Анастасия Садокова. Москва: Наследие, 6–43.]
- Rka phug Rdo rje don grub and Charles Kevin Stuart. 2014. *Farmers, Fugitives, Ghosts, and Exploding Grasshoppers: Everyday Life in Horse Race Village, a Tibetan Community on the Yellow River. Asian Highlands Perspectives* 33.
- Sa mtsho skyid and Gerald Roche. 2011. Purity and Fortune in Phug sde Village Rituals. – *Asian Highlands Perspective* 10: 231–284.
- Schram, Louis J. M. 2006 [1957]. *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier*. Xining City: Plateau Publications.
- Skal bzang tshe brtan. 2021. Tibetan Camel Packing in Chu Ring (Qurang) Community, Gser Chen (Gonghe) County, Mtsho Lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho Sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. – *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 60: 161–194.
- de Smedt, Albrecht, and Antoine Mostaert. 1933. *Le dialecte monguor parlé par les Mongols du Kansou occidental III: Dictionnaire monguor-français*. Pei-p'ing: Imprimerie de l'Université Catholique.
- Snying bo rgyal and Solomon Rino. 2009. *Deity Men: Reb Gong Tibetan Trance Mediums in Transition. Asian Highlands Perspective* 3.
- Tai Wenyi. 2016. Cong “shenti you yang” dao “liwu liudong”: zuowei jiaowang huayu shengchande zhiliao shijian - Xihanshui liuyu maoguishen xinyangde renleixue yanjiu. – *Zhongnan minzu daxue xuebao: renwen shehui kexuebao* 2: 24–28.
- Taiping Guangji. 2006. Beijing: Zhonghua chuju.
- Taube, Erica. 1994. *Skazki i predaniya altaiskikh tuvintsev*. Moskva: Vostochnaya literatura. [Тайбе, Эрика. *Сказки и предания алтайских тувинцев*. Москва: Восточная литература.]
- THDZCH. 1982. *Mongghol Qidar Harilqilegu Ugosge/Tuhan duizhao cihui*. Haidong: Huzhu tuzu zizhixian minzu yuwen bangongshi.
- Wang Chutong. 2021. *Mao cheng*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe.
- Wang Haiyan. 2012. *Zang Qiang Yi zoulang xiashen xinyang yiti duoyuande renleixue yanjiu*. A Master dissertation. Central University for Nationalities.



- Wang Wei and Lu Haowen. 2009. Wenhua renleixue shiyexiade Qinzhou “maoguishen” xinyang - yi Qinzhouqu Wangchuanzhen yili. – *Baoshan xueyuan xuebao* 28 (6): 4–7.
- Wei Zheng. 1635. *Sui shu* 2.
- Wu Cheng'en. 2018. *Xi you ji*. Changsha: Yuelu shushe.
- Wu Jun. 1994. Lun benjiao wenhua zai jiangheyuan diqude yingxiang. – *Zhongguo zangxue* 3: 100–115.
- Wu Wen, ed. 2004. *Zhongguo minsu daxi. Gansu minus*. Lanzhou: Gansu renmin chubanshe.
- Xie Lihong and Jin Xiaofang. 2012. Renleixue shiyuxiade “maoguishen” xinyang yanjiu - yi Gansusheng Suncun weili. – *Lanzhou daxue xuebao (shehui kexueban)* 2: 61–65.
- Xu Zhonglin. 2013. *Fengshen yanji*. Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju.
- Yang Wei. 2007. Lun Tuzude “maoguishen” chongbai. – *Qinghai renmin xueyuan xuebao (shehui kexueban)* 33 (4): 30–33.
- Yongne jushi. 2005. *Zhi wen lu*. Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe.
- Yuan Haibao. 2016. Maoguishen kaolun – yi Longdong diqu weili. – *Wenjiao ziliao* 36: 97–100.
- Zhanaydarov, Orynбай. 2006. *Mify drevnyego Kazakhstana*. Almaty: Aruna. [Жанайдаров, Орынбай. 2006. Мифы древнего Казахстана. Алматы: Аруна.]
- Zhangsun Wuji. 1983. *Tang lü shuyi*. Beijing: Zhonghua shudian chubanshe.
- Zhou Yang, ed. 2001. *Zhongguo minjian gushi jicheng: Gansu juan*. Beijing: Zhongguo ISBN zhongxin.