Remapping Sacred Landscapes

Shamanic Tourism and Cultural Production on the Olkhon Island

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Abstract

This article looks at the particular ways in which shamanic sacred places are being constructed through tourist performances. Focusing on the guided tours in Olkhon Island conducted by a Buryat shaman, the article maps out the various meanings of this tourist phenomenon in the context of Buryat shamanic revival. It interprets tourist performances as forms of social action and as a paradigmatic example of how contemporary Buryats fashion their ethnic and religious identity, arguing that this form of shamanic tourism results in the greater articulation (rather than the diminution) of cultural heritage. Focusing on the intercultural production of sacred sites as one part of multi-faceted shamanic revitalization process, the article demonstrates that it is through reinvention of shamanism as a "genuine world religion" — which fashions sacred sites as equivalents of "temples" (in this case in tourist discourse)—indigenous activists stake out political ground for reclaiming sacred sites.
The Sacred Himalaya Initiative: Sacred Landscapes and Sustainable Futures, is a Luce Foundation funded initiative which builds on the successes of the Everyday Religion and Sustainable Environments in the Himalaya (ERSEH) initiative. Background: The Himalaya is one of the most significant religious, cultural and ecological regions in the world, and continues to be the focus of much global scholarship.