

Meeting with Darkhad Shaman, Erdene-Ochiz, of Mongolia:

His Story and Description of a Special Tool for Extraction Healing

by Susan Ross Grimaldi, M.Ed., and John R. Lawrence Jr., PhD

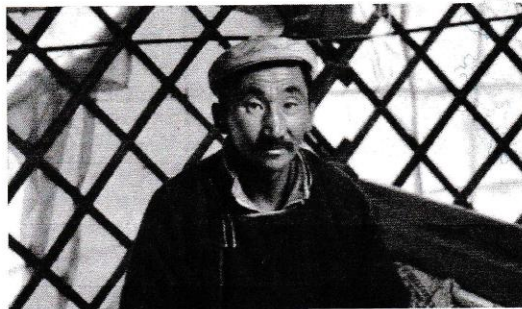
Introduction

Since the mid 1990's, Susan Grimaldi and John Lawrence, Jr. have together been searching for, and researching, surviving traditional shamans. Their work has taken them to three continents. The fruits of their labor have been preserved in photographic, video and audio recordings as well as in written form. The video recordings include face-to-face interactions, conversations, interviews, shamanic rituals, and healing work. For the work presented here, they began a quest to see if they could find practicing shamans among a nomadic tribe of reindeer herders called the Dukha (AKA Tsaatan), these people being the last remaining, truly nomadic, subsistence reindeer herders in the world.

Just as they finished packing their gear and were preparing to begin the last leg of this expedition into the West Taiga, John and Susan had the unexpected good fortune to meet a shaman from a different ethnicity, the well known Darkhad shaman, Erdene-Ochiz.

The following findings were gathered during this expedition to the Sayan Mountain Range, in the remote outpost of Tsagaanuur located in northern Mongolia.

We asked Erdene-Ochiz how he had become a shaman.



Erdene-Ochiz, Darkhad Shaman

Photo by John R. Lawrence, Jr.

He began, "When I was 13 years old, I got frozen." He was attending a boarding school in a different town. He missed his family and hated school. One winter he tried to escape from the school and reach his home. On the way, his ears and toes were deeply frostbitten.

During his escape he was stricken with another serious illness. It's a childhood illness known as the "wind flower illness". He explained, "This illness got inside of my body and I got crazy. A rash appeared on my skin. I was told that I had become delirious with a high fever and had taken off all of my clothes. I was unconscious." He didn't remember any of this. Someone in a car found him naked, lying beside the road. He was frozen so hard that his "feet were as hard as wood".

He laid in the hospital unconscious for fifteen days. When he awoke he remembered nothing, only knowing that he was in the hospital. For three months he stayed there, and during those months he had to have fluid aspirated from his chest and from behind his scarred ears. He lost some of his toes. Eventually, though, he got well.

We wondered why he had run away from school and he told us, "I missed my home very much. I was not interested in school at all. I had tried to run away before, and my family would catch me and send back to the school."

We wanted to know what happened after his recovery and were told, "After I got well, I had to go back to school. When I was at school, I started foretelling the fortunes of my classmates. The teachers didn't understand me. They blamed me for doing these divinations and said that I was bad and doing wrong, claiming that I was turning around the heads of my classmates. My teachers hit me, beat me and threw me against the wall. Shamanism was prohibited and punished by the Soviet government. My teachers made me hit the wall because the society was against the shamanic traditions. They tried to take away my power and destroy me. So, I stopped doing these shamanic practices under this pressure. I quit this kind of seeing. It was

something I had to stop for a period. It was when I was 27 years old that I became a shaman in the real meaning of the term."

He finished school, married and had a family of his own. At the age of 20, he became insane. He ran away from his home and family. He ran away fifteen kilometers and preferred to be in the mountains, in nature and alone. He became strange and couldn't be with regular people. This condition lasted for over a year.

He doesn't remember that time well. He only remembers what he heard from other people. He ran through the valley and on occasion he would return to his home only to eat, but then he would run away again. People couldn't recognize him because he had lost a lot of weight and seemed like a different person with a different appearance. He was really thin. He only wanted to be alone and to pray.

An old shaman saw him jumping up and running away into the mountains and tried to make a shamanic "re-pairment" for him, which we later understood to be the same as soul retrieval. With this help he made some improvement and after one year he stopped running away. That old shaman helped him to get back to life and regain his sanity. The old shaman had told him that he needed to have some shamanic tools, so he got three items: a rattle, a jaw harp, and the Sky's Arrow. His teacher made the jaw harp alive for him by whispering some powerful energy into it. A craftsman made a Sky's Arrow for this shaman, which he still has and uses for extraction healing.

Erdene's grandmother had been a shaman, too. One of her students who had become a shaman informed Erdene that he had been chosen to become a shaman. During this initiatory period he began to dream of shamanic teachings, learning directly from deceased ancestral shamans.

As a tool, the Sky's Arrow has its origins in the Bronze Age. The length of the Sky's Arrow is 7-10 inches (20cm). The point is sharp, and the shaft is twisted into a spiral. The Sky's Arrow assures that the shaman is always able to connect with the sky. He explained to us that, "The Sky's Arrow is empowered by thunder and lightening, and that the vibrations of the thunder and the power of the lightening can destroy an illness".

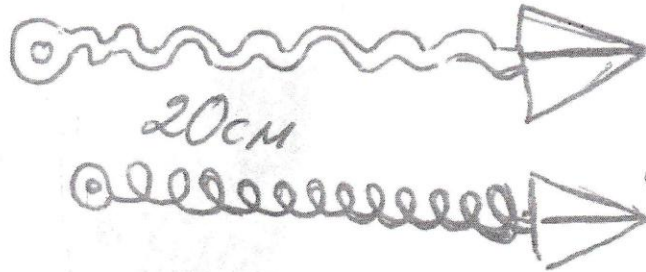
He described how he uses the Sky's Arrow for healing patients. "The Sky's Arrow is used for getting out bad things. The helping spirit goes into my body, and tells me what to do with the Sky's Arrow". For instance, he was instructed by the spirits to "wipe the patient's body clean using the Sky's Arrow. If the person is having spasms, or twitching, the Sky's Arrow needs to

be wiped over them from head to foot and crosswise. I may be shown how to draw this bad out from somebody." He says that he often doesn't remember the healings, "Because, when the spirit goes away, I forget what I have done". He compared his shamanic healing journey to a dream, saying, "It is like a dream. It is the spirit that knows".

The Sky's Arrow is a tool especially important for treating psychosis. He has treated many insane people successfully. He spoke about one man who had been insane for seven years. During this period this insane man had two horses that he would tie together by their necks. He would stand on one saddle and then step across the moving horses to stand on both saddles. We asked why the insane man didn't fall off, and he explained, "It was because while he was insane, he was very good at communicating with the animals".

During the healing for this man, a helping spirit entered the shaman's body, enabling him to see the reason for the bizarre behavior. This was a case of 'shamanic poison'. "This insane person was an unusual person but he wasn't a shaman. The

shamanic poison occurred because the patient had broken a taboo. He had offended nature and was experiencing punishment". In the healing process, "The Ongot spirit tells the shaman how to get rid of that shamanic poison so the person will be sane again". We understood Ongot spirits to be



Drawing of Sky's Arrow, by Erdene-Ochiz, Darkhad Shaman
Digital Image by John R Lawrence, Jr.

deceased shamans, ancestors, and nature spirits.

During a healing, the shaman calls on his many helping spirits and these go into his body. Erdene revealed, "It's like being shifted". He said, "I have seven helping spirits. Almost all of them are old people spirits who already lived on the earth and have passed away". He told us that during a healing, his soul goes out of his body as the spirits go into his body.

We told Erdene that we had been informed that a few shamans in Mongolia practice black shamanism and we wanted to know if this is true, and, if so, we wanted to know if he could explain why someone would do this. We had heard that in olden days there were two brothers who were both Darkhad shamans. They died in the 1960's. One shaman was white and one black. The black shaman would cause hardship and the white shaman would try to fix what his black shaman brother had caused. When the black shaman was still living, every year on a particular day, he required everyone in his community to pay him a visit and give him a valuable gift. Even the poorest person had to do

this or they would die. He took advantage of everyone and did terrible things with his power. To this day people will not speak the name of this black shaman for fear of awakening his spirit.

It was explained to us that the reason someone would practice these dark arts was because they were bad people, something was not right in their mind. A person who enjoys making others suffer and manipulating others to their advantage has the behavior of a sociopath.

He said that there used to be black shamans in the old times but nowadays he doesn't know whether they exist or not. But then he went on to say that he doesn't know about it directly, but he knows that it does happen. He added that if a shaman is trying to do good and is working to heal a client, it takes a long time, but for a 'black thing' it takes a short time.

We wondered what happens to a black shaman, asking if there are bad effects of doing bad things. He told us, "Bad things can affect the black shaman's children or relatives, like their brothers and sisters, or the next generation".

We asked him to tell us about his drum. He told us that shamans here never make their own drums. It must be another person who makes a drum for the shaman. "Drum makers are special people. Some shamans make drums for other shamans but not for themselves. A drum maker must have knowledge about shamanism and know the ethics and rules for making drums. They use larch wood for the rim. The drumhead is made from a doe's skin. It must be from a two-year old female deer. A female deer usually gives birth when she is two years old, but as for the skin for the drum, the female deer should not yet have given birth."

We told Erdene that we had seen shaman's drums with objects tucked under the hide, on the outside of the wooden hoop and we wanted to know about these bumps. We learned that these bumps are usually made of wood and that the size varies. "These bumps are part of the shaman's regalia and signify the shaman's rank. A young or new sha-

man starts with small bumps. When that shaman's rank is higher, and he becomes more skillful and powerful, then the bumps will be bigger."

We asked Erdene if he has an important message that he wants for us to convey when we return to our homeland. He hesitated only a moment before saying, "The most important thing when becoming a shaman, is that for the first three years, the shaman doesn't do any healing for others because the shaman needs time to mature in their understanding and grow in their abilities." He compared it to when a baby is born, saying, "It needs time to grow up, and start to walk. It takes time, for a shaman to be ready. The first year, just after becoming a shaman, if they start to do something, it's like just after being born, trying to run or walk, it can't be. These shamans are not good for the people because they are not yet a matured shaman." He cautioned, "This could result in more suffering for the client. The shaman must learn step by step to become powerful and helpful for people."

He was curious about us and wanted to know if we are shamans, researchers or if we are delegates from an organization wanting to protect the shaman's rights.

We told him that we are researchers and that we practice shamanism. We explained that we are working to preserve shamanic knowledge and that we would be contributing our findings to the Foundation for Shamanic Studies', Shamanic Knowledge Conservatory and that it would be protected and preserved for future generations.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

John R. Lawrence, Jr., PhD, is a Cultural Anthropologist, explorer, documentary videographer, and photographer specializing in the research of traditional shamans. His fieldwork has led him to China, Tuva, the Amazon Basin, Estonia and Mongolia, where he worked to record and preserve the practices of these tribal traditional healers. He

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