

Published in the book “Religion in Environmental and Climate Change. Suffering, Values, Lifestyles”, edited by Dieter Gerten and Sigurd Bergmann, 2011.

Chapter 13

Gulnara Aitpaeva

Jaichylyk: Harmonizing the Will of Nature and Human Needs

Introduction: Polysemy as an indicator of multidimensional phenomena

This chapter examines the historical and contemporary dimensions of jaichylyk, the Kyrgyz spiritual practice related to weather. This analysis is based on epic literature and oral history, and describes the traditional foundations of jaichylyk, the bearers of this spiritual capacity, its goals, related rituals, techniques and other properties. Other world cultures have practices similar to jaichylyk. A reconstruction of the jaichylyk knowledge system based on a targeted study of the epic Manas and epic tales of other Turkic and Altai peoples (see Mamytbekov, 1993, p. 160; Verbitskyi, 1893, p. 64; Potanin, 2005, pp. 773f) should also enable the elucidation of modern-day scientific parallels and paradigms.

The word jaichylyk refers to a traditional practice of the Kyrgyz people that is designed to change the weather. A jaichy was someone who had specific knowledge and abilities to impact the weather and the environment. If it did not rain for a long time, and livestock and the harvest would suffer as a result of drought, the practice of jaichylyk was designed to invoke rain. If it rained for a very long time and it was impossible to dry hay, for example, this practice was aimed at stopping the rain. If an enemy needed to be stopped, the jaichy would work to invoke a tempest or a blizzard. Similarly, if clear blue skies could bring a desired victory, the jaichy would perform certain actions to bring them about.

The underlying word jai has several meanings in the Kyrgyz language. Jai denotes the summer, as one of the four seasons (Akmoldoeva, 2009, p. 24; Abduldaev et al., 1984, pp. 280–281). At the same time, jai means ‘space’ in the broadest sense of the term, and depending on the context, it can mean one particular point or the entire universe. Jai also indicates a state of calmness and order, and it refers to spreading something, such as knowledge, or the spreading of carpets.

Subordinate vocabulary can be created from each of the four meanings of the word jai. However, it is not by chance that different phenomena, conditions and actions are characterized by the same word. This is a typical example of the traditional Kyrgyz philosophy that is encoded in the language (Aitpaeva, 1999, pp. 3–5). In Kyrgyz, multiple meanings always signal that the item being referred to has a number of different qualities, and the multiple meanings also denote the root fusion or initial affinity of all these qualities.

We can see that by referring simultaneously to time and space using the same word, the Kyrgyz ancestors were able to capture quite clearly the main quality of these concepts, which is their inextricable connection. To be precise, the initial oneness of time and space (Melnikov, 2006) was captured in the Kyrgyz language, and according to the polysemantic word jai—denominating a state of calmness and order—the spreading (unfolding, circulating, propagating) of specific materials with different properties (material–spiritual, heavy–light, allowed–forbidden, new–old, etc.) directly depends on the objective flow of time and space.

Following the underlying word jai, its derivative jaichylyk (jai + chylyk) also has several meanings, basically ‘peace’ and ‘well-being’ (Abduldaev et al., 1984, p. 283).

My hypothesis in this chapter is that jaichylyk, as a practice of humans exercising influence over the weather, contains all of the major meanings of the word jai. Time, space, a state of calmness and order, as well as the action of spreading are represented here in their initial oneness, or root fusion. Time and space are thus coordinates in which jaichylyk takes place. Jai as calmness and order represents the rhythm of the coordinates. It was only after one found one's exact position in these coordinates and tuned in to their rhythm that jai, or the spreading of some desired impact, could begin. Based on the same principle, I argue that a clear connection between the practice of human influence upon the weather and a prosperous world existed in the traditional Kyrgyz society.

The Epic Concept of Jaichylyk

Focus on Manas

Currently, one of the most important sources of traditional knowledge and practices associated with the Kyrgyz people, including those related to weather and climate, are Kyrgyz epics. These can be divided into two groups, the epic trilogy Manas and some 'small' epics (Akmataliev, 2002, pp. 3–40).

The centrepiece of the Kyrgyz oral tradition is the great Manas epic, which contains up to 500,000 lines. More important than the size of the Manas epic is the fact that the telling of the Manas, along with the individuals who do the telling, the manaschy, played an important part in the traditional Kyrgyz society (van der Heide, 2008, pp. 141–149). Because it has occupied such a special place in the intellectual and emotional world of Kyrgyz, the Manas is often the basis for comparison with the rest of the oral tradition. Compared with the Manas story, other epic folk poems have been affectionately called kenje, which means both 'junior' and 'small'. However, despite the kenje status of other stories, their average size is often from 1,000 to

17,000 lines. It is also important to note that the ‘small’ or ‘junior’ label given these other epics does not refer to their age. Several epics date back to the same period as the Manas. To roughly date these epics, Kyrgyzstan celebrated the 1000-year anniversary of Manas in 1995. The first episodes of Manas were recorded by Kazakh researcher Chokan Valikhanov (Valikhanov, 1986, pp. 241–250) in 1856 and Russian scholar Vladimir Radlov in 1862–69 (Radlov, 1885).

Jaichylyk practices are described in both kinds of epics. This chapter focuses on the Manas, as it is the cornerstone and the pivot of the entire epic heritage of the Kyrgyz people. It is named after its main hero, who was engaged in a severe struggle against foreign enemies (Kalmaks and the Chinese), and who was able to unite the scattered Kyrgyz tribes, thus creating one nation with its own territory.¹

As the largest epic in the world, the Manas contains enormous amounts of information accumulated over centuries. In the 20th century, scholars and writers emphasized the vast scale and encyclopaedic nature of this epic (Kadyrbaeva, 1980; Moldobaev, 1995; Akmoldoeva, 2009; Akmataliev, 2002, pp. 3–130; Asankanov et al., 1999, p. 37–54). A prominent writer, Chyngyz Aitmatov, introduced the epithet ‘ocean-like Manas’ (Aitmatov, 1994). In the 21st century, apart from its encyclopaedic nature, which addresses various aspects of traditional livelihoods, another feature of the ancient epic becomes of paramount importance: the Manas is no longer just a symbol of antiquity and a repository of collective folk knowledge, but is an actively evolving phenomenon. New versions of the epic have appeared which differ significantly from its classical versions (Umot uulu, 2009). Additionally, new manaschy have appeared, *i.e.* the chanters of the epic and bearers of the epic knowledge (Aitpaeva, 2006, pp. 118–123; Aitpaeva et al., 2007, pp. 264–282; Aitpaeva

et al., 2009, pp. 55–65, 74–79; Kadyrov, 2009). Astoundingly, the emergence of the new versions and chanters takes place in accordance with the epic-based thinking, which has little, if anything, to do with the contemporary rationality. Academic science typically treats the epic as an object of study, but not as an independent entity capable of restoring itself, or to transform, and to make a transition from epic reality to social reality².

What is jaichylyk in the epic world?

When the Chinese came close as one solid wall,

The day was dark and the night was bright,

And it was wet in some areas.

When he beheld a host of foes,

Almambet performed jaichylyk.

And then the highland was covered with hail,

And the valleys were flooded with rain.

The clouds dashed across the sky,

And the thunder roared in the heaven.

The Chinese who attacked so defiantly

Were locked up on the ground,

They dreamed of seeing the sun.

The whole battlefield was covered with snow

And the snowdrifts were as tall as a spear,

And then the countless Chinese, the Manjurs,

Turned into weeping girls.³

This is an excerpt from the chapter of the Manas called Chong Kazat (‘Great March’), which

describes when the Manas-led Kyrgyz tribes went on a military march to the stronghold of the Chinese, Beijing. A drastic change of the weather was ‘performed’ by Almambet, a staunch fellow-fighter of Manas. There is no description of jaichylyk, or the process of affecting the weather. All we know is that ‘Almambet performed jaichylyk’. There are more detailed descriptions of jaichylyk in the entire text, and yet no clear details are provided as to how humans actually influenced nature. This is not typical of the epic as regards the description of many other traditions, rituals and practices, all of which are described in numerous minor details. In this context, we may assume that the paucity of description has to do with the specific nature of jaichylyk itself. In fact, the epic tale presents jaichylyk as secret knowledge and a closed ritual.

According to the Manas epic, only a very few people can actually cause an impact on the weather and nature at all. As a rule, these are men who were specifically trained for this purpose:

Without trying to sound audacious,
I can turn summer into winter.
I can make the Chinese dressed in light garments
Weep like girls.
The reason I can do it is,
I came to the Kyrgyz all light-handed,
And I came in, having studied the craft of sorcery.

These words were pronounced by Almambet, who in the classic versions of the Kyrgyz epic is one of the most tragic heroes. His father was Chinese and he was raised among the Chinese,

but he then joined the Kyrgyz when he began to shape his personal philosophy and make a spiritual quest. Despite being half-Chinese, Almambet was the main jaichylyk expert among the Kyrgyz. He studied the craft of jaichylyk in China when he was among his ‘own people’. Much in the way that the epic contains no details about the practice itself, it is difficult to find any particulars about the school where jaichylyk was taught. It is known that it was located in the vicinity of Beijing, and the epic stresses that an ajydaar, a dragon, conducted all selection and training. As described by Kuban Almabekov, a manaschy coming from a family of epic chanters (Almabekov, 2009, pp. 46–50), this detail is sufficient to understand how sensitive and viable a young man had to be in order to be recruited for the school. Men had to be able to survive the selection process and stay alive during the actual training.

Jaichylyk as a ‘super-weapon’

The epic contains scenes in which Almambet, for example, disperses the clouds for others to enjoy a fight between two strong wrestlers. However, in the heroic epic that focuses on the struggle of the Kyrgyz people for their independence and territorial integrity, the main reason for deploying jaichylyk is military. Attacks by enemies, intelligence operations, and the need for stealth all are reasons for using jaichylyk to affect the weather and environment. Jaichylyk is an epic ‘super-weapon’ that was available only to highly qualified experts. The power of this weapon was enormous. Indeed, one jaichy who went through the ‘dragon’s school’ could stop thousands of warriors in their tracks, or cause confusion among the winners of a battle, or defeat the enemy’s best fighters. If there were two students of the ‘dragon’s school’ in two opposing armies, the result of a battle largely depended on them.

The ‘Great March’ featured numerous armies, strong warriors and spies, but also two jaichy locked in a fight: Shypshaidar, a Chinese man, and Almambet. Shypshaidar won this battle.

He dispersed the clouds invoked by Almambet, stopped rain showers and calmed the winds, counteracting the natural disasters called up by his opponent and then sending them back against the Kyrgyz. The 'Great March' ends tragically. Manas was wounded and then died from his injuries at his place of birth, while Almambet and other warriors were killed by the sniper shots from Shypshaidar.

Based on the hypothesis that the word jai contains all connotations of the word, we can explain Shypshaidar's victory by the fact that the battle of the jaichy took place in an area that was alien to the Kyrgyz and native to the Chinese. The epic also tells us that Almambet was defeated because he had studied the craft of jaichylyk for a less time (several months) than Shypshaidar.

A description of the basic principles and components of jaichylyk

A few years after the death of 54-year-old Manas and his warriors, the Kyrgyz, according to a law governing vendettas, embarked on a march in the direction of Beijing in order to take revenge for the deaths of their fellow-tribesmen. The sons of Manas and Almambet were among the new warriors. The first person who entered into a battle with the Kyrgyz was Muradyl, a Chinese jaichy:

He flung a jai stone into the lake,
And started conjuring the sun,
The master of the clouds, Buurakan,
Calling his name,
The master of the place, Jelshamal,
Calling his name,

And he brought in the winter clouds,
In the summertime.
Muradyl, a big Chinese warrior,
Pronounced incantations endlessly.
Fog appeared in the gorge,
And black clouds became thick
From behind the mountain peaks.
Ice-cold hail poured down immediately
Upon the highlands,
The earth started twisting, accompanied by noise,
And ice-cold hail was falling down.
Invisible to the eye,
Black mist was floating low on the ground.
The earth was not to be seen,
The earth split apart, making a roar,
And water was flowing noisily
Down the hollows and dimples.
The black rock fell off,
And the cliff was carried away [...]
The summer day was turned into a cold day,
The leader's face was covered
With ice which was four fingers thick.
Fourteen war horses
Were rushing about and neighing like foals.
All their bridles were torn off sharply,

And the spacious world became small.
The surface of the ground was covered with snow,
Starting from the saddles of the horses.
All animals hiding in the clefts and gullies
Were dying struck by the hail.

This is one of the most comprehensive descriptions as to how jaichylyk actually worked. The first action committed by Muradyl was when he threw (directing) a special stone, jai-tash, into the lake. The second thing he did was to pronounce duba, or verbal formulas, to address the relevant forces of nature. Jai-tash and duba are two basic components in influencing the weather and nature. They can be found in the actions of all jaichy in the epic.

The epic scene above clearly illustrates the conceptual basis of jaichylyk: a) the jaichy entered a place-space and became one with their natural surroundings (lake); b) they entered time and become harmonious with the prevalent force of the place-space (sun); c) turned to the spirits of nature (clouds, areas); and d) they used a natural object (stone). In other words, jaichylyk is based upon the concept of reciprocity and cooperation, and at some point oneness between humans and the natural world around them. Only by contacting the forces of nature and their spirits and gaining their support could a human being influence the weather and environment. In the epic concept of jaichylyk, there is no human dominance over or management of nature by humans. Jaichy, as experts who went through the ‘dragon’s school’, and who were well acquainted with the forces with which they were dealing, would have no concept of nature dominance or management.

Returning to the scene involving Muradyl, it should be mentioned that Kulchoro, the son of

Almambet, was able to counteract Muradyl's powerful influence upon nature. Kulchoro's mother learned the lessons of her husband's death very well. She prepared her son for revenge and sent him to study the secrets of jaichylyk at a very young age. According to the epic, Kulchoro's power was partly accounted for by Almambet's ritual stone.

The jai-tash (jai stone) is an integral part of the ritual for influencing the weather and nature. If jai-tash is a mandatory accessory of this practice, and if it is one of the two visible pillars on which the practice is based, it would be fair to assume that the nature of this stone reflected the nature of the practice itself. According to the folklorist Zair Mamytbekov, this stone was of animal origin (Mamytbekov, 1993, p. 150). It was found in the stomachs of domestic and wild animals, such as sheep, horses, cows or argali. It could also be found in the stomachs of some wild beasts, namely bears and wolves (Aliev, 1995, pp. 194–195).

[B] Why was a stone used in the epic's description of the jaichylyk practice?

The four elements of nature—earth, water, air, and fire—have long been known to humans⁴. The jaichylyk ritual needed to include these four elements in the quest to become harmonious with nature. A stone is a solid substance like the earth. Presumably, a stone is used in this case as a stand-in for the earth or at least one of the four elements. In the case of jaichylyk, a solid substance, a stone, is always conjoined with water, or a liquid substance. Even if we simply throw a stone into water, a visible reaction will take place. And if we throw, immerse, or pour water onto a stone as a part of a ritual, i.e. with a clear intention and in a certain fashion, the reaction will, most probably, be as expected. Why and how should a stone be of animal origin, however? According to the epic, Chinese leaders would station animals such as ak kulja (white argali) and the kuu tulku (cunning fox) along with birds, ordok (duck) on the Kyrgyz border to protect it. If needed, these 'border guards' could perform the functions of

jaichy. In the epic world, humans and animals are very close to each other and are oftentimes interchangeable. A stone extracted from the stomach of an animal or beast is different from a stone that, for instance, was resting at the bottom of a river or in a mountain gorge. It is different, first of all due to the fact that it went through (lived through) the life cycle of a warm-blooded mammal, which could also be a human. In this case, we may assume that jai-tash—as an equivalent of the earth on the one hand, and as a piece of a warm-blooded mammal on the other—conjoins various elements of nature. An object of such origin fits perfectly in the epic concept of jaichylyk. Indeed, this ritual performance is built on the interaction of natural phenomena, one of which is a human being.

The second basic pillar of jaichylyk is duba, or verbal formulas. In the scene involving Muradyl, we can see who duba is meant for—Buurkan, the master of clouds, and Jelshamal, the master of the place. According to the Kyrgyz traditional perspective, calling such forces by their names is a very serious venture. Knowing the names of natural forces and knowing how to call them in a way that they can hear and respond to it is presumably one of those bits of knowledge taught in the ‘dragon’s school.’ Detailed wordings of duba are difficult to find in the epic, which once again denotes their secret nature (Mamytbekov, 1993, p. 75).

All relevant epic scenes focus not so much on the ritual itself, but rather on the reasons for performing it and also its ramifications. Apart from military purposes, one fundamental reason for employing the ritual practices of jaichylyk is when communities experience a disaster that they cannot handle on their own and need a powerful ally, such as nature itself. In this situation, jaichylyk results in those weather changes and changes in nature that the community in need would like. Jaichy, or the mediators between the human world and the natural world, bridge the gap between cause and effect. Jaichy serve their people and rulers.

And when these people and rulers fight with one another, jaichy also enter the fight. Those who can make Nature their ally and those who are well acquainted with the language of natural forces, such as hurricanes, ice blizzards, earthquakes, and mountain rivers, will win this fight. In other words, the victors were those who were most skilful and precise in entering time and space and harmonizing with nature.

The idea of jaichylyk as ayan, or secret knowledge, runs like a golden thread through the epic. It is accessible only by the chosen ones, or those who are able to withstand the dragon's lessons. The dragon is the embodiment of might and mind pertaining to natural forces. The jaichylyk knowledge system is, presumably, a knowledge system governing interactions between humans and other natural forces and the principle of reciprocity.

All epic scenes involving jaichylyk are strictly limited in time and space. Any effect on nature occurs where there is a request, and ends along with the problem that was supposed to be solved by 'sending the request'. Most probably, this is one more piece of knowledge that jaichy are taught.

Jaichylyk in the oral history of the present-day Kyrgyz

Jaichylyk as a branch of kyrgyzchylyk

Today any Kyrgyz person is generally able to say enough about the epic Manas to sustain a conversation. However, this is not true of jaichylyk. If you want to learn about the traditional practices of influencing the weather, you must meet either with the elders who may remember the past, or with those whose professional and/or spiritual interests are related to traditional culture. Currently, oral history and the knowledge of the epics is a unique as well as accessible source of traditional practices.

Jaichylyk is similar to manaschylyk, or the reciting of Manas, while the two are different branches of the same cultural and natural phenomenon that the Kyrgyz labelled kyrgyzchylyk (Aitpaeva et al., 2007b, pp. 377–394; Aitpaeva, 2008, pp. 66–82; Koshaliev, 2008). During Soviet times, kyrgyzchylyk, as a complex of various traditions, rituals and practices pertaining to the Kyrgyz people, was destroyed and brutally eliminated from all areas of Kyrgyz life. This reaction was due to ideological reasons, as traditional thinking and behaviour expressed through customs, rituals and practices were rooted deeply in the spiritual and religious realms. During the seventy years that the Kyrgyz spent in a totally atheistic state, many things were destroyed and lost. However, in 1992, after the USSR disappeared from the world map, and a new country called Kyrgyzstan had appeared, a process of restoring and resuscitating kyrgyzchylyk in its various forms began. Traditional practices such as healing, manaschylyk, pilgrimages to sacred sites and many others actively returned to daily life, and are currently undergoing a new renaissance⁵. In this context, jaichylyk should be seen as a separate issue, and considered to be more a part of people's memories, rather than in their actions.

Jaichylyk as lost knowledge

Our village, Tash Aryk, in Naryn province, had one jaichy, and his name was Jaichy. When he was born he had a different name, but people kept calling him Jaichy. He was a very gifted person, and the belief was that this gift was from God. He could change the weather. Sometimes, when the village would decide to move to the mountains, and the weather would turn nasty or it would start raining, he would perform a ritual, and the weather would return to normal, and the rain would stop. Jaichy died not so long ago, when he was about 85 or 86. His relatives and children are still alive, and they still

live in our village. None of his children inherited their father's gift. There are no jaichy like him these days.

(Archive of the Aigine Cultural and Research Centre, 2010)⁶

This story was shared by Kubanychbek Tezekbayev, a leader of the organization called Uluu Kyrgyz Ordo, who works to restore ancient spiritual practices and traditional sports.

The following story comes from the oral collection of Cholponbek Abykeev, a writer and a person who possesses extensive knowledge about the past:

In the Issyk-Kul valley, in Ton, there lived a famous visionary named Osmonaaly. He died almost yesterday, in 1957. He had knowledge of jaichylyk and jylanchylyk (snake studies). He could call up rain at any time and stop it. I spoke with some people who had witnessed these weather changes. When there was no rain for a long time, farmers would approach Osmonaaly, and then due to his duba they would be able to invoke rain. He was the last real jaichy, there are no longer any people like him nowadays.

(Archive of the Aigine Cultural and Research Centre, 2010)

We were able to hear the beginning and the end of both stories ('there lived one jaichy, but there are no longer any people like him nowadays') in three regions of the country in 2006–2010. Jaichy lived 70, 100 and very many years ago. Jaichy could have been alive quite recently, only 50 years ago, like Osmonaaly, but 'there are no longer any people like him nowadays'. In present-day oral stories we clearly see some sort of an inclination to describe jaichylyk as lost knowledge that has already disappeared, along with its bearers.

When talking about ‘such jaichy,’ the interlocutors imply high-level practitioners, similar to those we encounter in the epic. ‘Such jaichy’ were able to turn a summer day into a winter day, to stop rivers, to move mountains apart, to speak with snakes, etc.

In the opinion of Kuban Almabekov, a manaschy from birth, the last jaichy similar to the ones we see in the epic was Berdike, who worked under Atake Baatyr at the end of the 18th and the early 19th centuries (Saparaliev, 2006, pp. 580–581). Currently there are no written or oral sources that could either confirm or refute this opinion.

In 2010, Kuban told a story about Berdike, which he heard in childhood from his grandfather, manaschy Almabek in Issyk-Kul province:

When Atake’s troops were surrounded by ten thousand Kokhand fighters in the vicinity of the Chychkan gorge (close to a modern Toktogul hydropower station), Berdike performed jaichylyk. He took his jai-tash out, plunged it into the water and started pronouncing duba, causing heavy showers and severe mudslides. Back then about one thousand Kokhand fighters died, and the rest had to withdraw. Atake’s troops were saved, and they did not allow the Kokhands to move to the north of the Kyrgyz territory.

Another story about the same jaichy was told in Talas province, in 2006. Although his name was forgotten, the name of his leader, Atake, was still remembered:

Once, a peasant whose corn crops could perish because of a drought under the scorching sun heard about Atake’s troops that were approaching his area. There was a jaichy

among them, and the peasant went out in their direction to meet them. The farmer spoke with Atake, saying the following: ‘It hasn’t been raining for a long time, and all my crops may perish. Ask your jaichy to call up the rain one time.’ And Atake responded: ‘It won’t be good if the farmer’s year-long efforts are wasted.’ Then he looked at his jaichy as if asking him to find a way to help the farmer, and then started moving further. A response to the request followed when Atake and his people moved away as far as two mountain ridges from the farmer’s field. This is where the greatness of Atake and the high skills of his jaichy should be appreciated. The rain was falling down along the line of Atake’s horse’s rump, and only the hemline of his gown became wet. The hemline of his gown was hanging below his horse’s rump, and that’s why it became wet. But the leader himself was dry. This is a jaichy who knows his business very well. (Archive of Aigine CRC, 2008)

In the stories about Berdike we can see the level of modern-day expectations as regards jaichy. This individual should be an epic-like specialist possessing epic-like powers, while his impact should be immediate and his skills should be precise. This example of the line along which Berdike’s rain fell and which only got the horse’s legs and the hemline of Atake’s dress wet is a cultural symbol of preciseness that jaichy should possess. Jaichylyk should be precise and accurate in terms of time, and strictly limited to the space where it is anticipated. It should not affect those areas where it is not needed.

Reasons for the loss of ‘epic jaichylyk’

If we follow the opinion that Berdike was, so to speak, ‘the last of the Mohicans,’ this would mean that jaichylyk started disappearing approximately around the mid-19th century. This was long before the Soviet social system was established.

Berdike's example gives rise to some thoughts as to why jaichylyk knowledge became lost. Notably, Berdike used the 'super-weapon' against the Kokhand army. The Kokhand Khanate and tsarist Russia were the last outside enemies of the Kyrgyz people. Understanding jaichylyk as a secret and formidable 'super-weapon' helps connect the epic concept of jaichylyk with present-day reminiscences. When fighting for their fatherland and independence, jaichy would serve the high and noble cause and move mountains if needed. Motherland, territorial integrity and independence were the fundamental values of the Kyrgyz nomadic society. Given the traditional way of life, the need for protecting these values was conducive to sustaining and reproducing the knowledge of jaichylyk.

In the contemporary oral history, Berdike's activities are not related to Islam, nor are they opposed to it. There is the assumption that Berdike worked outside the Islamic system. We would be able to judge more accurately as to what extent Berdike as jaichy was inside or outside the Islamic paradigm based on duba, or his verbal spells. However, duba were always the most secretive part of a jaichylyk ritual, and today it is almost impossible to find out the verbal formulations of Berdike's duba.

At the same time, by the beginning of 19th century, Islam had already been introduced to the Kyrgyz. As a folk practice that had been shaped long before the emergence of Islam and before it was spread among the Kyrgyz in particular, jaichylyk still falls in the area of 'active tension' between kyrgyzchylyk and Islam (Toktogulova, 2007, pp. 252–258; 507–517). Unquestionably, a traditional practitioner who directly contacted natural forces by bypassing the Almighty was not acting according to Islamic tenets. Jaichy who changed the environment assumed the role of the Almighty. Needless to say, when Islam arrived in the country, the

roles and skills of jaichy inevitably had to be altered. Instead of receiving training from the epic dragon, they had to study the Qur'an. Jaichy had to accede to the restrictions of Islam, and as a result, they lost their epic greatness and freedom.

In modern oral histories, the phenomenon referred to as jaichy-moldolor (mullahs) is represented rather widely. These are Islamic clergymen who know Muslim duba, or verbal formulations designed to influence the weather. This phenomenon should be viewed as a consequence of one of the practices of kyrgyzchylyk being subsumed by Islamic principles. In a broader context, this is a concrete and extremely interesting example of what scholars call 'folk Islam' (Light, 2007, pp. 476–497; Schubel, 2009, pp. 279–288; Aitpaeva et al., 2010, pp. 25–42). Asylbek Sarygulov from Manas village, Talas province, told us:

Jaichy are those who are knowledgeable about Muslim duba. Apart from the Qur'an, mullahs also have a book of incantations, Azeimkan. When biting winter frosts set in, they [jaichy-mullahs] dig out a cellar in the ground and lie there for forty days, reading this book.

(Archive of Aigine CRC, 2008)

In this elderly man's report, there is no mention of the fact that jaichylyk was a pre-Islamic practice, and there is no division between jaichylyk and Islam. In this case, influencing the weather is a component of Islamic practices. Such syncretic understanding is another distinctive feature of present-day collective memory about jaichylyk.

The main area for jaichy-moldolor activities is people's everyday lives, which is illustrated by the perishing crops and the farmer helped by Berdike. Every region features stories about

different jaichy-moldolor who helped people. There are also stories demonstrating that at the level of everyday life, jaichylyk was used as a weapon in inter-personal relations and as a means of intimidating the disobedient. The very existence of such stories suggests sacred knowledge is becoming profane. Presumably, this occurs as a result of the loss of such knowledge.

However, the principle of using time and space in a strict, targeted and limited fashion as a basic principle of jaichylyk is well preserved in the memories of traditional knowledge custodians.

I lived at one time with a man named Jarmambet. I never saw what he was doing, but I heard a lot about it. Once, people were moving their livestock from Talas to Aksy. When they passed Ketmen-Tube, the sun was scorching hot. Then they approached mullah Jarmambet asking him to do something about the heat. Jarmambet pronounced duba over one stone and flung it into a spring. From that moment, the heat subsided, and the sun was not so hot by the time they got to the market and sold their livestock. It even rained a little. However, in the market Jarmambet was very anxious and hurried back, saying that the time was about to be up. When he returned, he walked briskly to the spring and pulled his stone out. This is when he calmed down. Duba is performed for a specific time period, for some precise number of days or hours. Jaichy may face horrendous ramifications unless a stone is removed within this period of time and unless the activity of duba is stopped.

(Archive of Aigine CRC, 2009)

Thus, under the influence of Islam, the paradigm within which jaichy used to work has

changed, narrowing their scope of activities, and reducing the significance of the scale, but the internal principles governing time and space remain intact.

Therefore, both historical and religious factors placed restrictions on the use of jaichylyk. The significant historical milestones that influenced this process were the union with Russia (a few northern tribes did that in 1855), the award of the status as an autonomous province (1924), and the shift to a Soviet republic (1926). Becoming a part of the Soviet system and having a fixed territory resulted in the weakening of outside threats on the one hand and a loss of the traditional nomadic lifestyle on the other. As has been described above, one of the main areas where jaichylyk was used involved wars with external enemies. Additionally, the nomadic lifestyle was rooted in and fully interconnected with the natural seasons and cycles. Nomadic life required deep and systematic knowledge of nature, an understanding of the human place in the holistic natural system, and congruent actions. From this perspective, nomadism was fertile ground for growing of jaichylyk.

These factors, connected with religion, or more specifically the establishment of Islam (in the 10th and 11th century, during the time of Kara Khanate) combined later with Soviet atheism operated to restrict and eliminate jaichylyk.

Jaichylyk in the context of global changes

In the section on the epic concept of jaichylyk, it was emphasized that the Manas epic is a living and evolving phenomenon. This statement would have been difficult to prove some 10–12 years ago; today it is possible due to a new understanding of the Kyrgyz spiritual culture and folklore. In the section on jaichylyk in present-day oral history, it was emphasized that the knowledge and practices that enabled jaichy to influence weather had been lost and that there

is no reason to think any differently today. And yet, in light of the current restoration of the epic Manas and based on field observations, the question arises as to whether or not it is possible to revive jaichylyk in the epoch of global change, including climate change.

[B] ‘Naturalness’ and spirituality as the basis for jaichylyk

A woman named Kaliyman Danakeeva who was born in 1940 resides in the village of Kichi-Jargylchak, in Issyk-Kul province (see photo, Fig. 8). Those who know her call her ‘jaichy apa’, or a ‘granny jaichy’. In turn, she does not deny that she does jaichylyk. However, in full accordance with the traditional understanding of jaichylyk as secret knowledge, it is extremely difficult to learn anything about Kaliyman’s jaichylyk activities. There are some people who she has told about jaichylyk, but they are bound by a promise not to share this information.

However, Kaliyman’s past and her current lifestyle are not a secret. The village of Kichi-Jargylchak is located on the southern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul, far from large towns and resort areas. However, Kaliyman does not live in the village. She lives year-round surrounded by mountains in a place called Cholok Kiya. She comes down to the village only when there is a need to do so, for instance, to attend funerals or wedding ceremonies. Kaliyman’s husband died eight years ago. She has children and grandchildren, and they spend some time with her, but most of the time she lives in the mountains all by herself, taking care of her family livestock.

In the case of Kaliyman, jaichylyk is closely related to the epic Manas. Her father was an epic teller. She has never chanted the epic herself in public, although she does so in her dreams. When she was a young woman, Kaliyman suffered from epilepsy, and she was taken to a

mental hospital many times. Such disorders are quite common among many bearers of kyrgyzchylyk at certain stages of their lives.⁷ Normally, medical treatment in such cases does not help (Aitpaeva, 2009, pp. 254–265). Similarly, it was not medical treatment that helped Kaliyman, but rather her seclusion in the mountains and accepting the task that she had received from the spirit of Manas. Once he came to her in a dream and gave her a cup with kumis, saying the following:

If you drink this cup of kumis, you will find a coin at the bottom. Take it. When you go to the water, you will find a mirror there. Take it. There is a dagger in the barn where you keep your animals. Take it as well and use it for the benefit of the people.

(Archives of Aigine CRC, 2009)

Thus, she received ritual items, such as a mirror and a dagger. She also has jai-tash, or a ritual stone. Since she received this message, Kaliyman has performed jaichylyk, healing people and counselling them in various difficult life situations. To perform any ritual she uses an old edition of the book Manas. Her neighbours say that particularly on hot days, if Kaliyman turns up in the village for some occasion, people ask her to call up rain. And it does start raining in some limited area for a short while.

There are a few key aspects in Kaliyman's life that help us understand the nature of jaichylyk better. The first is the space where she spends most of her life, the natural environment. It is not an exaggeration to say that Kaliyman lives in nature. The second aspect is the time in which Kaliyman lives: it is also more natural than social. She has a hard time living even in the remote village that is a part of greater society. The third is the path that led her to jaichylyk: this is an ancient traditional path, when one is chosen and taught to carry out a

certain spiritual mission (Aitpaeva, 2009, pp. 254–256). Kaliyman never attended any classes by moldo (mullahs) or any other person. In terms of traditional culture, she learned—and keeps acting—under the tutelage of spirits, primarily the spirit of Manas. There is no doubt that although she lives in the mountains all alone, Kaliyman does not live in solitude. She does not feel intimidated by mountain nature. She feels she is an organic part of a bigger natural world.

Kaliyman's example makes it clear that jaichylyk is a phenomenon that exists in the state of interrelation and intercommunication of humans, spirits and nature. These key aspects—co-existence with nature and spirits, or in other words, 'naturalness' and spirituality—prepared the ground from which Kaliyman's jaichylyk stems. This is very ancient ground, and the epic jaichylyk also stems from there. In this context, it becomes clear that jaichylyk is the knowledge of nature and spirits, including the spirits of nature. This observation is often confirmed by oral narratives. Thus, a famous jaichy from the village of Tepke, Issyk-Kul province, Manake, was first of all extremely knowledgeable about the stars. Mukai, a jaichy from Talas province, used to say that much in the way that we see road signs along the road, he can see many signs amid the clouds that tell him what weather we can expect. The Kyrgyz refer to such people by saying 'tabiyattyn tilin bilchu,' or 'they knew the language of nature.' This was not a metaphor, but rather a literal statement. In accordance with oral history, before the Soviet era and during its early years, almost every community had its own jaichy, a mediator between the human and natural communities. Today Kaliyman is a rare person in the country as a whole.

When people are helpless, nature helps

However, a process of restoring ancient traditional practices in Kyrgyzstan, including

jaichylyk, is currently underway. Considering that Kyrgyzstan is an economically undeveloped, post-Soviet country, the process is taking different shapes and forms.

The renaissance of jaichylyk in the country has not yet been studied scientifically. Non-systematic practices of influencing weather have taken place in a few traditional communities such as Kut Ordo, Kyrgyz Uluu Ordo and Bata. The practitioners work in the field of kyrgyzchylyk and have little to do with science in its Western meaning. However the word ilim—science—is often used by kyrgyzchylyk practitioners. As a rule, the leaders of such communities are spiritual messengers. The common quality and specific task of such leaders is study through spiritual messages. According to their logic and understanding, certain chosen people get messages from a spiritual realm, interpret messages and then undertake necessary actions (Aitpaeva, 2008, pp. 78, 80). The exact process of getting information and its interpretation is called ilim. The experiences of spiritual leaders (and the communities behind them) involve discovering a spiritual realm as a diverse, multidimensional and multilevel phenomenon: it could be Aalam (Universe), Jaratkan (Creator), arbaktar (spirits of widely known or unknown ancestors), and others.

In December 2004, an event that has been characterized by its participants as jaichylyk took place in Talas.⁸ Two people were involved in the event. Both were knowledgeable about traditions, but neither had experience in influencing the weather. These individuals were not engaged in politics, nor were they members of any political party, nor were they part of the opposition. However, as citizens of Kyrgyzstan, they thought it was totally unacceptable to prolong the country's president's third term in office. As spiritual practitioners, they believed it was important to work first with any task or issue at a spiritual level, and thought that the political overthrow of the president might be spiritually predetermined. In their opinion⁹, and

to this end, at the beginning of 2005 when the issue of the president's term in office was expected to be resolved, the president was not supposed to enter Manas Ordo, a sacred site that is home to Manas Mausoleum (Aitpaeva et al., 2007a, pp. 26–30). In order to prevent the president from going to the sacred site, the two men turned to nature as an ally and used the weather as a weapon. At the same time, they did not have the skills or knowledge to perform jaichylyk. They had never studied the discipline, did not have any ritual-related items, nor did they have any special duba, or previous experience. In that situation, they opted for the most simple and ancient, and yet the most widespread ritual among the Kyrgyz, called 'tilek kyluu'. 'Tilek kyluu' means 'to make a wish'. The essence of the ritual is as follows: at a certain location and at a certain time a wish should be sent directly, without any intermediaries, to the highest force or forces, or spirits, in which a person believes. Around noon, in an open space, not far from the Manas Mausoleum, two people made a wish. The words and thoughts directed to Jaratkan (the Creator) were their duba. In accordance with what the participants had hoped for, the response was rapid. The clear weather suddenly turned cloudy, and it started snowing heavily. The mountain road was covered with snow, and the president had to cancel his visit to Manas Ordo. For the participants of the weather ritual this meant that 'tilek kabyl boldy', or the wish was accepted¹⁰.

Was that a jaichylyk ritual? In terms of certain formal features, it was not, as there was no jai-tash or duba, and there were no ritual accessories themselves. The general tilek-kyluu ritual in this case was somewhat specialized. If we take the position of the participants and assume that this was a jaichylyk ritual, then this ancient weather practice was aimed at influencing the political situation in Kyrgyzstan. This case, given its disputable nature, clearly demonstrates the social component of jaichylyk.

Moral responsibility of jaichylyk

According to the writer Cholponbek Abykeev, Osmonaaly, jaichy from the southern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul, died in 1957, leaving no apprentices or successors. He had two sons. When his fellow-villagers asked him why he wasn't teaching his sons, Osmonaaly used to say that none of his sons, based on their personalities, matched the mission of jaichy. His elder son was 'kara murtoz' ('hard-edged'), and he might abuse the sacred knowledge, while his younger son was 'ak konul' ('of mild nature'), and others could abuse his knowledge. Osmonaaly used to tell his friends that he had a successor, a boy from the neighbouring village, and that he was waiting until the boy turned 12 to begin to instruct him. However, before the boy reached the age when he could become an apprentice, Osmonaaly was bitten by a snake and died¹¹.

The principles of sternness and selectivity have been mentioned quite frequently in present-day narratives about jaichylyk. Kaliyman's children don't have the right to touch her ritual items. There are dynasties of epic jaichy (Almambet-Kulchoro), although in written sources and oral history no information has been found for jaichy dynasties.

Manaschy Kuban Almabekov, the keeper of knowledge regarding the 'last jaichy, Berdike' and one of the few people who knows the epic jaichylyk, claims that only those with well-developed and solid moral principles were able to master jaichylyk. Jaichy were morally responsible for using and disseminating this knowledge. In today's language, jaichylyk implies traditional technologies that had their own goals and areas of application. In the past, jaichylyk could be aimed at fulfilling opposite functions, as is the case with nuclear technologies in the modern world, as one example. Thus jaichylyk entails a moral responsibility.

A lack of attention to the issue of moral responsibility can be seen in the operational scope of modern spiritual messengers. One of the participants of the Talas ritual took part in a few other group campaigns aimed at changing the weather. He reported that there was always some impact following their actions. However, he also noticed that this impact took place not only in those areas where they were wanted, but had also manifested itself in various absolutely unexpected ways. This observation compelled him to recognize his lack of knowledge regarding jaichylyk, and he put an end to his amateur experiments.

The experience of this spiritual practitioner shows once again that jaichylyk represents a profound systemic knowledge that must be learned. This knowledge is required, in the first place, to restrict the impact to a certain time and space. When one makes an impact at one location, the entire system will, inevitably, be involved. One should be able to see the whole system to foresee all possible consequences and to prevent them in case they arise. Before initiating this type of change, one should clearly know how and when it should end. Probably, the mystery of jaichylyk lies in the area of controlling time and space—which is precisely the knowledge that has disappeared.

But it is clear that in a time of global change, when people more and more feel, face and realize their own helplessness, there is a growing need for practices like jaichylyk.

Disappearance of jaichylyk as a harbinger of global changes

The purpose and values of jaichylyk are integrated in the word itself. If we recall the four basic meanings of the term, jaichylyk denotes the spread of calm and orderly time and space. It would be logical to assume that this is the social and cultural mission of jaichylyk. As

natural and spiritual knowledge given to humans, it was meant to harmonize the needs of the people with weather and environmental conditions. Jaichy could call up snowfalls and gales, or bring in sunny weather in order to meet people's needs. In fact, through changing the weather and environment, jaichy could balance the state of affairs, be it a military battle or a drought that would diminish crop yields. Jaichy did not affect the climate, i.e. weather in the long-term perspective. This is confirmed by the basic principle of their activities, which involved strict control over time and space. Practitioners knew their capabilities and limits through very close ties with nature and spirituality.

Jaichylyk as a cultural phenomenon, i.e. the area of human activities, started to disappear long before the world realized that global environmental and climate changes were underway. If one type of a plant or animal species disappears in nature, this signifies some breakdown in a particular ecosystem. The disappearance of jaichylyk from the Kyrgyz culture was a signal of a breakdown in the 'naturalness' and spirituality of Kyrgyz.

As mentioned above, there are currently just a few jaichy practitioners in the country, along with non-systematic group experiences where it is practiced under spiritual guidance. Similar to their ancestors, the modern Kyrgyz people have realized that when faced with undesirable weather, human beings are unable to alter the situation single-handedly. Climate change and a systematic crisis in society have forced the Kyrgyz to look to the past and remember the concepts, notions and practices that would help make life more normal.

Harmonizing nature with human needs is at the very core of jaichylyk philosophy. This philosophy is based on the concepts of reciprocity and local action coupled with global responsibility, and is an approach adopted by indigenous cultures throughout the world

(Rappaport, 1979, pp. 27–42; Cajete, 2000, pp. 58–66; Pere, 2006, pp. 145–147; Tuxteneva et al., 2006, p. 446; Crate et al., 2009, p. 187; Mamyev, 2009, pp. 101–105). The crucial importance of the ongoing process of jaichylyk restoration in Kyrgyzstan, with all its imperfections and lack of special knowledge, is in restoring the philosophy of reciprocity and responsibility. Regaining ‘naturalness’ and establishing a link with spiritual realm(s) or other living beings are significant steps for humans in order to deal with climate change. In the past, the Kyrgyz used jaichylyk productively to lessen the impacts of frost or drought. Today, facing global climate instability, it is reasonable to educate people in the philosophy of jaichylyk, rebuild its spiritual technology and modify ancient knowledge for current needs.

References

Abduldaev, E. and Isaev, D. (eds) (1984), Definition Dictionary, Vol. 1. Frunze: Mektep. (in Kyrgyz)

Aitmatov, C. (1994), Manas is the Epos-Ocean, Bishkek: Ilim. (in Russian)

Aitpaeva, G. (1999), ‘Polysemy as an indicator of the Kyrgyz world comprehension’, in The Nature of University Education and Research: Conference proceedings. Bishkek: AUK, V.2, pp. 3–5. (in Russian)

— (2006), ‘The phenomenon of sacred sites in Kyrgyzstan’, in Conserving Cultural and Biological Diversity: The Role of Sacred Natural Sites and Cultural Landscapes. UNESCO: Paris, pp. 118–123.

— (2008), ‘Searching new paradigms in ancient practices’. Anthropological Yearbook of

European Cultures, 17, 66–82.

— (2009), ‘Spiritual mission, health and sacred site worship in Kyrgyzstan’, in S. Bergmann, P. M. Scott, M. Jansdotten Samuelsson and H. Bedford-Strohm (eds), Nature, Space and the Sacred. Transdisciplinary Perspectives. Surrey: Ashgate.

—, Egemberdieva, A. and Toktogulova M. (eds), (2007a), Mazar Worship in Kyrgyzstan: Rituals and Practitioners in Talas. Bishkek: Maxprint.

— and Molchanova, E. (2007b), ‘Kyrgyzchylyk: searching between spirituality and science’, in G. Aitpaeva, A. Egemberdieva, and M. Toktogulova (eds), Mazar Worship in Kyrgyzstan: Rituals and Practitioners in Talas. Bishkek: Maxprint, pp. 377–394.

— and Egemberdieva, A. (eds), (2009), Sacred Sites of Ysyk-Kol: Spiritual Power, Pilgrimage and Art. Bishkek: Maxprint.

—, Aldakeeva, G. and Egemberdieva, A. (2010), ‘Common followers of Islam or phenomenon of mullahs in Kyrgyzstan’. Ethnographic Observation, N5, 25–42. (in Russian)

Akmataliev, A. (2002), The History of Kyrgyz Literature. Bishkek: Sham. (in Kyrgyz)

Akmoldoeva, S. (2009), The Universe of Manas. Bishkek: Arabaev National University Press. (in Russian)

Aliev, S. (1995), ‘Jai-Tash’, in A. Karypkulov (ed), Encyclopaedia of Manas. Bishkek: Akyl,

pp. 194–195. (in Kyrgyz)

Almabekov, K. (2009), ‘As long as you respect the earth and water, they will give you their blessing’, in G. Aitpaeva and A. Egemberdieva (eds), Sacred Sites of Ysyk-Kol: Spiritual Power, Pilgrimage and Art. Bishkek: Maxprint, pp. 46-50.

Asankanov, A. and Bekmuhamedova, N. (1999), Akyns and Manaschis—Creators and Keepers of the Kyrgyz People Spiritual Culture. Bishkek: Sham.

Cajete, G. (2000), Native Science Natural Law of Interdependence. Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers.

Crate, S. and Nuttall, M. (eds) (2009), Anthropology of Climate Change From Encounters to Actions. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.

Kadyrbaeva, R. (1980), The Genesis of the Epic ‘Manas’. Frunze: Ilim. (in Russian)

Kadyrov, D. (2008), Philosophy of Common Field. Bishkek: Gulchynar. (in Russian)

Kadyrov, J. (2009), Bubu Mariam. Bishkek: Biyiktik. (in Kyrgyz)

Koshaliev, K. (2008), Purity Will Save the World. Bishkek: Poligrafcombinat. (in Kyrgyz)

Light, N. (2007), ‘Participation and analysis in studying religion in Central Asia’, in G. Aitpaeva, A. Egemberdieva and M. Toktogulova (eds), Mazar Worship in Kyrgyzstan: Rituals

and Practitioners in Talas. Bishkek: Maxprint, pp. 476–487.

Mamyev, D. (2009), 'Ecological principles of traditional culture', in I. Jernosenko (ed), Ecology and Culture. Gorno-Altaysk, Barnaul: Artika. (in Russian)

Mamytbekov, Z. (1993), Reflection of Life and Struggle of Kyrgyz People in the Epic 'Manas'. Bishkek: Ilim. (in Kyrgyz)

Melnikov, G. (2006), 'Fractal unity of time and space'. Available online at: <http://nauka.izvestia.ru/blogs/article69912/print.html>. (in Russian)

Moldobaev, I. (1995), 'Manas' is the Historical and Cultural Monument of Kyrgyz. Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan. (in Russian)

Pere, R. T. (2006), 'A celebration of Maori sacred and spiritual wisdom', in C. Laudine, Aboriginal Environmental Knowledge Rational Reverence. Cornwall: Ashgate, pp. 143–157.

Potantin, J. (2005), Essays of North-Western Mongolia. Gorno-Altayisk: Bai. (in Russian)

Radlov, V. (1885), Examples of Folk Literature of Northern Turkish Tribes. St. Petersburg: Publishing House of Imperial Academy of Science. (in Russian)

Rappaport, R. (1979), Ecology, Meaning and Religion. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.

Saparaliev, D. (2006), 'Atake', in U. Asanov (ed), Kyrgyzstan. National Encyclopaedia.

Bishkek: Al-Salam, pp. 580–581. (in Kyrgyz)

Schubel, V. (2009), 'Islam's diverse paths: seeking the real Islam in Central Asia', in G. Aitpaeva and A. Egemberdieva (eds), Sacred Sites of Ysyk-Kol: Spiritual Power, Pilgrimage and Art. Bishkek: Maxprint, pp. 279–288.

Toktogulova, M. (2007), 'Syncretism of religious beliefs (kyrgyzchylyk and musulmanchylyk)', in G. Aitpaeva, A. Egemberdieva and M. Toktogulova (eds), Mazar Worship in Kyrgyzstan: Rituals and Practitioners in Talas. Bishkek: Maxprint, pp. 507–517.

Tuxteneva, S., Xalemba, A., Sherstova, L. and Doblynskyia, O. (2006), 'Spiritual culture', in D. Funk and N. Tomilov (eds), Turkish peoples of Siberia. Moscow: Nauka, pp. 429–461. (in Russian)

Umetbaeva, T. (2007), 'The worst illness is Kyrgyzchylyk', in G. Aitpaeva, A. Egemberdieva, and M. Toktogulova (eds), Mazar Worship in Kyrgyzstan: Rituals and Practitioners in Talas. Bishkek: Maxprint, pp. 226–252.

Umot uulu, J. (2009), Aikol Manas I. Bishkek: Biyiktik. (in Kyrgyz)

Valikhanov, Ch. (1986), Selected Papers. Moscow: Nauka. (in Russian)

van der Heide, N. (2008), Spirited Performance: The Manas Epic and Society in Kyrgyzstan. Amsterdam: Rozenberg.

Verbitskyi, V. (1893), Altai Non-Russians. Moscow: Moscow University Press.

¹ There are many versions of the epic with one common plot, all of which are referred to as classic versions. This section relies on the versions of Sayakbai Karalayev and Diykanbai Almabekov.

² The tragic upheaval events that took place in Kyrgyzstan in April 2010 demonstrated that Manas, the epic hero, became an actual spiritual support and a leader of those who went out to protest the anti-popular regime.

³ This and subsequent translations of the epic by Gulnara Aitpaeva and Aleksander Grishuk.

⁴ ‘Not so many people think about it, but what seems hidden behind these elements are four structural types of substances and four conditions of substances: earth – matter; water – liquid; air – gas; and fire – plasma’ (Kadyrov, 2008, p. 7).

⁵ Aigine Cultural Research Center has been doing extensive field studies and documentation of the Kyrgyz traditional practices and knowledge with the financial support of The Christensen Fund, California, USA, since 2005.

⁶ This and further interviews are from the archive of the Aigine CRC, 2006–2010, which is partly presented on the web resource: www.tk.aigine.kg. This and all subsequent translations of the interviews by Gulnara Aitpaeva.

⁷ For example, at the stage of awareness, spiritual solidification and search (see Umetbaeva, 2007, pp. 226–252).

⁸ Talas is a town in north-west Kyrgyzstan which is the administrative centre of Talas province.

⁹ The story was shared by both participants of the experiment, and there are slight differences between the two stories. For the purpose of this chapter, the motives we report are those that were common to both stories.

¹⁰ In 2005, the first president had to leave not only his position, but also the country.

¹¹ Notably, jylanchylyk, or snake studies, was his specialty along with jaichylyk. Most probably, in case of Osmonaaly, influencing the weather and being a snake-man were different manifestations of undivided spirituality.