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Songsaeng

Living Together Helping Each Other

Spreading a Culture of Peace through Sports

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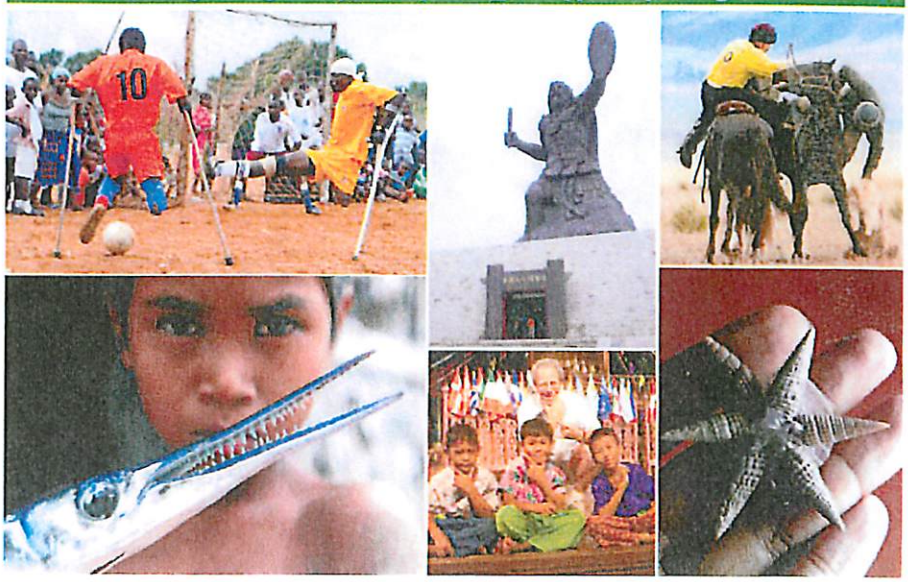
Climate Change and Development

International Understanding through Traditional Sports

An Interview with Professor Dallmayr

Cover photo: Children playing Sepaktakraw in Malaysia © Han Geum-Sun / APCEIU

CONTENTS



SangSaeng
Living Together Helping Each Other

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26-1, Guro-dong, Guro-gu, Seoul, Republic of Korea, 152-050
Tel: (+82-2) 774-3956
Fax: (+82-2) 774-3958
E-mail: sangsaeng@unescoapceiu.org
Website: www.unescoapceiu.org

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SangSaeng (상생), a Korean word with Chinese roots, is composed of two characters: *Sang* (相), meaning "mutual" (each other) and *Saeng* (生), meaning "life." Put together, they mean "living together," "helping each other," which is our vision for the Asia-Pacific region. SangSaeng (相生) aims to be a forum for constructive discussion of issues, methods and experiences in the area of Education for International Understanding.

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Oroqen shaman Chuonnasu (Meng Jinlu) and his wife

REVIVING SHAMANIC TRADITIONS IN NORTHEAST CHINA

By Kun Shi
(Director, Confucius Institute, University of South Florida)
kshi@usf.edu

These days, the term shamanism has caught increasing attention from both the researchers and laypersons. Indeed, publications and popular media about shamans and shamanic healing can be found everywhere.

A 2009 New York Times headline article ("A Doctor for Disease, A Shaman for Soul") increased the awareness of Asian shamans in the English-speaking world. In 2010, the ifeng Television Network in China aired a series of shows about a Daur female shaman (Siqingua) that reached millions of viewers in China.

The word "shaman" came from the Tungus-speaking groups living in today's Siberia and northeast China. It means "he or she who knows." (People in other parts of Asia have various names for shamans, such as *bö* in Mongolian and *mudang* in Korean.) Shamans are the most knowledgeable persons in traditional communities. They are either chosen by the spirits or hereditary, but they become shamans


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© Kun Shi

because of their unique experience and extraordinary qualities.

The present author has documented shamans of several ethnic groups in northeast China, including the Daur, Ewenki, Manchu, Mongol, and Oroqen. Shamans of all groups are highly respected by their people and function as spiritual leaders and healers. They all use drums and chants to connect with the spirits. Below is a virtual tour of the shamanic cultures in that part of the world.

Manchu in Jilin

If you have watched the movie, The Last Emperor. you may have remembered a scene with a shamanic ritual in the Forbidden City. Shamans played an important role among the Manchu in the past and are increasingly popular today in rural areas. Over the last three decades, a number of Manchu scholars have published extensively and portrayed shamanism as the backbone of Manchu identity.

The trend helped establish several centers and museums on shamanic cultures. For example, the first Museum for Shamanic Culture was established at Changchun University in May 2006. Around the same time, a theme park focused on shamanic culture opened in the suburb of Changchun, capital city of Jilin. With advice from researchers and shamans, the park incorporated shamanic symbols and rituals. Visitors can even experience a series of tests designed upon a shaman's initiation rite. These are helpful in educating the public about shamanism; they also serve as centers for research on shamanism for local and international scholars. As a result, selected novices are getting trained by master Manchu shamans to carry on the tradition.

Oroqen in Heilongjiang

The Oroqen is one of the smallest ethnic groups in China. Once nomadic, most of the Oroqen today live in permanent villages located south of the Heilong (Amur) River.

With the help of my colleagues in China and a grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation, Richard Noll and I visited a number of shamans in northeast China in 1994, including the Oroqen shaman, Chuonnasuan (Meng Jinfu). We were able to document the life and practices of the Oroqen shaman, although he was no longer practicing healing rituals.

During the trip. we found that China's national CCTV had made a documentary about Chuonnasuan, entitled *The Last Mountain Spirit*. We were happy to see him becoming a heroic figure on the Chinese national television but felt sad that he might be the last Oroqen shaman.

Daur, Ewenki and Mongols in Inner Mongolia

Eastern part of Inner Mongolia is the cradle of surviving shamans of various ethnic groups. Since 1994, I have made four research trips to Inner Mongolia to study shamans of the Daur, Ewenki, and Mongols. I have documented extensively and published some field reports (in journals *Shaman* and *Shamanism*). One report in Shamanism (Spring 2006) described a reviving shamanic tradition among the Mongols, including a young Mongolian with a Ph.D. who was going to become a shaman.

1

2

1. 22-meter tall shaman statue on top of the Morin Dawa Museum of Shamanic Culture
2. Siqingua making divination diagnosis

1 2 3

1. Mongolian Serenchin in 1995
2. Richard Noll and Kun Shi with Manchu shaman Guan Bairong in 1994
3. Daur shaman Siqingua drumming for her clients

The most exciting experience I had was with the Daur people. The 2010 census records a total population of 132,400 Daur. Most of them live in the Morin Dawa Daur Autonomous Banner (County) that borders Heilongjiang. The shamanic tradition among the Daur is so strong that the local government built a museum dedicated to shamanism—the largest in the world. On top of the museum, there is a 22-meter tall bronze statue of a shaman beating a drum, presenting the supernatural power of the shaman. Displayed inside the museum are more than three hundred exhibit pieces of shaman's costumes, drums, and other items from eight ethnic groups: the Daur, Ewenki, Hezhen, Korean, Manchu, Mongol, Oroqen, and Sibe.

I visited two Daur shamans and their apprentices in Morin Dawa and Hulunbuir (Hailar), and all of them are women. The most powerful among them is Siqingua, who became a shaman at the age of 48 in 1998. She is so popular that her "clinic" is often full of clients; some coming from as far as Mongolia and Russia. She uses various techniques for treatment, including drumming, chanting, seeking help from the spirits, divination, and sometimes herbs. The unique thing about Siqingua is that she takes notes of diagnosis of each client. She has trained several shamans and attended or presented at international conferences on shamanism.

The Significance of Shamanic Culture

Shamanism is an essential part of the traditional cultures in Northeast Asia. In recent decades, the Chinese government implemented more liberal policy towards shamanism, which has given rise to the revival of shamanic traditions among many ethnic groups in China. This trend contributes to preserving and enriching cultural diversity of the region. It also helps to maintain the age-old tradition of shamanic healing. If the Russian scholar Shirokogoroff (who published The Psychomental Complex of the Tungus in 1935) were alive today, he would be happy to see dozens of books on shamanism. We owe a great deal to those who have contributed to the revival of shamanic tradition in Northeast Asia.