

THE SEMANTICS OF THE WORD *KHAIRKHAN* IN A TURKIC-MONGOLIAN RITUAL EVENT

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Abstract: *The authors carry out a semantic reconstruction of the word qayiraqan, which is the most commonly used address to a deity in the Turkic-Mongolian mythology. The linguistic analysis allowed the authors to determine that the lexeme qayiraqan belongs to indigenously Mongolian lexical fund. In the Mongolian languages the adjective qayiraqan has both subjective and objective meanings. Meanwhile, in the Turkic languages this lexeme is used with its subjective meaning. The study of cultic texts revealed such denotations of the lexeme as supreme deities, mountain spirits, spirits of fire and dead ancestors, and totems.*

Keywords: *semantics, etymology, mythology, ceremony, deity.*

Bir Türk-Moğol Töreninde Kullanılan “Qayırqan” Sözcüğünün Anlamsal Çözümlemesi

Özet: *Türk-Moğol mitolojisinde yapılan tören ve ritüel eylemleri sırasında tanrılar için en yaygın kullanılan qayırqan sıfatıdır. Bu makalede, yazarlar qayırqan kelimesini ele alıp, ritüel metinlerindeki anlamını tekrar çözümlemektedirler. Yapılan dil analizi qayırqan kelimesinin Moğol sözcük dizinine ait olduğunu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Moğol dillerinde qayırqan sıfat olarak hem subjektif anlamda hem de objektif anlamda anlamdadır. Ancak, Türk dillerinde sadece ilk anlamda kullanıldığı görülmektedir. Türk ve Moğol halklarının ritüel metinlerinin incelenmesi sonucu bu kelimenin yüce tanrı, dağların rubu, ateş, ölmüş ataları, totem gibi anlamlarının olduğunu göstermiştir.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Anlambilim, Etimoloji, Mitoloji, Tören, Tanrı.*

In the Turkic-Mongolian mythology the most commonly used address to a deity during such ritual acts as veneration of the celestials (*tengeri*), ancestor spirits (*ongon*), and spirits of mountains and fire is the adjective *khairkhan*. This study is

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an attempt to reconstruct this word semantically and analyze its functioning in the cultic texts of Mongolian and Turkic peoples.

1. Etymology of the word *khairkhan*

1.1. The lexeme *khairkhan* in the Mongolian languages

In O.M. Kowalewski's dictionary there is a Proto-Mongolian form *qayiraqan* meaning 'lovely, lamentable; pity!' (Kowalewski 1849: 712). A more detailed lexical entry is given in F. Lessing's dictionary: *qayiraqan* 'merciful, gracious; sacred mountain; a formula introducing or concluding a prayer; also used as an interjection of surprise, astonishment, indignation, etc.'. For example, *qayiraqan yurban erdeni* 'Oh, the gracious Three Jewels!', *qayiraqan, yayutai sayiqan* 'Oh, how beautiful!', *yayutai qayiraqan* 'What a pity!' (Lessing 1960: 914). In "Bol'shoi akademicheskiy mongol'sko-russkiy slovar'" (The Unabridged Academic Mongolian-Russian Dictionary) the word *khairkhan* is given with the "archaism" label meaning 'gracious, sacred (*respectful naming of mountains*)' (Bol'shoi akademicheskiy... 2002: 21). In "Buryatsko-russkiy slovar'" (The Buryat-Russian Dictionary) the word *khairkhan* means 'poor lamb, pathetic' (Shagdarov 2008: 382) and there is no such lexeme in "Kalmytsko-russkiy slovar'" (The Kalmuck-Russian Dictionary). However in Gustaf Ramstedt's "Kalmuckisches Wörterbuch" we find *χᾱρχῶν* in the meaning of 'mercy, benevolence; merciful, gracious'; *nojῆ χᾱρχῶν* 'our worshipful lord', *lamⁿ χᾱρχῶν* 'worshipful lama', *oḡḡḡ χᾱρχῶν* 'euphemistic reference for sacred mountains', *ō χᾱρχῶν* 'Oh, what a nice gesture!' (Ramstedt 1935: 180). In Antoine Mostaert's "Dictionnaire Ordos" the lexeme *χᾱραχαν / χᾱρχᾱν* is given only as an interjection expressing regret (Mostaert 2009: 346).

Obviously, this word is formed with the help of the diminutive suffix *-qan* from the noun *qayir-a* having a number of meanings in the Mongolian languages. In the Classical Mongolian language the following meanings are present: *qayira* 'mercy, favor, sympathy; lovely, kind; pity, regret; pathetic; grievous; it is a pity', *qayiratu* 'gracious, favorable; amiable, sweetheart, beloved' (Kowalewski 1849: 712, 713), *qayira* 'love; grace, mercy, compassion', *qayiratai* 'beloved, favorite, darling; loving' (Lessing 1960: 914).

The derivative forms *qairan*, *qayirala-* are seven times encountered in the medieval written monument "The Secret History of the Mongols" (*qayiaralaju*, *qayiralatqun*, *qayirala'asu*, *qayiran* etc.) (Rachewiltz 1972) as well as in "Mukaddimat al-Adab": *qairalaba tündü* 'showed him mercy', *qairalaba yamayi* 'felt sorry for a thing', *qairalaqsan* 'compassionate' (Poppe 1938: 288). Based on their semantics the meanings of the productive stem *qaira* 'mercy; pity; compassion' are revealed.

In Mongolian the word *khair* means 'love; pity; mercy; favor, benevolence' while *khairt* means 'beloved, sweet, darling'. If in the Khalkha-Mongolian word *khair* the meaning 'love' comes to the fore, it is missing in the Buryat and Kalmuck

reflexes, though it can be traced in the derivative adjective *khairatai* / *khærtə*: Bur. *khaira* ‘regret, pity’, *khairatai* ‘poor lamb, pathetic; dear’, *shagnal khaira* ‘high distinction’, *magtaal khaira* ‘praise, approbation’ (Shagdarov 2006: 381), Kalm. *χāīr*, *χāīrᠢ* ‘favor, benevolence’ (Ramstedt 1935: 180), *khəər* ‘regret, pity’, *khəərtə* ‘beloved, darling’ (Kalmytsko-russkiy slovar’ 1977: 587). The key notion of love in these languages is expressed with the help of the lexeme *duran* in Buryat and *durn* in Kalmuck meaning ‘love, sympathy’. It should be noted that this meaning developed in the basis of the semes *dura(n)* ‘will, desire, volition, inclination; pleasure; appetite; lust’ (Kowalewski 1849: 1879). Possibly, the disparity of the mode of expression of the notion ‘love’ in the main Mongolian languages points at the rather late formation of this semantic field.

In this way, originally the semantics of compassion and pity was present in the Mongolian *khair* while in the Buryat *duran* and Kalmuck *durn* the motives of desire and pleasure are original. Considering the semantic sphere of love in the Slavic languages S.M. Tolstaya notes that the semantics of compassion primarily characteristic of the **mil-* nest ascends to the bookish tradition and the concept of Christian love. This is because there is no incumbent connection between love and compassion outside of the Christian concept of love for one’s neighbors (Tolstaya 2014: 593–594).

By contrast, in the Mongolian languages the meanings of ‘love’ and ‘compassion’ are connected by the common seme ‘suffering as some strong feeling’. Not surprisingly, the phonetically related root **qar* serves to denote other strong feelings, such as jealousy or envy: Kh. *khār* ‘jealousy’ (Bol’shoi akademicheskii, 2002: 46); Cl.-Mong. *qaratu*, *qartai* ‘envious, jealous’ (Kowalewski 1849: 834), Kh. *khartai* ‘jealous; distrustful; guileful’ (Bol’shoi akademicheskii, 2002: 60), Bur. *kharatai* ‘envious; spiteful, guileful’ (Shagdarov 2006: 403), Kalm. *kharta* ‘distrustful’ (Kalmytsko-russkiy slovar’ 1977: 581). It stands to reason that these meanings are not etymologically connected with the adjective *khār* ‘black’, which emerged as a result of visual perception of light phenomena, but are rather determined by the inner state of an organism. This is duly reflected in “The Unabridged Academic Mongolian-Russian Dictionary”: **khār** I ‘black’; **khār** II ‘jealousy’ (Bol’shoi akademicheskii, 2002: 60), whereas in “The Buryat-Russian Dictionary” the meanings of the word **kharatai** ‘having something black’ and ‘envious’ are given in a single lexical entry (Shagdarov 2008: 46).

Derivatives of the root **köger* have a similar semantics with the root *qayir*. The root **köger* is, in our view, its soft-palatalized, labialized “reflection”: Cl.-Mong. *kögerkei*, *kögerken* ‘poor lamb!; grievous’ (Kowalewski 1849: 2628), *kögerkei* ‘arousing pity, pitiful; nice, darling, sweet’ (Lessing 1960: 480). In Mongolian *khöörkhen* we only find the meaning ‘lovely, adorable’. In Kalmyk *köörk* only means ‘pitiful’ whereas in Buryat the word *khöörkhen* has both meanings: ‘pitiful, lamentable; lovely, adorable’.

1.2. The lexeme *хайрхан* in Turkic languages

It is known that the words with the **qair* root are also used in the Turkic languages: Tuvinian *khaiyrakan* ‘1) *conversational, religious* a respectful naming of a deity; *üstüü khaiyrakan* the Almighty, heavens, sky; 2) bear; ursine’; *khaiyra* ‘mercy, quarter’, *khaiyraan* ‘pity’. In Shor *kaira* means ‘favor, reward’, in Altai *kairakan* ‘1) a respectful naming of a deity, spirits, idols venerated as deities’; 2) an epithet of Erlik, *kairan* ‘goodness, favor; help, salvation; quarter’. As V.I. Rassadin puts it, the opinion about the Mongolian origin of the Turkic words *kairan*, *kairakan* has long been established in the academic literature. M. Räsänen, G. Ramstedt, A. Yoki, V.V. Radlov and L.Z. Budagov have pointed at it. This viewpoint is shared by V.I. Rassadin who points out that “of the Turkic languages these words are represented only in those, which were most exposed to Mongolian influences and some of them still remain in the contact Turkic-Mongolian zone, such as, for example, the Tuvinian language” (Levitskaya 1997: 207).

Gustaf Ramstedt expressed two viewpoints concerning the origin of the Mongolian *qayiran*: 1) from the ancient Uyghur word *qair* ‘benefaction, favor,’ which, in its turn, is originally Arabic *hair* ‘goodness, grace, alms’; 2) from the Sino-Korean word *kārjen* meaning ‘what a pity, how unfortunate’ (Levitskaya 1997: 206). In our view the lexeme may belong to the indigenously Mongolian lexicon, and this is proven by the semantics of the aforementioned roots **köger*, **qar*, in which, like in *qayir*, the trill sonant *r* carries most of the meaning rendering the idea of inner discomfort or anxiety caused by a strong feeling (Sundueva 2011: 272–273).

Out of other assumptions a known hypothesis belongs to N.B. Dashieva, who, based on the mythology of the Nart and Karachai epics, believes that “within the structure of the theonym *Kaiyrnar* the part *Kai(yr)* render a notion of “heavens” and Turkic *nar* denotes ‘sun’ and ‘moon’, its etymology may be grounded in the notion of Heaven’s light” (Dashieva 2012: 138). Therefore, according to N.B. Dashieva, the theonym *Kayarakan* came to the Turkic-Mongolian world from the ancient Turkic language with the meaning ‘heavenly’.

As we can see, the adjective *qayirqan* in the Mongolian languages can have both subjective (gracious, merciful, benevolent) and objective meanings (lamentable, pitiful, poor lamb, pathetic). In the Turkic languages it was fixed only in its subjective meaning. Undoubtedly, in the ritual texts of the Mongolian and Turkic peoples, this lexeme has a thoroughly “action” semantics that presupposes a certain behavior toward an object, such as care, tutelage, and compassion.

2. The functioning of the word *khairkhan* in the cultic texts

2.1. A supreme deity as a denotation

Let us consider the functioning of this lexeme in the cultic texts of the Mongolian and Turkic peoples to expose its concrete denotation. First of all, the lexeme *хайрхан* in the Turkic-Mongolian mythology may act as a name of a

supreme deity. In Tuvian mythology *khaiyrakan* is a respectful name of a deity (*Üstüü khaiyrakan* ‘the Almighty, Heavens,’ where *üstüü* means ‘upper’). In Khakassian myths *Tengere kairakan* is also presented as the creator of life, “He created a growing tree with nine branches. Under each of these branches he created a man, who became progenitors of the nine tribes living on Earth nowadays” (Sagalaev 1990: 54).

According to G.N. Potanin’s notes, the Altaian people’s name of the master of the nether world is *Erlík kairakan*. The Chui shamans say, “I don’t know what *Kairakan*’s name is; I only know that we Altaians say *Kairakan!* when the thunder rolls or when something bad happens, or when one has a bad dream” (Potanin 1883: 58, 69). These words allow making a conclusion that the address *kairakan* replaces the word *god* in its generalized form, not meaning any concrete deity. As we see, thanks to a strict following of the ritual and imposed behavior this theonym has been preserved in the collective memory and its mythological prehistory with ancient roots remains an echo in a ritual action.

According to Ts. Zhamtsarano the Olkhon Buryats say their “greatest God is named *Ee-Khairkhan*. *Ee-Khairkhan* is the creator of the Universe, of all deities, people, animals, land and heavens”. A well known Buryat deity *Esege Malaan tengri* is his son (Zhamtsarano 2001: 47). It is worth noting that the version according to which *Khükhe Münkhe Tengeri* is the creator of the universe addressed to as *Khairkhan* (variants: *Aa-Khairkhan*, *Ee-Khairkhan*) is persistent and widespread in the entire Mongolian-speaking world.

According to T.M. Mikhailov, *Khairkhan* is “a deity of some ancient Turkic tribe, once settled in the Sayan-Altai highlands... The cult of *Khairkhan* was apparently brought to Buryatia by some Turkic-speaking groups who gradually got assimilated in a new environment. It could also be brought by the Mongols, who borrowed this cult from the ancient Turks” (Mikhailov 1980: 153). According to G.R. Galdanova’s studies, in the texts of the Mongolian cultic books, *Хайрхан-тэнгери* acts as a guardian genius of ethnic groups of the Turkic origin. He is venerated as the guardian of the *Khirgis* and *Uyghur* clans (Galdanova 1995: 105).

The analysis of Mongolian Shamanist and Shamanist-Buddhist texts substantiates the use of this term in the meaning that it identical with that of the Turkic and Buryat texts. In this way, the supreme celestials with different functions are denoted by the epithet *khairkhan*. A shaman conventionally starts his worship with an address to heavens: *Khan khairkhantenger min* ‘My regal merciful heaven!’ In many callings the lexeme as the epithet of an addressed deity becomes the repeated ending of a certain part of the text: *Yeren yusen tenger / Aa khairkhan* ‘Ninety nine tengri / Aa khairkhan’ (Rinchen 2013: 137).

When addressing *Dayan-Deerkhi*, a well known Shamanistic and, currently, Buddhist deity of the Cis-Khubsugul region the epithet *khairkhan* is used as one of the constant elements of addressing, like other epithets. The challenge in example:

Khaan bogd Dayan Deerkh min' / Aa khairkhan 'Majestic sacred my Dayan Deerkh / Aa khairkhan (Rinchen 2013: 131) is similar to Bur. *Ee khairkhan*. After D.S. Dugarov, N.B. Dashieva supposes that "the theonym of the Buryat (Ekhirit) deity *Ee khairkhan* consists of two lexemes, each being a variant of the two supreme deities of the Shamanistic pantheon of Central Asian peoples. The first part of the theonym is a phonetic variant of the theonym Aia" (Dugarov 1991: 204–207; Dashieva 2012: 136).

As we know, the meaning and function of phraseological units are defined by the context in which they are used. Variability of the first part of the address *aa* and *ee* gives us a chance to assume that it is an interjection and in its modern version it does not carry a semantic meaning. Instead of this short exclamation other words can be used. For instance, in the Buryat (Ekhirit-Bulagat) tradition when addressing local guardian spirits the interjection *söög* is used in the anteposition. In this particular case it was a meaning 'hark after the calling': *Söög khairkhan, gazaaduulaa / Hain kharazha baigty, / Söög khairkhan, barandaa khürtegy* 'Söök khairkhan, look well after / the cattle in the yard, / Söök khairkhan, all of you, receive [offering]!' Though it should be pointed out that the exclamation *söög*, as a rule, is pronounced after a certain fragment of spirit invoking and stands for 'receive a sacrifice'.

2.2. A guardian spirit as a denotation

2.2.1. A mountain spirit as a denotation

A mountain as an object of cultic veneration not only possesses a sacral meaning, but also becomes a place of worship of a mountain spirit aimed at satisfaction of spiritual needs and achievement of different goals connected with various spheres of human and social activity. Names of spirits are often followed by the epithet *khairkhan*. For example, the worship ceremony of the master of the Burin-Khan mountain starts with a conventional beginning: *Ünder Büren khan khairkhan min', / Ürgen dalai eezh min'* 'My regal merciful Burin-Khan, / Wide sea my mother'. *Khatan uul khairkhan* is considered to be Burin-Khan's spouse 'the merciful lady-mountain'.

On the territory of Mongolia E. Ravdan recorded 944 mountain names with *хайрхан* component. Out of them 56 are *Хайрхан уул*. As the scholar puts it, there is not a single district (*aimag*) without this name (Ravdan 2008: 38). A high frequency of this component is primarily connected with the desire to appease a mountain spirit and evade its wrath. "Some oronyms could be pronounced only in the case when a mountain was not seen (obscured by other mountains) or inside a yurt that is placed right in front of this mountain. Other oronyms could be pronounced only silently. There are mountains whose names cannot be pronounced several times, or uttered at sunset. Finally, some mountain names cannot be pronounced at all since this can cause distemper or natural disaster" (Darbakova 1969: 199).

Among the Mongolian oronyms such adjectives as *achit* ‘beneficial, benevolent’, *bayan* ‘rich’, *bogd* ‘sacred’, *buyant* ‘virtuous’, *zhavkhlant* ‘majestic, grand’, *mönkh* ‘eternal’ are presented as epithets. In some toponyms the word *khairkhan* passes into the category of oronymic terms as a result of substantival ellipsis and acquires the meaning ‘a *venerated* mountain *or* hill’. In the geographical terminology the adjectives *zadgai* ‘open’ and *ögöömör* ‘bounteous, rich’ functioning with the meaning of ‘spring well, springlet’ underwent the process of substantiation.

The example of the use of *khairkhan* as a determinative is found in a cultic text dedicated to a venerated *ongon* named *Üriin khairkhan* of the Darkhat shamans in the Cis-Khubsugul region. According to shamanistic legends, she lived in the valley of the Uri River: *Bat zairnaar bagshluulzh, udgan bolood, khairkhany üzüürt khus nars khoyort shingesen baigaa* ‘Having finished her training by a *zaarin*-shaman, she became a woman-shaman herself and ‘dissolved’ into a pine tree and a birch growing on the top of the *khairkhan*’. Here the word that is of interest to us is used with the meaning of ‘hill’.

In the Altaic good wishing and invoking of mountain spirits *kairakon* is also the most widespread address: *Lastyn pazhy-lazhyl kaan, / Iapsynagan Altaiym, / Iaya tushken tuularym, / Kairako-on, bash bolzyn!* ‘The Green Khan, / My Eternal Altai, / My spread-out mountains, / Kairako-on, we bow our heads!’ As we can see, here *kairakan* is also used not as epithet, but with the meaning of ‘god, deity’.

2.2.2. A fire spirit as a denotation

In the Altaic cultic texts there is also praise to a fire spirit starting or ending with the conventional formula: *Jalar ody, / Kairako-on, bash bolsyn! / Odus bashtu Ot-enem / Ozogyda bai-enem, / Kairako-on, bash bolsyn!* ‘My blazing fire, / Kairako-on, I bow my head! / The thirty-headed Mother-Fire, / The Lady venerated since times immemorial, / Kairako-on, I bow my head!’

Parallels with the Altaic traditions can be found in the Kalmyk wedding ritual during sacrificial offering to the fire. The first wishful prayer of the bride was the address to the Fiery Okon-Tengri: *A, kheerkhn, / Galyn Okn Teengr, / En avsn orulh avsn ber / Shütg, zal'vrg, mürgg, / Gal tusk ayulas* ‘A, khairkhan, / The daughter-in-law who came to our house asks the Fiery Okon-Tengri for well-being’. The Fiery Okon-Tengri personifies the fire of the family hearth that the daughter-in-law adores (Bordzhanova 2007: 361–362). In the same ritual the address *A, khairkhan* is directed both to the Almighty Gods and to the specially venerated White Old Man, master of the land. In Kalmyk wishful addresses in honor of the coming New Year the worship also starts with the address, “*O, khairkhan, Okon-Tengri*” (Bordzhanova 2007: 347–348).

2.2.3. An *ongon*-spirit as a denotation

Apart from the address *khairkhan* the form *khairkhad* in plural is specifically widespread in the Mongolian shamanistic texts when addressing the *ongon*-spirits. *Ongons* are souls of dead people who became venerated spirits. As Sh. Sukhbat writes, the word *khairkhad* appeared in the early 19th century. In this time shamanistic clannish rituals of blood relatives to venerate ancestor spirits (*ongod-tengri*) began to be held according to Buddhist canons. It was in those rituals that the *ongod* were called *khairkhad*. Over time this denotation was extended to all *ongon* (Sukhbat 2012: 331).

In this way, the use of the adjective *khairkhan* in the arrangement of both one and two affixes of the plurality category *-d* and *-uud* points at the fact that in this particular case it already acts as a noun with the meaning of ‘deity’. From the cultic texts the portraits of the summoned deities are drawn. They are ethereal spirits coming down from heavens to render assistance to people: *Khökh möngön yazguurtan bolson kharirkhaduud / Khörst altan delhiin tulguur bolson khairkhaduud* ‘The deities who became emissaries of the Eternal Blue Sky, / The deities who became the foundations of the Golden land’ (Bum-Ochir 2002: 24).

In the course of shamanist ritual events the Darkhat shamans from the *tsagaan kuular* clan summon venerable spirits in the following way:

<i>Shil möngön nüdtengüüd khairkhaduud,</i>	Deities who possess silver glass eyes,
<i>Shizhir altan gereltengüüd khairkhaduud,</i>	Deities who possess clear golden shining,
<i>Oyun tülkhüür ukhaatanguud khairkhaduud,</i>	Deities who possess light wise knowledge,
<i>Oron бүгед магтаалгатангууд khairkhaduud...</i>	Deities who are objects of glorification in all lands.

(Purev 1998: 260–261).

In this case nouns formed with the help of the affix of the collective set *-tan* and framed up by the plural suffix *-uud*.

According to the tales recorded by G.N. Potanin in the Altai, the name *Kairakan* was attributed to a hunter who became a powerful shaman. The Telengits have legends about a great shaman named *Kairakan*. Later this name was extended to all shamanistic spirits. As is obvious, in the Turkic and Mongolian cultic texts the semantics of the lexeme *khairkhan* was established with the meaning of ‘deity’.

2.3. A totem as a denotation

In Mongolia there is a taboo on the name of a reptile, a snake, whose proto-Mongolian name is *urtu qairaqan*, and modern Mongolian name is *urt khairkhan* ‘snake’ where *urt* means ‘long’ (Lessing 1960: 914). Analyzing Western Mongolian petroglyphs depicting snakes A.P. Okladnikov notes that “a snake caused not only fear, but a feeling of admiration among the ancient dwellers of the Gobi desert too” (Okladnikov 180: 5). The ancient veneration of the snake was reflected in later

shamanistic rituals, outfits and accessories of shamans. As is well-known, in the shamanistic tradition of South Siberian peoples the snake functions as a mediator between the underworld / water world and the world of men.

As L. Erdenebold writes, in the beliefs of the Oirat Mongols a snake is a thoroughly good being. Numerous allegorical addresses to the snake that, as with many other venerated animals, it was forbidden to name directly: *khairkhan* ‘deity’, *urt khairkhan* ‘long deity’, *mushgia khairkhan* ‘twisted deity’, *lustyn elch* ‘messenger of water spirits’; *urt khorkhoi* ‘long worm’, *gürvelzüür khorkhoi* ‘crawling worm’, *matigar khorkhoi* ‘curved worm’, *urt khelt* ‘with long tongue’, *ereen deesen* ‘motley rope’ (Erdenebold 2012: 61). As is seen, the euphemisms point at both exterior looks (form and color), and mythological functions of the snake. In general, the author concludes that the cult of the snake persists in the tradition of Western Mongols. It is manifested in the benign meaning of seeing a snake in one’s dreams, positive perception of snakes and good attitude to them during surprise encounters in the wild and even inside a human dwelling, despite obvious danger of snakes (Erdenebold 2012: 64).

The Uryankhai people “have two Qairaḡans: one heavenly thunderer named Qairaḡan-Qudai, and another one, living on earth in the forest (i.e. bear). УЛЫ-Кайракан dwells high above with the Sun and the Moon” (Potanin 1883: 77). According to legends and tales of the Altaic peoples, recorded by G.N Potanin, the *kairakan* may be both deities of heavenly origin (the supreme deity, thunderer god, master of the underworld Erlik), and rather earthly characters (shaman spirits, a shaman himself and a bear). In the Tuvinian non-fairytale prose there are many legends and myths in which the main idea is connected with bear (*khairakan*) being a human primal forefather. In the Turkic-Mongolian mythology the motive of worshiping bears as primal forefathers.

Conclusion

Consequently, the lexeme *khairkhan* represents one of the most ancient deity symbols in the Turkic-Mongolian tradition. The linguistic analysis showed that in the Mongolian languages it has a more developed polysemy than in the Turkic languages, which testifies to its origins deep inside the Mongolian languages. It was revealed that the adjective *khairkhan* has both subjective (gracious, merciful, benevolent) and objective (pitiful, lamentable, poor lamb, pathetic) meanings in the Mongolian languages. On the contrary, the Turkic languages borrowed it only in its primary meaning. In the cultic texts of the Mongolian and Turkic peoples this lexeme has a thoroughly “action” semantics that presupposes a certain behavior in relation to the object, such as care, tutelage, and compassion.

The study of cultic texts revealed such denotations of the lexeme as supreme deities, mountain spirits, spirits of fire and dead ancestors, and totems. Depending on the position in a complex toponym or theonym *khairkhan* acts as the adjective with the meaning ‘giving mercy, merciful’ or as the noun with the meaning

‘mountain, hill’ and ‘deity’. Supposedly, the word had an extensive mythological history forgotten over the years, but thanks to precise following of the constant ritual formulas, preserved as a theonym until now. In this sense its meaning continues to develop, and its spatial-temporal stipulation acquires new additional semantics according to requirements and norms of a ritual.

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