

Tadysheva N. O.

«Scientific and Research Institute of Altaian Studies» n.a. S.S. Surazakov,
Russia, Gorno-Altai, e-mail: tadisheva@mail.ru

RITE CHACHYLGA: MODERN FUNERAL AND MEMORIAL RITES IN THE TRADITIONAL CULTURE OF ALTAI

Funeral and commemoration ritual is considered to be one of the most conservative and ethnically indicative spheres of traditional culture. Field materials show that unlike the maternity and wedding, the traditional burial rites of the Altai population of the Altai Republic have undergone the least changes, therefore archaic traits are preserved in them: animistic and totemic ideas. Today, the task of describing the complex of funeral-memorial ritual is not put. The article deals with the ritual of “chachylga” as a rite of passage. The study shows that in the traditional picture of the world of the Altai population, the visible and invisible life forms are one, but the events of the visible world (being) at every single moment depend on the forces of the invisible world (other-being). Clear regulation and mandatory observance of the ritual of “chachylga” in the modern funeral-memorial rites testifies to its sacredness. The notion that if the funeral rites were not fulfilled on death, the deceased is doomed to a miserable existence – he can not penetrate into the world of the dead and join the community that has formed there, nor remain in the world of the living. And that the deceased was included in the world of ancestors, the rites of transition are carried out – separation and inclusion, in order to preserve the continuity of generations.

Key words: family rituals, rites of transition, stability, variability, sacredness

Тадышева Н.О.

«С.С. Сузараков атындағы ғылыми-зерттеу институты»,
Ресей, Таулы-Алтай қ., e-mail: tadisheva@mail.ru

**Чачылга рәсімі: Алтай дәстүрлі мәдениетіндегі
қазіргі жерлеу және мемориалдық рәсімдер**

Жерлеу-еске алу рәсімін дәстүрлі мәдениеттің ең консервативті және этникалық көрсеткіш аясы ретінде есептеу қабылданған. Дала материалдары көрсеткендей босану мен үйлену салттарына қарағанда Алтай республикасының дәстүрлі жерлеу салт-жоралары аз өзгеріске ұшыраған, сондықтан да оларда архаикалық; анимистикалық және тотемдік идеялар сақталған. Бүгінгі таңда жерлеу-мемориалдық рәсім кешенін сипаттау міндеті қойылмайды. Мақалада «чачылга» рәсімі өтпелі кезеңнің рәсімі ретінде қарастырылады. Алтай тұрғындары әлемнің дәстүрлі көрінісінде көрінетін және көрінбейтін тіршілік формаларының бір, бірақ көрінетін әлемдегі оқиғалардың әр уақытта көрінбейтін әлемнің (басқа) күштеріне тәуелді екендігін зерттеу көрсетіп отыр. Қазіргі жерлеу-мемориалдық салт-жоралардағы «чачылга» рәсімін нақты реттеу және міндетті түрде сақтау оның қасиеттілігін дәлелдейді. Егер жерлеу рәсімді дұрыс орындалмаған жағдайда, қайтыс болған адам қайғы-қасіретке ұшырайды, ол не өлгендер әлеміне ене алмайды және де сол жерде қалыптасқан қоғамға қосыла алмайды не тірілер әлемінде де қала алмайды. Ұрпақтар сабақтастығын сақтау мақсатында қайтыс болған кісі ата-бабасының әлеміне енуі үшін өтпелі рәсімдер жасалынады – бөліну және қосылу.

Түйін сөздер: отбасылық ритуалдар, өтпелі рәсімдер, тұрақтылық, құбылмалылық, киелілік.

Тадышева Н.О.

Научно-исследовательский институт им. С.С. Сузаракова,
Россия, г. Горно-Алтайск, e-mail: tadisheva@mail.ru

Обряд чачылга: современные похоронные и мемориальные обряды в традиционной культуре Алтая

Похоронно-поминальную обрядность принято считать одной из наиболее консервативных и этнически показательных сфер традиционной культуры. Полевые материалы свидетельствуют, что, в отличие от родильной и свадебной, традиционная похоронно-поминальная обрядность алтайского населения Республики Алтай претерпела изменения в наименьшей степени, в связи с этим в них сохраняются архаические черты: анимистические и тотемистические представления. Сегодня не ставится задача описания комплекса похоронно-поминального ритуала. В статье рассматривается обряд «чачылга» как обряд перехода. Исследование показывает, что в традиционной картине мира алтайского населения видимая и невидимая формы жизни едины, но события видимого мира (бытия) в каждый отдельный момент зависят от сил невидимого мира (инобытия). Четкая регламентация и обязательное соблюдение обряда «чачылга» в современной похоронно-поминальной обрядности свидетельствуют о его сакральности. Не теряет своего значения представление, что если по поводу смерти не были выполнены похоронные обряды, умерший обречен на жалкое существование – он не может проникнуть ни в мир мертвых и включиться в сообщество, которое там сложилось, ни остаться в мире живых. И чтобы умерший был включен в мир предков, проводятся обряды перехода – отделения и включения, с целью сохранения преемственности поколений.

Ключевые слова: семейные ритуалы, обряды перехода, стабильность, изменчивость, святость.

Funeral rites are considered to be one of the most conservative demonstrations and ethnic indicative areas of traditional culture. The article deals with the rite of *chachylga* as a rite of transition, the separation from the previous sphere and the inclusion in the new environment or the otherness by performing an action. A definite regulation and indisputable following of the ritual in the modern funeral rites denote its sacredness.

Social and economic transformation of the society to the least extent affects the ritual part of spiritual culture. And the preservation of traditions, customs, universally recognized sustainable values form the norms of behavior. Family ritualism is especially highly conservative. Field materials show that unlike the maternity and wedding rites, the traditional burial rites of the Altai population of the Altai Republic have undergone the least changes; therefore archaic traits such as animistic and totemic ideas are still preserved in them.

The study of the transformation of family rites is topical; the significance of these works is that we trace simultaneously the trends of both preservation and the changes. And family ritualism can act as a system of customs and rites which maintain and activate memory. The problem of the modern funeral and memorial rites in modern historiography is fragmented or insignificant. Since the nineteenth century researchers have been focusing on the descriptions of certain elements of this kind of rites. During the

trip to Gorny Altai N.M. Yadrintsev recorded from the Altaians several ways of burial and the idea that seven days after the death of a man Altaians perform shaman rituals to Tyus-Shaitan. The mother and father whose child has died do not enter anyone's yurt for forty days. (Yadrintsev, 1981: 246-247).

Missionary V.I. Verbitsky noted that “dead bodies are buried in different ways. The deceased are dressed in full clothes and hats, and always with a stock in the bag for the long journey” (Verbitsky, 1893: 107).

V.V. Radlov noticed that Altaians are buried without special ceremonies, secretly. “Local people usually buried their dead in the ground, in sheltered places in the mountains. The deceased is laid in a coffin, in full attire, and, in addition, he is given a bag of food for the journey. Rich people are supposed to bury the dead next to a riding horse. Only after the deceased is buried, the family and neighbours must gather in his yurt and arrange the feast. After this event the remaining relatives call the shaman to clean the yurt, and then transfer it to another place. Barking yurts and yurts constructed of logs after the death of one of the members of the family remain empty, and the family builds a new yurt in another place” (Radlov, 1989: 180).

G.N. Potanin gives interesting information, “Altaians dress the deceased in a fur coat, hat and other clothes, give him a cup, a spoon and put him in a small log frame. The rich kill a horse. Long ago they

just put it on the ground and covered (with decks?). In the old days, they arranged a platform on the trees for the dead. Wake was not arranged. When Russians were asked about the wake they answered me: "What wake?! They are afraid of wooden frames or graves and go around them as far as possible" (Potanin, 1883: 36).

Thus, analyzing the fragmented information, it is possible to identify common features of the funeral rites. The Altai people had two types of burial – ground and underground. The taboo attitude to death is observed: the cleansing of the ail, moving of family members to another place. The deceased was buried in clothes and in a headdress and accompanying inventory was necessarily placed together with him. A memorial ceremony was arranged after the funeral and was held with the participation of the shaman. After seven days the ritual was repeated. The sacred significance of the period of forty days after the death is noted.

Ethnographers studied modern funeral and commemoration rites. Highlighting the traditional religious and mythological picture of the Altai world V.A. Muytueva touched to some extent on the ideas of the Altai population about life and death (Muytueva, 2004).

Kleshev V.A. notes that in the funeral rites of the Southern Altaians, at the present time, despite the influence of "Soviet norms", some traditional ideas and prohibitions have been preserved (Kleshev, 2011: 124).

Considering the changes in customary law in contemporary culture Enchinov E.V. comes to the conclusion that in the Altai culture the funeral and inheritance are closely connected, it is believed that the well-being of the family and heirs depends on the proper conduct of farewell, burial and funeral customs. Legal customs associated with death, regulate the cycle of emerging rights and responsibilities of family members and families (Enchinov, 2013: 106).

Tadysheva N.O. considers the funeral and memorial rituals of the indigenous population of the Altai Republic in the modern period in the monograph and a number of articles. The changes of the most conservative family rite under the influence of Christianity are also considered. An attempt to investigate in the comparative analysis the burial-memorial ritual of the Turks of the Sayano-Altai is made (Tadysheva, 2011; 2014; 2015).

Today we do not set the task of describing the complex of funeral and memorial ritual but fix on one ritual of the *chachylga*.

According to the traditional views of the Altaians death ends life only in this world, but life

continues in the world of ancestors. Informants call it "*ada-öbököniḥ jeri*" – "the world of ancestors", "*aylu-kündü -ol Altai*" – "moon and sunny that Altai", "*ol jer*" – "that land".

Of course, ideas about the world of the ancestors are strongly influenced by the **cult of ancestors**. There is an opinion that when a man dies, one should not to cry a lot or suffer greatly. It is believed that the deceased will find it difficult to "go to the next world." The tears shed over him create unnecessary obstacles on his way. "*At ölböskkö altyn ba, ep ölböskkö möḥḥyn be*" – «a horse does not die – is it gold, people don't die – is it silver,» says an Altai proverb. Everyone has his own destiny, everyone has his own way. Aged Altaians often get prepared in advance and they say: "*janar kerek*" (lit. "it is necessary to go home"). It is believed that death is an inevitable phenomenon for the elderly who have lived their lives.

The deceased are prepared for life in the other world: in the coffin Altaians put food (other than dairy), *Közhögö* (wedding drape for women), dishes, and if he was smoker – smoking accessories. All of these items are either broken or torn. Intentional damage of things is conditioned by the belief in the invertedness of the other world. People believed that life in the other world was arranged in a reversed way: a broken thing would become whole. Objects made from the skin of prey or clawed animals, the pricking, cutting and golden items were not placed in the coffin.

A taboo attitude to death is traced. Until now, the Altaians are careful not to speak directly about death. There is fear, fear of incurring trouble. In the conversations, informants used metaphors that reflected both spatial movements and qualitative changes in the deceased.

The use of a particular specific language is allegorical: instead of the word "dead", they say: "*kizhi korody*", "*ol jerge atana berdi*" – "gone to another world", "*ada-öbökkoni jerine jḥre berdi*" – "gone to the world of ancestors" "*Jada kaldy*", "*bozhoy berdi*" – "passed away". Special food is not salted which is a natural way of distinction. The meaning of the rite of separation of the deceased from the living world is observed in preservation the language of symbols and signs – "living or non-living", "even – odd-numbered", "complete – incomplete".

The departure from life entails the regulated performance of funeral and memorial ceremonies, which represent a wide range of symbols representing a complex picture of the interrelation between the being and otherness, a reflection of the norms of people's behavior with regard to the impact of

the other world. Funeral rites are primarily aimed at guarding (protecting the world of the living – being), separation of the deceased (otherness) as it is evidenced in the oral folk art of the Altaians: in the heroic tales, the ritual actions in the funeral ritual are described in detail and clearly. In the rites of resurrection and reincarnation rites of transition take place. Indeed, if the soul was separated from the living and attached to the world of the dead, it can then move in the opposite direction and appear among us, either by itself or under duress. In the legend “Altyn-Koo” the hero’s horse tells the *batyr* (Altaian folk hero) how to conduct ritual actions of the funeral rite.

But light-yellow horse
 With six tusks in the mouth,
 Said to his hero:
 Don’t go home, friend
 Help out your brother.
 Listen to me
 Do everything as I say.
 Catch a bright red horse
 Find a red silk coat,
 And also find red fox hat,
 Boots redder than a poppy flower
 Take with yourself.
 Where your brother died
 There tear your horse.
 Red silk coat
 Spread there.
 Red fox hat
 Boots redder than poppy
 Put on a black stone
 Arak from red tashaur
 Pour onto a black stone
 Then your beloved brother
 Maybe will rise (Ulagushev, 1947: 67).

It is illustrated that if the funeral rites were not performed when death occurred, the deceased was doomed to a miserable existence. He can neither penetrate into the world of the dead and join the community that has developed there, nor remain in the world of the living.

In the Altai tradition, while the dead is in the house, he never remains alone, there should always be a lot of people. Every visitor is invited to the table to taste the treats for the deceased should go to the other world well-fed. No one should sleep at night in the house where a dead man lies. People sit, talk quietly, drink tea, men play cards. Everything is aimed at ensuring that relatives do not remain alone, so that at night the “black forces”,

which these days gather very much, do no harm to the deceased’s relatives.

As evidenced by field materials according to the tradition during the memorial rite on the third, seventh and fortieth day (a memorial rite is held during day and night, starting on the sixth and thirty-ninth night after the death; it is believed that in the other world the day lasts longer than usual) the ritual of *kizhinji töyözi* is conducted. In most cases, the rite is not pronounced aloud, so during the mourning they say *Chachu* or *Chachylga* (*Chachylta*) (lit. “sprinkling”, here “feeding the souls of the dead”). The Kosh-Agach Altai people call this rite “*jer ayak*” (lit. “earth cup”). The memorial offering to the dead *tögy* (lit. “tögötöni” – pour out) is performed on the day of the funeral and during the funeral in the evening. After the sunset, the lamb is killed. Blood is not used for food (as is usually done) and is not left on the surface of the earth. They dig a hole, drain the blood into it, then bury it. It is believed that if the blood is left on the ground, then “black forces” will gather at this place.

Then they take the meat from the sacral parts of the carcass of the sheep, string it on sharp wooden sticks and lower it into the cauldron with *köchö* (meat broth with pearl barley) and cook the meat “*kanyyn kainada*” i.e. until the blood is completely boiled down. The cooked meat is put in a separate place. Unsalted *köchö* is also poured into a separate dish. The idea of the world of the dead, as the reverse world, is reflected in the offering of unsalted (*tus jok*) food as a ritual feeding of the dead. So, during the preparation of a treat for participants of the memorial rite, before salting food, some of unsalted food is put aside for a ritual offering.

When visiting the deceased’s home, relatives, close ones, friends, all who come for visitation, bring food for the memorial feast – tea, bakery products, sweets, fruit, vodka or juice, but necessarily an odd number. Also an odd number of pieces are taken from all the items of the brought food and are placed in a separate bowl from the back of the hand.

Then they brew tea from a new pack without milk, prepare one bottle of vodka. All kinds of food should be an odd number. Dairy products are not used. The products are put from the back of the hand.

In the evening at the sunset, in summer it is 8-9 o’clock and 5-6 o’clock in winter, i.e. *kyzyl ejirde* (lit. *red evening*, here *sacred time*, it is believed that during this period the door to the ancestors’ world is opened) kith and kins of the deceased, the eldest ones in the family go to perform the Chachylga rite, for which they invite *neme biler kizhi* (literally, people that know something), *kösmökchi* (literally

clairvoyant). An odd number of people go to the rite. Women and children do not participate in this rite. The participants undoubtedly go to the side of the west – *kün badysh*, where, according to the traditional worldview, there is the other world.

The person who conducts the ceremony, calling the deceased by name, pours vodka into the dish and makes the sprinkling three times. Then they repeat the same with tea, *köchö*, meat and other products brought with them. Those who smoke, leave a whole pack of cigarettes in the same place, and they themselves lights out of another pack. *Neme biler kizhi* “talks to the dead” on the day of the funeral, on the seventh day “communication” occurs with deceased relatives as in this period the deceased is not considered to be aware of his death. On the fortieth day there is communication with the deceased himself.

There are different questions – the cause of death, whether the deceased was buried correctly, whether everything was put, maybe something was forgotten, parting words for the relatives.

All food and dishes are left in place of the rite, they do not bring back anything home. After returning, people wash their faces, hands, get cleaned by fire. They sit down at the table and eat talking quietly. At midnight and at 3 am, as well as at 6 am all the present are given food, hot meal is always served. All the bones from the meat are collected and the *neme biler kizhi* or some of the elders in the family take them without breaking to the place where the Chachylga (Chachylta) rite has been performed.

A year later the memorial ceremony is not held. Elderly people explain this by the fact that in earlier days annual memorial ceremonies were not held at all, that this was borrowed from the Orthodox Russian population.

After the funeral and memorial rites all contacts with the other world are limited, rituals protecting the living people from its influence are followed.

The following material testifies that the Chachylga rite is a rite of inclusion. When a baptized daughter-in-law died in a non-Orthodox Altaian family, burial ceremonies were performed only according to the Orthodox canon, but the Chachylga rite was held. This was insisted on by elderly unbaptized family members. They explained this by saying that if the deceased herself does not come, then other, long-dead unbaptized relatives will show up (Tadysheva, 2011:176).

The Ulagan Altaians and the non-Orthodox also hold a memorial ceremony on the third, ninth (Altaians traditionally hold it on the seventh day), on the fortieth day and a year later. Undoubtedly, there

was a strong influence of the Orthodox environment both in the past and in the present. After all, this area is the most Orthodox region in the Altai Republic. Here funeral rites are held without *chachylga*. Although elderly people say that the souls of baptized Altaians do not get into the world of the ancestors because during the funeral *cachyulga* is not conducted, thus relatives do not help the soul to leave. By the same fact elderly people from other regions explain the large number of “*turgaktu jer*” in the Ulagan district (the letters “difficult places”, here – places with evil forces). They believe that the souls of the baptized Altaians remained among the living ones, since they were not properly laid to rest (PMA-2).

In modern times, there are different representations or norms of behavior according to the rite. Thus, at observations it was found out that in one case the doors during the Chachylga rite were closed (PMA-2, 3), and in the other case (PMA-4) were opened. They explained that the door should be closed so that the *körmösi* could not enter the house and cause any harm sitting here. And the open doors help the deceased enter the house for farewell.

Some researchers disclose the *chachylga* rite as a ceremony of serving food to *körmösi* (Kleshev, 2011:110). Let us respectfully disagree with this statement, since the *chachylga* rite is aimed at the world of ancestors, the deceased, who continue to live *ol Altide* – “in that Altai”. And *körmösi* (lit. invisible) is the evil spirit of the deceased, who after death could not escape into the world of ancestors, because they did not perform the rite and he remained in the “moon and sunny Altai” and brings misfortunes and troubles to the living here.

The Chachylga rite is not performed by all the Altai population of the republic. Mostly the rite is conducted in all Altai villages of the Ust-Kan district, in some villages of the Shebalino and Ongudai districts, and also in a small part of the Ust-Koksa district. The area of the rite of transition is of interest because this is where Burkhanism originated and spread at the beginning of the 20th century (*ak jan* – ‘white faith’). Perhaps the preservation of the rite was influenced by Burkhanism. On the one hand, adherents of Burkhanism at an early stage forbade contacts with the world of the dead. On the other hand, in Burkhanism there was a revival of archaic beliefs, rituals, characters, even their accentuation. Therefore, rejecting the world of *Erlik kaana*, on the territory where there was a strong influence of Burkhanism, the Altai population began to use archaic ideas about the world of ancestors for ritual ceremonies.

During the collection of the field material, there was an opinion that the conduct of the *chachylga* rite is a complex sacred ritual. Not everyone can perform the rite. People who do not know all the details can not and do not participate in the preparation of the rite, even in the preparation of *köchö* and especially in the performance of the rite itself. As informants say, who do not take part in the preparatory part of the “*kizhi bailanar, jastyrza*”, this implies a special sacred attitude towards the rite, the fear of doing something wrong and thereby bringing trouble and misfortune. There is also the opinion that “the ritual is complex, but it is necessary to take the last actions in relation to the deceased, so that he should not worry and disturb the remaining relatives here” (PMA-4).

The rite of “seeing off the soul / memorial offering / feeding the soul” as a rite of transition, separation from the previous environment and inclusion in a new environment through commitment of the action is also found in other Turkic peoples of the Sayan-Altai. In the Tuvinian family ritual, in the house where there was the deceased, small dishes with ritual treats were placed on a special table and a candle, which was to burn for 49 days, was lit up. The meaning of this rite is to feed the soul of the deceased and illuminate his path to the kingdom of Erlik Khan. The basis of feeding is the smells of food, it is necessary to put a small spoonful of all dishes next to the candle on a saucer. If they offered any food from the store, one had to pinch it, break into small pieces and put them on the table too. Over time this ritual meal could become stiff, dry, but it could not be thrown away, but was collected in a small pouch. This bag, with other food prepared for the memorial ceremony on the 49th day, was burned in the fire. Tuvinians make a fire during the ritual of feeding the deceased, which is held on the 7th and 49th day after the death (Ulturgasheva, 2013:390).

In the Khakass traditional culture a separate table is set for the deceased. Every relative who comes to the funeral places a treat for the deceased in a bowl and khabakh (alcoholic drinks). Tea with milk is always put on the table as well as confectionery products, boiled pieces of meat, bone marrow, liver, kidneys, chicken meat (for women) or rooster meat (for men), sometimes a sheep’s head. For the funeral ceremony cattle were slaughtered. The animal that was slaughtered for the funeral ceremony in honor of the deceased, called *teyogi*. As *teyogi* for men there was a bull, and a cow for women. When butchering bones were forbidden to hack, but were divided into parts at the joints. The preservation of the integrity of the skeleton had the semantics of the

rebirth and the continuous reproduction of livestock, and in some cases *teyogi* had a meaning of an animal riding to the afterlife (Burnakov, 2009: 133).

Modern family rites reflected social and cultural changes of the society in connection with the introduction into the traditional rites of the elements of the *ordinary way of burial*, especially among the urban population. The evolution of the funeral rites is caused by the national regulations for medical examination, fixation of the fact of death in law enforcement agencies, etc., economic transformations, urbanization – in the urban environment a memorial lunch takes place in the canteens, cafes, restaurants. But even in urban settings a sheep is killed, food for the *chachylga* performance is cooked, after the funeral lunch “overnight” is still held at home of the deceased. We see how tradition interacts with this new norm. Of course, the increase in the educational level of the population, and the diminished role of traditional methods of transmitting cultural experience also has a great influence.

The presented material shows that in the traditional picture of the world of the Altai population the visible and invisible forms of life are unified, but the events of the visible world (being) at each separate moment depend on the forces of the invisible world (otherness). Clear regulation and strict adherence to the ritual *chachylga* in modern funeral and memorial rites evidences of its sacredness. The idea Does not lose its value that in case of death funeral rites were not performed, the deceased is doomed to a miserable existence – he can neither get to the underworld and get engaged in the community that has developed there nor remain in the world of the living.

And for the deceased should be included in the world of the ancestors the rites of transition – separation and inclusion – are held with the aim to preserve the continuity of generations. The non-included becomes a black force that can bring anxiety and misfortune; in order to protect the family it is necessary to perform ritual actions without violating the generally accepted norms and rules of behaviour.

Field Materials of the Author (PMA)

Azhanarova Togunchi Kypchakovna, born in 1926, *söök kypchak*, place of birth and residence of Kyrlyk village, Ust-Kan District, the Altai Republic, record of 2012;

Antradonova Maria (Kine) Idrukovna, born in 1932, *söök ochy*, place of birth and residence Verkh-Anuy village, Ust-Kan district, the Altai Republic, record of 2013;

Kereksibesova (Sansarova) Mandyk Badaevna, born in 1929, *söök közhöö*, residence village of Sugash of the Ust-Koksa district of the Altai Republic (place of birth Talda village, Ongudai district), record of 2009;

Sorosheva Unchukpas Bapaevna, born in 1930, *söök köbüik*, place of residence of Karakol village, Onguday district, the Altai Republic (place of birth Verkh-Muta village, Ust-Kan district, record of 2012;

Toyedov Echish Nokorovich, born in 1933, *söök ochy*, place of birth and residence village Kelei, the

Ust-Kan district, Altai Republic, record of 2012;

Topoyev Timothy F., born in 1952, place of residence Anshakov village, the Askizsky district of the Republic of Khakassia (place of birth Ust-Ec' of the the Askizsky district), record of 2017;

Chebotaev Nikolai Kuzmich, born in 1942, place of residence Anshakov village, the Askizsky district of the Republic of Khakassia (place of birth village Maly Anzas Tashtypskiy district), entry 2017;

Shukakov Valentin Stepanovich, born in 1954, *söök kergil*, place of birth and residence Verkh-Anui village, Ust-Kan district of the Altai Republic.

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