

# **AK JANG IN THE CONTEXT OF ALTAI RELIGIOUS TRADITION**

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By

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## **ABSTRACT**

In 1904, a Native religious movement, Ak Jang, formed in Gorny Altai in Southwestern Siberia. It strongly opposed itself to Shamanism, which was considered to be the “core” tradition of Altaians. The initial persecution of the movement by the Russian colonial administration did not stop its spread and development. It was widely practiced in Altai until 1930 when it was eradicated by the Soviet regime.

During the period when Ak Jang was still practiced, it was observed by a number of witnesses, some of whom were ethnographers while others were not. Those who investigated Ak Jang, produced a number of diverse and often contradictory interpretations of it.

From the 1930 until the post-Soviet period, Ak Jang was not studied due to an imposition of the Communist Party “verdict” regarding its (counterrevolutionary) character.

In the 1980, the practice of Ak Jang has resumed. However, there is no agreement in academic publications regarding its nature and character.

The Thesis research has had two principal objectives: the analysis and clarification of certain misconceptions about the nature and character of Ak Jang, and the formulation of a view, according to which Ak Jang is the manifestation of the continuity between the old religious and cultural tradition of Turks and Mongols and the modern tradition of Altaians and their cultural “siblings” – the heirs of the ancient Turkic-Mongolian culture.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my family. Without their patience and support I would have never been able to complete my work.

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# Introduction

## Overview

This thesis presents a description and analysis of Ak Jang, or White Faith, called “Burkhanism” in popular and ethnographic literature by the name of its most prominent deity, White Burkhan. Ak Jang is a religious movement, which originated in Altai (Southwestern Siberia), in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The main goal of the thesis is presenting Ak Jang in the context of the traditional religion of Altaians and, more generally, of Turkic-Mongolian groups of Siberia.

Ak Jang emerged in 1904, after an Altai shepherd, Chot Chelpanov and his step daughter, Chugul, had several encounters-visions of a White Rider who they called Ak Burkhan. The rider delivered a number of commandments and prophecies, which determined and defined the formation of the new movement. The onset of Ak Jang was extremely active and rapid – in a few weeks, many<sup>1</sup> Altaians accepted the tenets of the new faith with enthusiasm. The movement had a strong eschatological and charismatic character – Altaians began anxiously await the arrival of a hero-king-messiah, Oirok-khan, and radical changes in their lives. Another characteristic of the movement was its extremely negative attitude towards shamans, who, prior to the emergence of Ak Jang, were the chief religious specialists in Altai culture.

Russian administration of Altai persecuted the followers of Ak Jang and arrested most of its leaders within a few weeks after its beginning, but it did not stop Ak Jang from further spread. Those arrested were released in about a year, and Ak Jang continued gaining influence among the Altaians – by the 1913, most of them became

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<sup>1</sup> In a little more than a month from the first vision of the White Rider, the single prayer meeting, which was dispersed by a mob, involved more than 4000 people.

its followers.<sup>2</sup> As Ak Jang was spreading and becoming more universal among the Altaians, its structure was steadily becoming more sophisticated – it developed a standard complex of rituals, priesthood, and a rich narrative. The active practice of Ak Jang continued into the 1930s. Within approximately 10 years after its emergence, Ak Jang lost much of its eschatological character as well as the negative attitude towards shamans: it acquired a shape of the “everyday,” common religion,<sup>3</sup> incorporating most of the traditional rituals, deities, etc., which existed prior to its formation. In the 1930s, Communists forcefully eliminated the movement and executed all of its activists.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, all academic research of Ak Jang, which was conducted for a short period in the 1920s and the early 1930s, was de-facto prohibited as well, and did not resume until the mid-late 1980s.

Information on Ak Jang, available to the general public and specialists, was very limited until recently. Most publications on Ak Jang during its development in 1904-1930s, were based on anecdotal evidence, often on information, biased or simply falsified for a variety of reasons. The emergence and existence of Ak Jang was extremely “inconvenient” for both the Tsarist administration of Altai, and for its Communist successors: the emergence of a vigorous religious movement, which absolutely did not fit into a colonial-“civilizing” scenario of both the Russian Tsarist

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<sup>2</sup> According to Sokolov, quoted in Danilin (Danilin p126), less than 10% of the Altaians remained not Ak Jang followers by the 1913. This gives us an approximate figure of about 50,000 Ak Jang followers at the time.

<sup>3</sup> The term “everyday religion” means approximately what M.Weber calls the “routinization of charisma.” In this case, it is the shift in the message and character of the religion from the stress on the personal and social change, prompted by eschatological expectations, etc. to the structuring and support of the “ordinary” personal and social stability and homeostasis.

<sup>4</sup> There is no statistics on the number of the executed and/or imprisoned Ak Jang followers. Thousands of Altaians were imprisoned during the Stalin’s purges, and the membership in Ak Jang (which, as we will see later, “meant” being a Japanese spy,” was the most popular choice of the criminal charges in Altai. *All* of the prominent Ak Jang figures (famous *yarlykchi*, Altai intellectuals) were executed. A.Znamenski is currently working on the book, dedicated to the details of these purges.



ideology and of its Communist successor, was perceived as a threat to the Russian, and, later, Soviet, influence in the region. Thus, most of the early observers of Ak Jang used in their presentations very few facts, and heavily interpreted the movement – usually, attempting to present it as “evil” and anti-Russian and falsifying its nature. Sometimes, as it happened in the case of Shvetsov, who was the defense lawyer of the Ak Jang activists, the interpretations of it pursued the opposite goal, producing biased characterizations of the movement solely for a purpose of defending it.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, until the 1990s, all available published *factual* information on Ak Jang would have probably fitted into two pages, but the interpretations of it were plentiful and diverse. In various sources, it was characterized as: a political movement with religious overtones, either liberationist, or subversive – inspired either by Chinese or even by Japanese “agents”<sup>6</sup> or as a purely religious movement, which imitated, or was heavily influenced by either Buddhism, or Christianity. In either case, it was seen as a movement, essentially alien to Altai tradition at its core, and a) transient and not having any roots in Altai tradition, and b) syncretistic, mainly based on “imported,” Christian and/or Buddhist, ideas, with an admixture of Shamanism, which was what was portrayed as “Altai religion.” In the popular literature, reference materials and even web pages today, this particular interpretation is still the only one existing.

Before the 1990s, those few scholars<sup>7</sup> who attempted to reconstruct Ak Jang outside the interpretation, offered by the Communist ideology, were not able to move

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to mention that all of the people who presented the descriptions-interpretations of Ak Jang in this period, were Russians.

<sup>6</sup> The notion of Ak Jang being mainly political and subversive movement, concocted by the Japanese spies, was initially invented by Altai Mission in 1904 and soon (at the court) proven to be false. However, this notion was “picked up” by Soviet ideology in the 1930s and became the only allowed, official point of view, resulting in total extermination of Ak Jang and execution of its followers.

<sup>7</sup> Namely, Krader and Sagalaev in his early work.

beyond the view, described above – not because they had any specific biases, but simply due to the lack of data. The structure and *known to that date* (until the mid-1990s) content of Ak Jang were very different from the assumed “shamanic” substrate of Altai tradition. The deities of Ak Jang – Uch Kurbustan, Ak Burkhan and others, had, as it seemed, not been known in the ethnographic data before its emergence and could not be located within Altai tradition prior to the emergence of Ak Jang; the “hero-messiah-king,” Oirok khan (and other similar Ak Jang personae) also, as it seemed from the previous research, had no prior place in Altai tradition; finally, the anti-shamanic attitude, characteristic to Ak Jang in its beginning, could not be explained with the reference to the pre-Ak Jang indigenous religious culture of Altai alone, because the amount of the innovation, brought by Ak Jang compared with “shamanism,” which was perceived as *the* indigenous religion of Altaians was so great that the latter simply could not be “responsible” for it. Thus, the early attempts at the reconstruction of Ak Jang had to postulate its syncretistic nature, vaguely referring to Christianity and Buddhism as its constituent parts.

From the late 1980s on, the situation began to change. First of all, the open practice of Ak Jang resumed in Altai. This fact alone has proven that the view of Ak Jang as “transient” and as a movement, which was based on foreign influence, or some sort of “crisis-reaction,” was wrong.

Also, in the 1990s, a number of works, which fundamentally changed the view of Ak Jang, were published. The most important publication was the monograph of Danilin, an ethnographer who studied Ak Jang in the 1920s and 1930s, but whose work was banned from publication (which was attempted in 1937) for ideological

reasons. This work is the only monograph on Ak Jang and the only published source, where the content of Ak Jang – its deities, rituals, beliefs, and priesthood, are described in detail. The information provided in this work shows the complexity of Ak Jang as a *religion* as well as its indigenous, rather than syncretistic<sup>8</sup> (or imported), nature.

Also, a number of papers, published by Altaian and several Russian researchers since the late 1980s, provide very important information, which has a direct relation to Ak Jang on various aspects of Altai and on Turkic and Mongolian religious tradition, in general. Specifically, this information reveals the origin of the “mysterious” elements of Ak Jang, such as its messianic character, “hero-king” idea, its deities, and others, placing them within Altaian and, more generally, Central Asian religious tradition.

As a result of these developments, the picture of Ak Jang and its context – the traditional religious culture of Altai, emerging from the sum of data, presented by the above-mentioned publications, is very different from the one that was accepted in the earlier Soviet ethnographic scholarship.

First of all, it presents the indigenous traditions of Altai and other Turkic and Mongolian groups not as shamanism – that is, a religion whose sole sacred office was a shaman, and whose deities were “shamanic,” but as a diverse complex of narratives, religious offices, and “spirit-figures,” co-existing in a form of a pattern with “many centers” rather than with one (a shaman).

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<sup>8</sup> In this paper, the term “syncretistic” refers to the idea that Ak Jang was formed on a basis of recent (19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> centuries) and substantial borrowings from Christianity and Buddhism, which the author aims at disproving. At a deeper level, Ak Jang and Altai tradition (as any other religion) are indeed syncretistic – for example, Altai tradition might have been profoundly influenced by Manichean religion and Buddhism in the middle ages. For a detailed discussion of the issue see Chapter 3, pp. 62-66.

Also, the fact that all of the “unique” elements of Ak Jang can be located within indigenous Altai and/or Turkic-Mongolian narrative, in Epic and other traditions, shows that Ak Jang has not had a single significant “imported” element within it and, thus, cannot be considered syncretistic.

Finally, it turns out (especially from the work by Danilin and a manuscript by Anokhin<sup>9</sup>) that Ak Jang, from its very beginning, readily appropriated and included most of the traditional Altai and Turkic deities and religious procedures, associated with them, with the only major exception of the “underworld” shamanism, its pantheon and office. The very fast appropriation of spirit-characters, religious offices and other elements of the pre-Ak Jang tradition by Ak Jang, again characterizes it as an organic element of Altai religious culture rather than an alien element in it.

The “macro”- historical analysis of the religion and culture of Inner Asian Turks and Mongols as well as modern cross-cultural research allow the placing of Ak Jang within Altai tradition as well as the understanding of the causes for its emergence. The key element for this understanding is the dynamic and multi-layered structure of Turkic (and Altai) religion, which intimately follows the (changing) structure of the social organization.

The traditional Turkic-Mongolian religion has three interdependent, but, at the same time, autonomous levels, reflecting the three-level social structure among Turks and Mongols. At each of these layers, a semi-independent group of deities and spirits

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<sup>9</sup> Anokhin, A.V. Manuscript (property of the Institute of Altaic Studies, Gorno-Altai) Part 1. *Burkhanizm v Zapadnom Altae* (Burkhanism in the Western Altai), 1910 Part 2. *Burkhanizm na Yugo-zapadnom Altae* (Burkhanism in the Southwestern Altai), 1924 Part 3. *Kratkiy Analiz Shamanstva Altaiskih Plemen* (A Brief analysis of the Shamanic practices of the Altai tribes), 1930

is addressed by a particular sacred office. These layers complement one another and do not conflict. These levels are: the household-family level, the clan level, and finally, the “large”<sup>10</sup> – overarching ethnic, or supra-ethnic, level.

Scholarly works on the history of Turkic culture and religion showed a recurrent phenomenon, characteristic of nomadic cultures of Central Asia – the quick consolidation into “empires,” followed by dispersion and functioning at a clan level. During the former, a “royal” religion, featuring “universal gods” with a persona of “hero-king” as a focal point, was practiced along with the clan deities and sub-clan “professional” shamans. During the latter, only the worship of clan-deities and the shamanic activities remained practiced. However, the “universal” deities of the high, or “imperial” religion, while losing the ceremonial complex associated with the king (*kagan*), remained popular at the *household* level, entering into a sort of “latency” until the re-emergence of the next supra-ethnic entity.

It will be shown that Ak Jang has been exactly such a re-emergence - an attempt to “regenerate” the Altai religion *and society* to its “higher” level, namely – to a traditional consolidated empire-federation. While Ak Jang initially emerged as a national religion of Altaians, which seems to contradict its attempt at re-emergence of the “imperial” stratum, the repeated attempts at its internationalization among the ethnic and cultural siblings of Altaians, both in the beginning of the twentieth century and now, clearly show the supra-ethnic pattern, with a focal point as a real or “virtual” figure of a *kagan*, manifested in Ak Jang by the figures of divine-royal-messianic heroes. Thus, the emergence of Ak Jang can be seen not as a unique and “odd” phenomenon, but rather as a traditional manifestation of a *recurrent* process

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<sup>10</sup> According to the terminology of J.-P.Roux, “Imperial” level.

within religious and cultural dynamic among Turkic-Mongolian ethnic groups. As it seems, the modern developments in Ak Jang as well as recent publications, dedicated to the cross-cultural analysis of the similar phenomena among various Turkic and Mongolian ethnic groups, support this point of view.

The uniqueness of Ak Jang can be seen only in one of the major elements. While the typical “resurrection” of the supra-ethnic dimension of Turkic-Mongolian religion was a step from the clan-based religion to a “overarching” worship of the “universal” deities, in the case of Ak Jang the regeneration went from the community level to clan level and universal, or “supra-ethnic” level, simultaneously. The reason for this was the extreme social and demographic crisis, which deeply damaged Altai clan structure and associated forms of worship that happened in 1756 at the destruction of the Dzungarian Empire.<sup>11</sup>

### **The structure of the Thesis**

This thesis attempts at pointing at a several key markers within Altai and Turkic-Mongolian tradition, which would reveal the pattern of its structure and dynamic, as well as the role and place of Ak Jang within it. This is needed to establish the background for a much more detailed research of these traditions. This thesis is by no means a detailed analysis of the mentioned phenomena – there is neither enough data nor space to provide it.

Chapter 1 of the thesis provides a historical – contextual background for the description and analysis of Ak Jang, stressing the recurrent “consolidation-diffusion” pattern of Turkic society due to its importance for further discussion.

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<sup>11</sup> Discussed in more detail in Chapter 1 (History).

Chapter 2 describes the emergence of Ak Jang and its development prior to its eradication in the 1930s. Most of the description is based on the narrative from the work of Danilin. Chapter 3 discusses the sources of information on Ak Jang, and the versions of this phenomenon, presented by them, tracing their origins. While the discussion of the academic and ideological misinterpretations of Ak Jang has no direct relation to the description of the movement, presented in the Thesis, it has to be dealt with due to the fact that most of the published sources on Ak Jang involve such misinterpretations. Indirectly, this discussion points at a general problem, characterized by A.Znamenski as “anthropology of anthropologists,” that is, the political, ideological and other biases that make anthropologists interpret their field of study in a certain way. In the Soviet scholarship, this problem is very severe.

Chapter 4 begins with the description of Turkic-Mongolian pre-modern<sup>12</sup> religious tradition, its main deities, offices, etc., based on its reconstructions made by modern scholars. The tradition of Turks and Mongols, being the predecessor of the religions of the modern Turkic and Mongolian groups of Siberia, created the cultural template for the latter, both in specifically religious aspects and the social ones. Thus, its main markers are highlighted in the Chapter with a purpose of comparing them with the structure of the contemporary Altai tradition.

The second part of the Chapter is dedicated to the scholarly debate about the core character of the pre-modern Turkic and Mongolian tradition, namely to its possible interpretation as Shamanism. This issue is extremely important for the discussion in

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<sup>12</sup> From beginning of the Common Era to 18<sup>th</sup> century, the beginning of the Russian and Chinese colonial period.

this Thesis, because this debate involves the modern traditions, including the tradition of Altai.

In the last part of Chapter 4, the structure of the contemporary (20<sup>th</sup> century) Altai tradition is analysed. The template of the analysis follows the descriptive template of the pre-modern Turkic-Mongolian religion to provide a basis for the comparison with the latter and to show the continuity of the tradition.

Chapter 5 describes Ak Jang and its key elements – deities, religious offices and ceremonies, placing them in the context of the Turkic-Mongolian and Altai traditions.

Chapter 6 describes the post-Soviet re-emergence of Ak Jang and its current interpretation by Altaians. It discusses several different trends within Ak Jang, which emerged since the late 1980s.

Chapter 7 (Conclusion) provides a reconstruction of Ak Jang within the context of Altai and Turkic-Mongolian history and culture. Summing up the picture of the socio-religious patterns, presented in the previous chapters, it argues that the Ak Jang is an integral part of the Altai tradition and a manifestation of the continuous and recurrent socio-religious processes, characteristic for the cultural history of Turks and Mongols.

### **Sources and Methods**

The thesis is based on diverse secondary sources: works on history, ethnography, comparative religion and culture. While the aim of the thesis has been the description and analysis of Ak Jang and its place in the Altai and Turkic-Mongolian tradition, a problem, the discussion of which became inevitable, quickly arose after the search through the materials. This problem was the fact of ideologically motivated biases, present in the most of the sources on Ak Jang and Altai tradition. Thus, along with



dealing with the main theme of the thesis, it became necessary to critically analyze the biases in the Soviet scholarly works, which is done in Chapter 3.

Due to the limited amount of the materials on Ak Jang, the author had to travel to Altai Republic in the Summer of 2001 and use the help of the staff of the Institute of Altaic Studies in Gorno-Altai: S.Tiuokhteneva, PhD, V.Oinoshev, PhD, Ye.Yamaeva, PhD, and others, who kindly ran a series of seminars, helping author with the interpretation, organization and structuring of the available material. Also, they pointed at many relatively obscure sources, published only recently and locally and unavailable through the libraries' network both in Russia and in the West. Many of these sources became the key materials for both understanding and reconstruction of the Ak Jang and Altai tradition. After returning to Canada, author had numerous telephone consultations with the Altai scholars. Without their careful guidance, author would not be able not only to reconstruct, but also to understand the tradition of Altai.

## Chapter One. A young nation with ancient history.

### Who is an Altaian?

Altaians are an indigenous people who populate the Republic of Altai within Russian Federation, in Southwestern Siberia, and who are officially (for census and “nationality” entry in passports) are called “Altaians.”<sup>1</sup> While not being entirely artificial,<sup>2</sup> this nationality designation is not a result of Altaians’ self-description, but rather was created by the “other” – namely, by the Soviet state, in 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup>

An Altaian would describe him- or herself as “Altaian” only to a “remote stranger” – a Russian, French, etc. The self-description within Altai would consist of *seok* membership and, possibly, a tribe. The self-description for a culturally-proximate stranger (Tuvan, Western Mongolian, or a Turk) would likely consist of *seok*-membership and a *location* (“from Altai”). *Seok* is the most fundamental unit of self-definition and self-identity for the Turks and Mongols.<sup>4</sup> Thus, for example, the members of a given Altaian *seok* would never marry Tuvan members of the same *seok*: here, nationality, or ethnicity (Tuvan and Altaian) is considered secondary and almost accidental compared to the fundamental nature of the *seok*. *Seok* is a patrilineal, exogamous clan. It is a very conservative and stable structure among the Turks and

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<sup>1</sup> Their number is about 75,000.

<sup>2</sup> Altaians are the majority in the Altai Republic, distinct from Russians as well as non-Turkic indigenous groups.

<sup>3</sup> Until mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the name for the inhabitants of Altai who are now called “Altaians,” often changed: They were called White Kalmyks, Forest Kalmyks, Altai Tatars, Oirots, Sayans, Telengits, and so on. Altaians attempted to create a different self-definition in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, but it was gradually (finalized in 1948) changed into the present one.

<sup>4</sup> According to Potapov (Potapov, L.P. Etnicheskii sostav i proiskhozhdenie Altaitsev. (The Ethnic makeup and the origin of Altaians). Leningrad: “Nauka,” 1969) there are approximately 30 to 40 *seoks* among Altaians. Practically all of the *seoks* are “duplicated” among the Altaian “tribes” – Telengit, Teleut, Teles and Altai kizhi. About 70% or more of Altai *seoks* are also found in Tuva (where they are Tuvan clans), and about 50% - among the Western Mongols.

Mongols: the names of many Altai *seoks*<sup>5</sup> can be traced to the early middle ages. This difference in the characteristics of self-identity depending on the audience reflects its polymorphous nature, which runs much deeper and is more fundamental than, for example, self-definition in the cases of “simple” multicultural state.<sup>6</sup>

The present indigenous demographic of Altai formed at the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century, after the fall of Dzungarian Khanate (1756), when a large number of various ethnic groups (including indigenous Altaians – Telengits and Teleuts) escaped from Dzungaria, which was being brutally destroyed by the Ch’ing Empire. These immigrants, among whom were Teleuts, Telengits, Mongolians, and many others, settled in Altai and formed a new group – Altai kizhi (“Altai people”). At the time, Southern Altai was already populated by Telengits, Teles, and Teleuts – the relatives of the repatriates, who never departed from Altai region. Gorny Altai,<sup>7</sup> being a mountainous area, impenetrable by the enemy, became their “stable” dwelling place. To the East, were their close relatives (Tuvans), occupied by Ch’ing forces, to the West – their old enemies, Moslem Kazakhs, to the North – Russians, and to the South – Ch’ing Empire.<sup>8</sup>

The “common” format of historical narrative is based on tracing the development of a nation-state, or a nation, or tribe, which remains stable and thus can be “pointed at.” Such an approach is impossible when one has to deal with the history of Turkic and Mongolian nomads, because they, until recently, never “conceptualized” themselves as

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<sup>5</sup> Henceforth, the terms *seok* and *clan* will be used interchangeably: when Altaians are discussed, the specific Altaian term *seok* will be used. In the discussion of Turks and Mongols in general, the term *clan* will be used instead.

<sup>6</sup> E.g., “Ukrainian Canadian.” For example, a Russian whose ancestors lived in Altai for many generations, is not an Altaian.

<sup>7</sup> Gorny Altai means “Altai Highlands,” or “Mountains of Altai.”

<sup>8</sup> This set the stage for the formation of Altai ethnicity. Despite the statement by L.P.Potapov, “Before the Great October Revolution Altaians did not constitute a united nation and didn’t have a common self-title,” which implies that now (1968) they did, the process of formation of Altai self-identity is still going on.

nations, or nation-states.<sup>9</sup> While the history of Turks and Mongols is rich with state, or even empire formation, those states and empires were never based on a nation-state principle and usually were very short-lived entities, albeit large and powerful during their existence. Rather, they were *federations of clans*, brought together and united under the supremacy of a *kagan* (khan) – a “divinely *elected*” leader. The main reasons for such a clan consolidation were, as it seems, the threat of the invasion and the climactic conditions, which required a massive move.<sup>10</sup> Such states, or empires included clans of diverse origin<sup>11</sup> and, usually, lasted only for as long as it was necessary to accomplish a particular task, such as finding new pastures or repelling/attacking the enemy, after which the empires “dissipated” to the basic pattern of nomadic society – the clans. In other

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<sup>9</sup> With the exception of those Turkic groups that settled and acquired the “western-style” statehood relatively early – usually, by borrowing its template and offices from the states that they conquered, as in the case of Turkey, which occupied “the matrix” of Byzantine Empire.

<sup>10</sup> L.Gumilev sees the latter as the main cause of the repeated invasions of the West by the Eastern nomads – beginning with Huns and including the armies of Genghis Khan (Gumilev, L.N. *Drevniaia Rus' i Velikaia Step'* (The Ancient Rus' and the Great Steppe).Moscow: ACT, 2001). It is important to mention that on a lesser scale, at the level of a single clan or a small group of clans, the consolidation happens for the same reasons and according to the same model, but instead of a khan, a zaisan (a chieftain) makes the decision. This is not to say that this system always operated in some ideal way – smoothly and without conflict. The history of Turks and Mongols is full of inter-group warfare and usurping the “divinely elected” positions by various ambitious leaders. However, this pattern of “divinely sanctified” leadership remained the same throughout the Turkic-Mongolian history.

A short note on the role and place of L.N.Gumilev and his work is necessary. Gumilev has been very popular among the intellectuals of the USSR and later, of Russia, but his work is often considered as too speculative to be admitted, even as a reference, into academic publications. In many cases, it is necessary to agree that information, presented and promoted by Gumilev in his works, cannot be verified and looks like fantasy. However, at the same time, Gumilev must be credited for his unique role in dispelling of many myths and stereotypes of Soviet historiography. For this work, his importance lies in the fact that he presents an “antidote” to the Marxist-Leninist “stadial theory” which has been dominating Soviet history, ethnography and sociology. According to this theory (see also Hutton, p.49), a given culture/ethnic group can develop a statehood only after the complete or nearly-complete disintegration of its clan structures. Using material from the medieval history of the Central Asian cultures, Gumilev has convincingly shown that this is not so. To the author’s knowledge, no other Soviet or Russian scholar has done this.

<sup>11</sup> For example, clans of different linguistic background – Turkic and Mongolian, in Genghis Empire.

words, the “ruling dynasties” – the kernel of the nation-state formation, were not being formed, except for a very short time, usually one or two generations.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, most of the history of the “Altaians” can be presented only in the context of the *whole* Turkic-Mongolian world, because the clans, which now constitute the population of Altai, have existed as basic units of self-identification for a very long time and across a vast space – at the height of Turkic influence in the 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, they spread from the Pacific ocean to Danube.<sup>13</sup> Throughout centuries, the homogenous “clan pool” that constituted the nomadic states, remained essentially the same. While some regions on the Western edge of the Turkic-Mongolian domain that were dominated by Turkic-Mongolian nomads as well as some of the Turkic and Mongolian population, was “lost” to the gradual formation of the separated and sedentary Turkic nations,<sup>14</sup> especially after the Islamization of the part of Turks, which began in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and actively continued into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the general pattern of Turkic and Mongolian self-identity remained the same until recently. Some 200 years ago or so, this formerly homogenous or nearly homogenous regional, cultural and ethnic continuity was split by external influences – specifically, by colonialism on the part of Russia and China into a number of nation-state-like fragments, which now constitute the “national regions” and/or republics in Russia, China, and Mongolia.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The about 300-hundred-year long exception from this rule was the dynasty of Genghis and his descendants (from 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries).

<sup>13</sup> Klyashtorny, S.G., Sultanov, T.I. Gosudarstva i Narody Evraziiskih Stepei: Drevnost' i Srednevekov'e. (The States and Peoples of the Eurasian Steppes: Ancient and medieval periods). St.Petersburg: Institute of Oriental Studies, 2000. pp.78-85

<sup>14</sup> E.g. modern Turkey, Azeibarjan, Uzbekistan, etc.

<sup>15</sup> Istoriia Sibiri. (The History of Siberia). Leningrad: “Nauka,” 1968, v. 1 and 2.

The main markers for tracing the ethno-history of Altaians are ethnonyms – the titles of the *seoks* and, especially, the name *Tele* – a cognate of the modern titles of the Altai tribal units, Teles, Telengit, and Teleut.<sup>16</sup>

### **Ancient and medieval history**

The history of the clans and tribes in question can be traced as far back as the Hun Federation, which formed in the last centuries B.C.E. The Huns were not an ethnicity.<sup>17</sup> They were a large, multi-ethnic political confederation, which included, among others, Indo-Europeans as well ancient Turks. There are several pieces of evidence to prove this – primarily the indications of Chinese authors of the linguistic and genealogical continuity from Huns to Turks,<sup>18</sup> and also – the formation in 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E. that is, before the earliest documented mentioning of ethnonym “Turks” (Tyurk, or Tyurkut) of the Bulgar and Ogur<sup>19</sup> ethno-political entities (nomadic “kingdoms”) near Volga. While the Bulgars arrived on the Volga with the Huns, their language is a very archaic Turkic language. From the 6<sup>th</sup> century on, the “Turks proper” began dominating Central Asia. This domination continued uninterrupted until the rise of Genghis Khan and Mongols in 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Turks trace their genealogy to Ashina – a grandson of the couple of legendary ancestors, a man and a she-wolf, who married a Turfan , an Indo-European woman from

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<sup>16</sup> This work has been done in the two-volume work, *Istoriia Sibiri*, and in the work by Klyashtorny and Sultanov. This presentation is based on these works.

<sup>17</sup> Gumilev, L.N. *Istoriia Naroda Hunnu* (The History of the Hunnu People). Moscow: “Di-Dik,” 1998, pp.11-28

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.71, and Potapov, L.P. *Etnicheskii sostav i proiskhozhdenie Altaitsev*. (The Ethnic makeup and the origin of Altaians). Leningrad: “Nauka,” 1969, p.11

<sup>19</sup> “Ogur” is a cognate of two later prominent Turk self-names – “Uighur” and “Oguz.” This ethnonym survived in the names of the following groups: Uighur, Guz (small group in Caucasus), Gagauz (a Turkic group in Moldova and Romania), Hungary, and ethnographic title for a linguistic group (Ugro-).

Tien Shan area. This legend, resembling a typical clan-origin totemic myth,<sup>20</sup> laid the foundation of the “supra-ethnic” recognition and consolidation of Turkic clans.

After the 6<sup>th</sup> century and until the Mongol domination, which began in 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Turks formed a number of large “Empires of the Steppe,”<sup>21</sup> which, due to the pattern described above, were mostly short-lived: First Turk Kaganate (530-551), Western Turk Kaganate (619-630), Second Turk Kaganate (682-742), Uighur Kaganate (742-840), and, finally, Kyphchak “federation,” which lasted until 1207, after which it was assimilated into a new, Mongolian Empire -federation. These were the largest state-like formations of the nomadic Turks – between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. There were many more brief “states” formed by them, which dissipated back into the clan-based homogenous nomadic society, just as the larger empires did. The size of the largest Turkic states was formidable – the First and second Turk Kaganates included much of Central Asia and reached as far as Europe.<sup>22</sup>

Almost all of the clans that constitute the modern Altaians as well as their neighbours – Tuvans, Sakha, and others, can be traced back to this period.<sup>23</sup> Some of them were mentioned in various chronicles and other documents as clans, while others were mentioned as larger units – tribes,<sup>24</sup> which, as time went on, “shrunk” into clans. The consistent and frequently repeated process of expansion of clans into multi-clan tribes as well as the contraction of tribes back into clans is well-documented, but the

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<sup>20</sup> Which it most likely was. Every clan of Altaians has its own unique myth of origin. However, this particular story laid the (still existing) foundation of all-Turk “collective ancestry,” thus constituting a deeper (“higher”?) and more universal “image of unity” among the Turks. A sudden resurfacing of this myth, as Altai scholars testify, is the prominence of the “divine hero,” Shunu (Shunu – Ashina) in Ak Jang

<sup>21</sup> Grousset (Grousset, R. *L’Empire des Steppes*. Paris: Payot, 1976) discusses them in detail.

<sup>22</sup> Hungarians are partially the descendants of the ancient Turks of the Great Kaganates period.

<sup>23</sup> Potapov, *Etnicheskii...*, p.29

<sup>24</sup> For example, once large Naiman tribe is now represented by Naiman clans of Mongolians, Tuvans, and Altaians.

dynamic of this process is almost completely obscure.<sup>25</sup> The most likely hypothesis is that the ambitious (or worthy) *beks*, or *zaisans* (chieftains) of certain numerous and powerful clans formed “mini-empires,” uniting the groups of neighboring clans under their clan’s name, and thus forming a small federation – “tribe,” which bore all the features of social structure of an empire, often including the title of its leader, *kagan*. After some time, the dissipative processes reduced this “tribe” back to a number of clans. The mechanism and character of this dynamic is essentially identical to and reflect the processes that were occurring at a “higher” level of the Turkic-Mongolian kingdoms and empires.

The rise to prominence of the Mongols under Genghis Khan and their assimilation of the Turkic groups, which happened in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, essentially followed the pattern, established in ancient times: the “federal” unity of clans under the divinely elected leader.<sup>26</sup> The main templates of the social structuring of the nomadic society, namely clan and empire-federation, remained unchanged. Due to the most fundamental rule of the Turkic-Mongolian clan-based society – the patrilineal exogamy of the clans, the “cultural transparency” and continuity of the “clan-pool” was kept stable.<sup>27</sup>

A major challenge to this “fluid stability” of the Turkic-Mongolian society came with the gradual Islamization of parts of the Mongolian Empire. This process began as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century, but by the 14<sup>th</sup> century, a large number of the subjects of the descendants of Genghis Khan, Turks and Mongolians, had become Muslim, and were, in a manner of speaking, “falling away” from the previously homogenous Turkic-Mongolian society and forming various new nation-states. This process, which began in

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<sup>25</sup> Potapov, *Etnicheskii...* p.62 and further.

<sup>26</sup> The ancient Turk ritual of the “divine ordination” of a kagan, described by Klyashtorny and Sultanov (p. 163), remained unchanged throughout Mongolian period.

<sup>27</sup> Gumilev, L.N. *Drevniaia Rus' i Velikaia Step'* (The Ancient Rus' and the Great Steppe). Moscow: ACT, 2001, pp.302, 418 and further.



the Western part of the Mongolian Empire, (now, the modern Muslim states of Central Asia and the former USSR – Turkey, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and others), steadily continued eastwards. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, most of the Turkic groups of the Mongolian Empire were Muslim and formed independent state-like entities, which later became nations. While clan structure continued to be important among these groups to varying degrees, the traditional pattern of the vast “pool of clans,” which were interrelated through sophisticated “macro-family structure” by exogamy, was reduced. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the last large remnants of the traditional Turkic-Mongolian society were Eastern (Khalkha) Mongolia, then a vassal of China, and the Dzungarian Empire, which included the ancestors of the modern Altaians.

#### **The Dzungarian state.**

At the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, “Juchi Ulus” – the Western “branch” of Mongolian domain assigned to Genghis’ son Juchi and his descendants, lost its integrity and divided into the White Horde and the Golden Horde. At that time, the latter was already in the process of Islamization, and soon became entirely Muslim. The left wing of the White Horde, the Dzungars, further separated from the Horde and became a state. Dzungars were inclined towards Buddhism, rather than Islam. While “Dzungar” was an inherited name for a military-political unit in the Horde (“left wing”), the self-name of the Dzungars was “Oirats,” or “Oirots,” meaning “allies.”<sup>28</sup>

There is a considerable difference of opinion among researchers concerning the status of Altaians within the Dzungar/Oirot state and the legacy of the “Oirot period” in Altai history. While L.P.Potapov (and Soviet historiography in general) consistently

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<sup>28</sup> Sherstova, L. Taina Doliny Tereng (The Mystery of Tereng Valley). Gorno-Altaiisk: Ak Chechek, 1997, p. 64

states that the Oirots were the colonizers, and that they forcefully moved a large segment of the Altai population to the Southwest (modern Sinkiang region),<sup>29</sup> Altai scholars insist that Altai tribes were as equal partners- “oirots” with Dzungars. In fact, it is asserted that they *were* Turkic Dzungars, as distinct from Mongolian ones in all respects, including political power:

Terms “oirot” and “dzungar” were political rather than ethnic... . . . Altai zaisans, equally with the representatives of aristocracy of other ethnic groups of Oirot alliance, participated in the functioning of Eke Jyrga – the supreme legislative and executive governing body of Oirots.<sup>30</sup>

The Dzungars rose to the dominant position in Central Asia twice. First time, Dzungars became dominant in the period between 1368 (the end of Yuan – Mongolian dynasty of China) and 1456, the death of the kagan Esen,’ during whose reign Dzungaria spread as far south as Tibet, and Peking was taken by Dzungars.<sup>31</sup> The second rise to power of the Dzungars happened at the beginning of 17<sup>th</sup> century, when kagan Khara Khula united the Oirot tribes. During the reign of his successors, Galdan (1653-1697) and Tsevan-Rabtan (1697-1750s) Dzungaria dominated a large part of Central Asia (modern Eastern Turkestan in China), Tibet and Mongolia, including Altai, Khakassia (Kyrgyz) and Tuva. At this stage, the ancestors of the Altaians - Tele, who were the vassals of Dzungarians even during the first period of their domination, joined the Oirat federation completely.<sup>32</sup> During the reign of the latter two kagans, a large part of Tele and Kyrgyz

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<sup>29</sup> From this opinion it follows that Russian colonization of Altai was, in fact, liberation.

<sup>30</sup> Transl. A.V. from Samaev, G.P. “*Znachenie Dzhungarskogo perioda v istorii Altaiskogo naroda*” (The meaning of Dzungarian period in the history of the people of Altai). In: Altai i Tsentral’naia Azia: Kul’turno-Istoricheskaia preemstvennost.’ Gorno-Altaiisk: 1999, pp. 127-133. (p.129)

\* The Russian originals of this and other translated citations are presented in the Appendix 2. For the original of the citation above, see Appendix 2, entry 1.

<sup>31</sup> *Istoriia Sibiri*, vol.1, pp.267,379.

<sup>32</sup> Samaev, p.128

tribes migrated (according to L.P. Potapov, were forcefully taken to) to Turfan area (Tele) and modern Kyrgyzstan (Kyrgyz).

In 1756, the Ch'ing (Manchu) Empire army destroyed Dzungaria and literally decimated its population.<sup>33</sup> For several years, Oirots leaders, the most famous among whom was Amysana<sup>34</sup> tried to resist Chinese destruction, but in vain. Tele tribes together with the fragments of other Oirots groups escaped back to the region of Altai, which being a natural fortress partially protected them from the Chinese raids. Another part of the Oirots, the modern Kalmyks, migrated to the Volga region in the European part of Russia.<sup>35</sup>

During this period, the Russians exercised limited influence on Altai. However, after 1756, parts of it became Russian protectorates and the border of Russian Altai (vs. Chinese) began moving southward. In 1863, all of the modern Altai Republic became Russian territory.<sup>36</sup>

### **Altai as a part of Russia**

After their escape from the Ch'ing army to Altai, Tele tribes, together with the new immigrants – the Dzungarian escapees from the Ch'ing army who did not belong to Tele tribes or were not even Turks, did not get “assimilated back” into tribal units of which they were parts just a hundred years ago. Instead, they formed a new group, Altai kizhi,<sup>37</sup> which became one of the tribes along with the Telengits, Teleuts, and Teles.

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<sup>33</sup> According to various sources (e.g. Sherstova, pp.88-93), almost 9 out of ten “Oirots” (Kalmyks, Altaians, and others) were killed during the Ching invasion.

<sup>34</sup> Who later became prominent epic heroes of Altai, Tuva, and Western Mongolia, and Ak Jang “deity.”  
Also, there is monument to Amysana in Western Mongolia.

<sup>35</sup> Sherstova, p.186.

<sup>36</sup> Istoriiia Sibiri, vol.2, pp.25-41.

<sup>37</sup> The Tele tribes that did not leave Dzungaria are now called Uriankhais (in Mongolian this means “people who don’t speak our language” and live in N-W Mongolia (approx 30 000) and in NW China. The Kyrgyz who didn’t return now constitute the core ethnicity of Kyrgyzstan (and are Muslim). The returned

The period from 1756 until the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was one of severe crisis for the Altaians. After suffering demographic shock of massive slaughter by the Ch'ing army in 1756, the Altaians faced Russian settlement and transformation of their best pasturelands into the tilled (and owned by Russians) fields, the high prices that Russian traders charged for the basic necessities, high taxes, forced settlement into the locations designated by Russians, which broke down the nomadic social structure.<sup>38</sup> Also, they were exposed to the Orthodox Church proselytizing, which began rather benevolently in 1820,<sup>39</sup> but soon became socially and economically coercive.

By the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, the Altaians had managed to stabilize and even improve their economic and demographic situation. In the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Altaians even produced several *zaisans*-oligarchs, who directly traded with European markets and took an active part in the cultural and economic empowering of the Altai society.<sup>40</sup> However, although they were increasing in numbers and becoming overall wealthier, the Altaians were still experiencing a significant social disruption, because the social catastrophe of the Ch'ing invasion and later Russian colonization distorted the network of clan-identity. One of the most significant indications of this distortion is recorded by Verbitsky, namely that few clans had *zaisans* (chieftains), which in

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Kyrgyz (and those who never left) are modern Khakass. Some Tele became parts of the population of modern Tuva, which became part of the USSR only in the 1940s.

<sup>38</sup> One of the most fundamental disintegrating factors was the "mixing up" of different *seoks* in the same settlement, which destroyed traditional system of governing authority (elder, or *zaisan*).

<sup>39</sup> Exemplified by the most famous missionary, M. Gluharev who had a very limited success with baptisms (for which he was fired and punished by the Church administration), but developed a rudimentary hospital system, orphanage, and literacy programs for Altaians. M. Gluharev even defended Altaians against Russian state authorities. He is still highly respected among Altaians. (For the details of the interactions between the Altaians and Russians, see Znamenski, A. Shamanism and Christianity: Native Encounters with Russian Orthodox Missions in Siberia and Alaska, 1820-1917. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999, pp.193-253

<sup>40</sup> Most notable among them were brothers, A. and M. Kul'jin, who were also very important figures in the development of Ak Jang. See A. Znamenski, pp. 216-217.

traditional Turkic society meant that relatively few Altaians recognized their clan identity as the fundamental marker of their culture.<sup>41</sup>

After the death of the Russian tsar, Alexander the 3<sup>rd</sup> (1894), liberal and populist movements gradually gained strength all over the Russian Empire. The first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the formation of many nationalist and other movements, aimed at the empowerment of the oppressed people. In Altai, the weakening of the Russian Imperial “grip” allowed the formation of Ak Jang (1904), which was actively practiced until the 1930s. Simultaneously with the emergence of Ak Jang (and in direct relation to it), the Altaians took a step forward in either electing *zaisans*, or simply making known to Russians their existence.<sup>42</sup>

After the Communist revolution of 1917, the Russian imperial structures disintegrated very quickly. During the Civil war (1918-1922), many regions of the former empire went through a brief, but very dramatic period of numerous attempts to create various state-like entities, based on various consolidating factors, including political and ethnic ones. In Altai, this period produced a very interesting manifestation – the so-called Karakorum Executive Committee.<sup>43</sup> Very little is known about the functioning of this Committee, because Soviet historiography regarded it as thoroughly reactionary and counterrevolutionary.<sup>44</sup> However, it is evident that the pattern of the Karakorum

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<sup>41</sup> Verbitsky, *Altaiskie Inorodtsy*, pp. 19-23.

<sup>42</sup> Danilin, A.G. *Burkhanizm (iz istorii natsional'no-osvoboditel'nogo dvizheniia v Gornom Altai)*. (Burkhanism (from the history of a national liberation movement in Gorny Altai). Gorno-Altaiisk: Ak Chechek, 1993, pp.36-51 .

<sup>43</sup> Karakorumkaia Okruzhnaia Uprava

<sup>44</sup> The following is the most complete (albeit very biased) description of it, done by L.P.Potapov:

After the Communist revolution,

[b]ourgeois-nationalistic intelligentsia of Altaians, bais, zaisans and other counterrevolutionaries continued their counterrevolutionary activity, which was aiming at separation of Altai from the Soviet State. In February of 1918 they organized in the village of Ulala Gorno-Altai legislative meeting with 133 delegates to proclaim their own bourgeois “state.” The delegates were chosen in

Committee organization and function exactly followed the traditional Turk-Mongolian pattern of “state-consolidation” in that the delegates to the Committee belonged to the ethnic groups, which earlier, in the Dzungarian period, were the “oirots” – a federation of allies, led by a *kagan*. The Karakorum Executive Committee even elected a *kagan* at the opening meeting. The delegates represented the clans – most of them were the *zaisans* (chieftains), which also exactly reflects the traditional pattern. Very significantly, the function and authority of the “imperial religion,” which traditionally sanctified such consolidations and especially validated the election of a *kagan*, was taken over by Ak Jang at the meeting of the Karakorum Committee.

Until 1921, the legacy of this meeting continued in the form of “Karakorum government” under control of general Kolchak (White army). In 1921, Communists took power in Altai. With the strengthening of the Communist power in Altai, the Committee was disbanded and its members were executed by Communists in the period of the next 15 years. The importance of the short history of the Karakorum Committee for this

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such a manner as to provide the meeting with counterrevolutionary agenda... ..The meeting was inaugurated by the artist, Ch.Gurkin. ... on February, 22, the meeting voted for separation of Altai into a separate administrative region. The meeting was accompanied by religious ceremonies (collective prayer, blessing of the banner) ...

The same evening, Anuchin at one of the sessions made a presentation concerning the need of uniting of all the lands of former “Oirots state” in an autonomous republic. Anuchin stated ”It is not difficult to do, and this is why. The population of Altai Highlands, Mongolian Altai, Khakass, Uriankhais, Soyots (i.e. Tuvans – *L.P.*) and population of Dzungaria are the same tribe, same clan; language, customs – they all have the same ones, they all are “kizhi.” Once they were all a great people, Oirots. It is necessary to unite them in one family, in one state, because they are abandoned and yearn for the unification. They will form a great Asian republic...

...he was praising ancient “Oirots” state, i.e. the feudal Dzungaria, where, as shown above, cruel exploitation and submission of the peoples – subjects of Dzungars, were rampant...

... Following this report by Anuchin, the meeting voted for the organization of the Oirots republic. For the inauguration of republic, a Kurultai (meeting of delegates) was in Kosh-Agach, a settlement at the Mongolian border, was scheduled. It was accepted that:

“For organization of calling and opening of the legislative Kurultai of peoples who were parts of Oirots state, and for all negotiations that may be necessary in this matter, a special commission is formed: a delegate with special authority (*kagan*) and two deputies...

Potapov, L.P. *Ocherki po Istorii Altaitsev* (Studies in Altaian History), Moscow-Leningrad: Academy of Sciences of the USSR, 1953, pp.384-385.

\* See the original Russian text in Appendix 2, entry 2.

research lies in the fact that the ideology of this attempt to create a state was based on two factors and two legacies: The Oirod Federation – as the traditional template of Turkic-Mongolian consolidation and the Ak Jang – White Faith, as its ideology.<sup>45</sup>

Needless to say, the tendency toward the formation of an internationalstate-like entity that was not loyal to the newly-forming Soviet Empire, as seen in the quote from Potapov in the footnote 43, was seen by the latter as a threat – more so, because this formation followed a “natural,” well-established traditional pattern.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, Soviet ideologists had to take measures to erase all positive references to the “Oirod state,” both in its Dzungarian and “Karakorum government” manifestations, and of Ak Jang as its background ideology, from the Altaians’ collective memory. One of these measures was the total elimination of the Ak Jang practice, followed by the imposition of a complete taboo upon any academic study of it.<sup>47</sup> This was accomplished by the beginning of 1930s. Another measure was the campaign to re-create the history of the Altaians in such a way that it would not include any positive reference to the “Oirod period.” Until 1948, Altai was called “the Oirod Republic” and the “Oirod autonomous region,” but in the 1940s, L.P.Potapov, the foremost specialist in Altai culture and Soviet “ethnographer Number 1” who, unfortunately, by choice or due to the pressure, also became the most active promoter of the Communist, especially Stalinist, ideology in Siberia, filed a number of reports to the central and local Communist organizations. In these reports he argued that

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<sup>45</sup> The presence of Ak Jang at the Karakorum Committee’s meetings will be discussed below.

<sup>46</sup> This does not necessarily mean that this entity was aggressively opposing the Russian, or Soviet presence. Rather, it did not see it as relevant. However, the formations (political, cultural, ethnic, or religious) that did not acknowledge Soviet ideology as important, irritated the Communists even more than those that opposed it.

<sup>47</sup> Sherstova, p. 174-180, and Diakonova, V.P., Foreword in: Danilin, A.G. Burkhanizm (iz istorii natsional’no-osvoboditelnogo dvizheniia v Gornom Altae). (Burkhanism (from the history of a national liberation movement in Gornyy Altai). Gorno-Altaysk: Ak Chechek, 1993.

the Altaians were mere slaves when they constituted a part of Oirod – Dzungarian Federation and, therefore, all positive traces of “oirot” should be erased from Altaians’ cultural memory, beginning with the name of Altai. After 1948, “Oirod autonomous region” was transformed into “Gorno-Altai Autonomous Region.” In 1991, Altai Highlands received the status of republic. Now, it is Altai Republic within the Russian federation.



## **Chapter 2. Beginning and the formative years (1904-1920s) of Ak Jang.<sup>1</sup>**

The emergence of Ak Jang in 1904 was a dramatic event. While large number of Altaians<sup>2</sup> accepted it and consolidated around its leaders and practices in mere weeks, it was a complete surprise for the Russian colonial administration of Altai, which reacted to its emergence with persecution and creation of many false rumors about it, which will be analyzed in the Chapter 3. This chapter is built on the selection of sources that were relatively unaffected by the ideological interpretations and especially, from the interviews with the activists of Ak Jang – Chot and others. It presents the picture of the development of Ak Jang from its onset in 1904 to the period when it was suppressed by the Communists in the late 1920s and 1930s. During this time, Ak Jang underwent development, which may be divided into two stages: the onset (1904-1906), which was characterized by the strong eschatological element in Ak Jang, its vigorous harassment of shamans and its ceremonial simplicity, and the “routinization” period, which gradually developed from 1906 on. It was characterized by the almost complete disappearance from Ak Jang of the eschatological sentiment, its development of the priesthood and of the elaborate system of rituals and beliefs, which integrated much of the pre-Ak Jang tradition of Altaians.

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<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to remember that despite the recent origin of Ak Jang, very little reliable information concerning the details of the first years of its formation is available. All information about the first years (1904- approximately to 1910s) presented here, is the reconstruction, made by Danilin, Anokhin and Krader, based on diverse and unreliable information such as reports of Russian colonial administration, court materials, newspaper articles (based largely on rumors) and so on.

<sup>2</sup> At the prayer meeting, which took place in about two months after the first vision of the White Rider, and which was dispersed by the Russian mob, there were between 3000 and 4000 people.

### **The onset: 1904-1906.**

In April of 1904, Chugul-Sarok-Chandyk, a 12-year-old stepdaughter of a shepard, Chot Chelpan, met an old man, dressed in white and riding a white horse. This happened at the highland pasture, where Chugul was working. This is what Chugul later reported to the state persecutor at the interrogation:

Once in the spring, near to the yurt of Chot Chelpanov, when I was tending sheep, I was approached by some old kalmyk<sup>3</sup> dressed in white, and on the white stallion, and said: “God and king, Kudai-kan, has arrived. Go to the yurt at which you will see a white banner. If you do not obey, you’ll be punished.” I immediately went to Chet’s yurt. Chet did not tell me anything. After that, kalmyks began gathering in Chet’s yurt. The mentioned old man I have never seen either before or after, and where he came from, I don’t know”<sup>4</sup>

Chot Chelpanov said in his testimony the following:

“I myself haven’t seen god. Chugul-Sarok, according to her words, saw in the spring a white old man on a white stallion. This old man prohibited kalmyks to worship kormos and ordered the worship Russian god, moon, sun and White Tsar (Ak-kan), told me to wear [on my headgear] four silk ribbons. This rumor spread among kalmyks and they began gathering to pray at my yurt. Chugul, the girl, herself told kalmyks who lived nearby that god told them all to pray, to abandon old faith, stop butchering herds for old gods, and promised happiness to those who would obey him. I haven’t taught kalmyks the new way – the girl taught everything.”<sup>5</sup>

Other Altaian witnesses of the events told that

“Chelpanov, who began to wear white overcoat and ride a white stallion, was telling them that god personally appeared before him on a white stallion, ordered kalmyks, under a threat of being killed by heavenly fire, to burn the drums and *chalu*, to gather in the Tereng valley and wait for fifteen days. The prayer was as follows: one had to ascend a mountain, spread a white felt, take a cup with mare’s milk, turn towards the sun, sprinkle milk upwards, and say: “God, sun, white tsar, give help.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “White Kalmyks” was the name by which Russians called Altaians at the time.

<sup>4</sup> Danilin, pp.89-90. For the Russian original, see Appendix 2, entry 3.

<sup>5</sup> Danilin, p.90 For the Russian original, see Appendix 2, entry 4.

<sup>6</sup> Danilin, p.90 For the Russian original, see Appendix 2, entry 5.

There were other rumors, surrounding the “first events” in the onset of Ak Jang, for example, the appearance of two maidens, who ordered the destruction of the shamanic attributes and who [miraculously] burned these attributes themselves. They descended from two miraculous rainbows. Those who did not want to destroy their drums and *kormozhoks*<sup>7</sup> were burnt by the lightning.”<sup>8</sup> Apparently, an important part of the messages of the White Rider was a list of commandments, presented by Anokhin in his paper, *Burkhanism v Zapadnom Altae*.<sup>9</sup>

The most extensive coherent narrative of the communication with the White Rider and the foundational precepts of Ak Jang, presented in 1911 to A Semenov (a Russian journalist) by Chot Chelpanov himself and published by Semenov in an article, “Religiozni perelom na Altae”<sup>10</sup>, gives a glimpse of both the structure of the newly emerged movement, and its dynamic and earliest developments.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> literally – “little demons”: small figures of shamanic guardian spirits where spirits dwell between the sessions and which are fed and venerated. Also, a title that the adherents of Ak Jang use for the figures of family ancestors, *emegender* (which they do not have). *Emegender* (plural) means “little grandparents.” *Kormozhok* is obviously a pejorative name. It is unclear here, if only the shamanic guardians-ancestors or the figures of the family ancestor cult as well had to be destroyed.

<sup>8</sup> Danilin, p.91

<sup>9</sup> While this list of commandments became one of the hinges on which the interpretation of Ak Jang was based by the later scholars (e.g., Krader, L. “A Nativistic Movement in Western Siberia.” In: *American Anthropologist*, #58, 1956, pp. 282-292), its authenticity is questionable. Altai scholars dismiss it as an invention, and neither Anokhin in his later writings nor any other researcher of Ak Jang in its formative period, mention it.

The commandments are cited from Krader. See Appendix 2, entry 6.

<sup>10</sup> “Dramatic Religious Change in Altai” *Sibirskii Arhiv*, 1913, #9-11, pp.388-397. Again, the original was impossible to retrieve.

<sup>11</sup> “I did not believe my daughter (Chugul), but I happened to meet this man myself. At the time, I was in Tulaita (the branch of river Charysh) and went home from there. At the crest of the mountain range I met with him (the Rider). And he told me... we need to burn demons and abandon *kams* (*shamans* – A.V.) ... [I] must leave the old faith and tell about this to the whole of Altai, so that everybody would burn. Also, he said that everybody should pray to sun and moon, Ai-Burkhan, Kun-Burkhan, Ot-Burkhan, Uch-Kurbustan Burkhan... Then he began to pray in a new way. There is a tree *archyn* (*juniper* – A.V.) in the mountains, I put it in the fire and prayed. We put archyn in the fire even before that... I myself was born in Yabogan... moved to Tereng... I have seen no foreigners. After the vision, three months later, Altaians began coming to Tereng... They set up the birches, burnt the fire, put archyn there, milked the mares and sprinkled milk on the birches and on fire, and tied ribbons to the birches. Birches and archyn are taken from the old faith, when we prayed to good god. In such a way [they] prayed by my yurt, and went into the mountains not far away and also prayed there. Besides this prayer, there were no other prayers. These

The message of the White Rider and the beginning of the new movement were rather simple, but they radically went against the religious status quo of Altaians at the time. First of all, the new gods Ak-Burkhan and Uch Kurbustan were introduced. Also, a new religious ritual has been established.<sup>12</sup> The shamans and shamanic practices, which had been extremely important in Altai culture, had to be and were abolished.

The consistent anti-shamanic attitude of the message of Ak Jang has been its characteristic trait from the beginning:

Bloody sacrifices offend God! Drums and hysterical screaming during the shamanic sessions upset God's honor; shamanic gods are greedy. You must pray at certain times in the open places. Stick in the ground birches and decorate them with white ribbons. Instead of bloody sacrifices, burn juniper and sprinkle milk and milk moonshine (araka). Why did the Kalmyks become poor? Why are we harassed by everybody? It is because the Kalmyks pray to devils instead of one all-powerful God from Above. The day is coming, and those who do not recognize Burkhan will perish.<sup>13</sup>

Here, the “devil” in question is the patron-god of shamans, the god of Underworld, Erlik. However, it will be shown that not all of the “Shamanic” gods have been abandoned by Ak Jang.

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words are said either aloud, or whispering, or in one's mind – and meanwhile, one thinks about health for all of Altai. We prayed standing... We did not dig the knives into the ground, when prayed. It is wrong what they said – that we dug the knives into the ground. However, maybe somebody did it that way. The word Burkhan means god. He lives in heaven. He is Ak (white). He is good. I don't know if he pushes anybody ever, or not. In the court, I was accused of these new prayers. There was a record that we mentioned Japanese in them. This is wrong. I have never heard about Japanese – found out about who they were only while in prison. About 2-3 thousand people participated in the prayer meetings, maybe, somebody made it up... ..I don't know where *yarlykchi* came from... The new faith is better: we do not butcher horses, and do not pay to kam... (Danilin, pp.24-25)

For the Russian original, see Appendix 2, entry 7.

<sup>12</sup> Below, it will be shown that neither gods nor ritual were entirely new for the Altai tradition, but none of the observers of Ak Jang at the time was aware of this.

<sup>13</sup> Chot Chelpanov's statement. From Maidurova, N.A. and Tadina, N.A. Burkhanism: Dokumenty i Materialy. (Burkhanism: Documents and Materials). Gorno-Altaiisk, 1994, p.298 Cited from translation by Znamenski, Shamanism and Christianity, p. 237

The second most prominent feature of the Ak Jang message<sup>14</sup> was its strong eschatological character, based on several legendary or semi-legendary heroic figures: Oirok-khan, Shunu, Amyrsana, and Galdan. Especially important, practically messianic figure, was Oirok-khan:

Galdan-Oirok (if) comes-  
The Black ones (shamans) will disappear!  
The Black ones will fall into the earth!  
The Black Chests will go to sunset<sup>15</sup>!  
Golden Oirok, our tsar, will come –  
The Black Chests will go to the moonset –  
We'll go to live in *Ak-Chechek* and *Kok-Chechek*<sup>16</sup> Altai!  
The Black Chests will live at the moonset!<sup>17</sup>

The pathos of the eschatological message (or rather of its most manifested layer) of Ak Jang was very transparent: all of the “heroic” figures – Galdan, Oirok and others were related to and symbolized the Dzungarian period in the life of the Altai tribes, which, while somewhat idealized in Altai mind, was nonetheless a period when Altai tribes were admitted as equals into a federation (Oirats – “allies”).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> It is unclear whether it was delivered by White Rider or not.

<sup>15</sup> West in Altai culture is associated with the Land of the Dead.

<sup>16</sup> Danilin links *Ak Chechek* and *Kok Chechek* to some (rather mysterious) geographic locations. According to Altai scholars, both terms are adjectives-metaphors: “white-pure (clean)” and “blue-pure”

<sup>17</sup> Ak Jang prayer, from Danilin, 99.

For the Russian original, see Appendix 2, entry 8.

Also, for the prayer that summarizes the eschatological expectations of Ak Jang (From Danilin, pp. 94-95), see Appendix 2, entry 9 (for both Russian and English texts).

<sup>18</sup> While Dzungaria, as a state, was destroyed in 1754, the message, according to L.Sherstova (Taina..., p.127-135 and also Sherstova, L. Altai-kizhi v kontse XIX – nachale XX v.(Istoriia formirovaniia etnokonfessional'noi obshnosti) (Altai-kizhi at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: A history of formation of an ethno-confessional unity). PhD Dissertation. Leningrad, 1985), was an attempt to create an “ethno-confessional unity” from its remnants – Altaians, Soyots (Tuvans), and other former remaining “Oirots,” using the figures from the past as the symbols of such a unity.

While it is very likely that the hypothesis of L.Sherstova is correct, the “messianic project” of Ak Jang was not fulfilled, as its adherents hoped, in the beginning.

As the news of the White Rider spread over Altai, more and more people began visiting Chot Chelpanov who moved to Tereng valley. While he explained to the Altaians the new message, his step-daughter became a semi-worshipped figure as the main recipient of the message. At this time, Ak Jang still did not develop “priesthood” – the only exponents of the Ak Jang were Chot and Chugul, who implemented a number of simple rituals and prayers.<sup>19</sup> As both prayers and commandments, and the witnesses’ accounts testify, shamans and active adherents of Shamanic practices were thoroughly harassed by the followers of Ak Jang. Their drums and costumes were burnt, and they were ridiculed and abused.<sup>20</sup>

In 1904, all of Russia was in a state of unrest. The Tsarist Empire was steadily losing its integrity and control and was coming close to the Revolution of 1905. Government administration, both in large centers and periphery, was extremely paranoid, constantly awaiting mutinies and often provoking (and then – violently suppressing) them. In addition, Russia was fighting an extremely unpopular Japanese war (1904-1906), which it eventually lost.

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<sup>19</sup> At first, the prayer meetings were very simple. People gathered around yurts, smudged with juniper and sprinkled milk in the direction of the mountains that surrounded Terem valley. Meanwhile, [they] sang ancient songs, praising Altai; also, sang the songs ridiculing Russians, called curses upon them, etc. There were no established canons; the texts of prayers and songs were diverse. Only later the ritual became standard... (Danilin, 94). For the Russian text of the quote, see Appendix 2, entry 10.

Those who gathered for the prayers gave Chot a new name – Abaya, his wife – Kudeim, and Chugul – Aky Shulengi (“father,” “divine,” and “white purity,” respectively – A.V.)... .. messengers were sent to collect white felt for building a yurt for Chot... ..this yurt was solemnly called “orgo” (the palace)... .. Chot prayed with the few elected separately, while other Altaians settled on the slopes of surrounding hills and in the valleys and prayed in big groups. For feeding this massive amount of pilgrims, 30-40 horses were butchered daily... Soon, Chot was saying, a boy without a navel cord will be born. His name will be Kaan-Mergen (a name of epic deity-hero “khan the Archer” – A.V.)... .. The prayers went on from April to mid-June. Those who came to Chot with gifts or to pray patiently waited for the sign on the sun – the sign of the imminent coming of Oiroi. (Danilin, 94-99). For the Russian original, see Appendix 2, entry 11.

<sup>20</sup> Danilin (p.99-100) presents examples of torturing shamans by “Burkhanists.” According to L.Sherstova, this data is a sort of exaggeration, generated by... Christians (and later uncritically accepted by academics) who alleged the abuse of their traditional enemies, Shamans, by the adherents of Ak Jang because they saw Ak Jang as a bigger threat. The reasons for the anti-shamanic trend in Ak Jang are analyzed below.

The mood of the Tsarist administration in Altai was no exception to the general rule. As soon as the change in behavior of Altaians was noticed, local government suspected the worst – a mutiny. However, the first group to stir panic both among Russian settlers and government, were the Orthodox missionaries, who noticed a massive retreat of baptized Altaians into a new faith:

It seems that the missionaries first noticed the meaning of what was happening and realized its danger for their mission. Indeed, not only the pagans, but also baptized Altaians, who renounced Christianity and adopted “their own” faith, went to pray to Tereng...<sup>21</sup>

Missionaries and local Orthodox authorities, especially, the Bishop of Biysk and the head of Altai Mission, Makarii, tried to alert police and other civil authorities to the fact of “unrest among Kalmyks.” Interestingly, the authorities<sup>22</sup> did not notice any “politics” in the movement:

At the place in question (Tereng – L.Sh) we saw 4000 people, who were praying. There were no strangers or suspicious individuals. The gathering was strictly religious. These people fancied that Chet Chelpan, Chugul and Kul received from the Sun God the directions to make a prayer meeting.<sup>23</sup>

On May 30, the Biysk Police Deputy and several policemen visited the meeting again. They produced a different report – one that changed the fate of Ak Jang for a long time to come:

Chelpanov who stood in the center of the crowd, with his hand raised up, repeating “Oh, tsar Burkhan-Oirot-*Yapon*<sup>24</sup>” and did not answer the questions of the deputy... ..By this faith once kalmyks prayed with their tsar Oirot who went

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<sup>21</sup> L.Sherstova, 59. For the Russian original see Appendix 2, entry 12.

<sup>22</sup> As evident from their reports in Maidurova, N.A. and Tadina, N.A. *Burkhanism: Dokumenty i Materialy*, pp.227-230.

<sup>23</sup> The report of May, 26 by the Head of the Biysk County Precinct, in L.Sherstova, p.25. For the Russian original see Appendix 2, entry 13

<sup>24</sup> Japan in Russian sounds “Yaponiia”.

beyond the sea into the land where now is tsar of *Japan*,<sup>25</sup> became Burkhan and soon [he] will return to Altai...<sup>26</sup>

Except for the Deputy himself, nobody, as it turned out two years later in the court, heard any reference to anything “Japanese,” but the statement of the Deputy set wheels in motion at once. On June 5, Russian Telegraph Agency published a panic-stricken column about the “Japanese sabotage” in Siberia.<sup>27</sup> Soon, rumors of a “Japanese presence” and alleged Altai collaborationism reached Russian settlers who began alternating between panic and evacuation and brutal harassment of Altaians which occasionally ended with casualties (only among Altaians).<sup>28</sup> Soon, the Altai Orthodox Mission produced a “confirmation” of the “Japanese involvement”: In the prayer (presented above), “Bulun-Tokoi” (the capital of Dzungarian alliance) transformed into “Tokio,” and other prayers also suddenly acquired “Japanese references”<sup>29</sup> and vehement anti-Russian passages.

These rumors and the commotion created by them, soon resulted in dramatic events. On June, 21, 1904, a mob of “pious Russians” – about two thousand peasants, armed with clubs, pitchforks, whips and a few guns, mobilized by Mission<sup>30</sup> and police

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<sup>25</sup> it.mine (A.V.)

<sup>26</sup> Danilin, p. 100. For the Russian original see Appendix 2, entry 14.

<sup>27</sup> Sherstova, p. 27.

<sup>28</sup> Danilin, p. 87.

<sup>29</sup> Burkhanism: Dokumenty i Materialy, pp. 275-287. *Document # 36, The report of Altai Mission*. It seems that Burkhanist prayers presented by Danilin come from the same source, which makes their authenticity doubtful. L.Sherstova plainly states that not only “Japanese” passages, but also anti-Russian ones were fabricated. While I agree with her evaluation, unfortunately there is no proof, because the above-mentioned missionary reports are the only source of the prayers.

While L.Sherstova considers “Yapon-khan” to be a pure fabrication made either by the Police Deputy or by the missionaries, an Altai scholar B.Bedyurov and N.Ekeev, who wrote Afterword and comments for the work of Sherstova (Sherstova, pp.183-191), think that “Yapon-khan” is actually a misunderstood name, Rigden Gyapo (Japo) – the title of the Shambala King, and/or Maitreya. It is important to mention, however that both scholars belong to the “Buddhist” party in modern Ak Jang and, especially, were influenced by the ideas of N.Roerich .

<sup>30</sup> Before the departure of the mob, bishop Makarii organized a collective “blessing prayer” and addressed the crowd with the following words: “You are going to disperse unlawfully gathering kalmyks, who are preaching false doctrine and disobeying the authorities” (Sherstova, p.31)



authorities and accompanied by about a hundred policemen,<sup>31</sup> attacked the prayer meeting in Tereng, where more than 3000 Altaians were present at that moment.<sup>32</sup> The Altaians, who had no weapons, did not put up any resistance. Several Altaians were beaten to death, and many wounded. Thirty three persons, including Chot and Chugul<sup>33</sup>, were arrested. The mob looted both the camps in Tereng and neighboring Altaian villages. The next two years all of the arrested Ak Jang activists spent in jail. On May, 26, 1906, a long court session began in Tomsk, the central Siberian city at the time. The activists of Ak Jang were defended by lawyers who belonged to the anti-Tsarist “Populist” movement.<sup>34</sup>

After the Revolution of 1905, Populist and other leftist movements acquired strength and popularity. What was absolutely impossible in 1904 happened in 1906 – all of the arrested and accused activists of Ak Jang were acquitted and released. The defense proved that there was no sufficient evidence of any “Japanese connections” of Ak Jang – it turned out that *nobody* could remember the occasion of the alleged mentioning of “Yapon-khan” and “Tokio.”<sup>35</sup>

One of the issues on which the defense attorneys, Klements and others, built their case was proving that Ak Jang was, essentially, loyal to the Russian Imperial order. Thus, Klements built his account of Ak Jang in such a way that it presented the movement as a step from Shamanism to Christianity – a “naïve attempt” to create a religion, essentially

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<sup>31</sup> the mobilization began on June, 18, by Police Deputy (Sherstova, p.31).

<sup>32</sup> Danilin, p. 87-89

<sup>33</sup> Who was nearly raped and saved by a physician Barsov, who later produced the most (or the only) unbiased account of the events, preceding the pogrom and the pogrom itself.

<sup>34</sup> The Head of the Defence, D.A.Klements, was a famous Populist. He was given an assignment to investigate the nature of Ak Jang/Burkhanism by the Court and, having done so, he produced the first coherent account of it (Burkhanism: Dokumenty..., pp.30-40.)

<sup>35</sup> Burkhanizm: Dokumenty... pp.287-289 and Sherstova. L.Sherstova thoroughly analyses the court proceedings (two Chapters in her work, pp.24-54 and pp.152-181 are dedicated to this) and sums up the case.

inspired by Christian ideals and having numerous elements of the latter. While the motivations for creation of such a story were admirable, the consequence of it, being the first account of Ak Jang, was a creation of long-lasting<sup>36</sup> “academic myth” of alleged Christian-Shamanic syncretism of Ak Jang.

The “enemies” of Ak Jang, namely Mission, pursued another myth – of a “Lamaist – Mongolian – Chinese” plot behind the Ak Jang’s origin. The failure with proving the “Japanese influence” at the court did not entirely stop the missionaries in their attempts to perpetuate this myth. As late as 1911, Mission was still presenting the reports with the prayers mentioning “Yapon” and “Tokio”.<sup>37</sup> However, after 1906 (and the end of the Russian-Japanese war, after which the “Japanese connection” became less sensational) the strategy of presentation of Ak Jang by Mission changed. Now, the connection with the Chinese-Mongolian Lamas as the “agents” behind Ak Jang came to the fore. While there had been some connections between Ak Jang and Lamas,<sup>38</sup> they were superficial. However, the “Lamaist connection,” just like the previously mentioned “Christian influence,” created another academic myth. The story of “Japanese influence” was forgotten for the next 20 years, after which it suddenly surfaced in a very sinister form during the Stalinist purges. It cost the lives of almost all of the Ak Jang activists and many of its lay followers in the 1920s and 1930s.

#### **Further developments of Ak Jang: “routinization” and emergence of the priesthood.**

The arrest of the Ak Jang activists did not eliminate Ak Jang, but for two years, until all the arrested were released, there had been no information on its development. After the return of the activists to Altai, Ak Jang continued its spread, but changed its shape:

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<sup>36</sup> In the contemporary scholarship, presented in Znamenski, pp.238-239.

<sup>37</sup> Burkhanizm: Dokumenty... p.287.

<sup>38</sup> Again, L.Sherstova analyses it in detail ( Sherstova, pp. 27, 154-155, 160-161).

...[t]he trial of Burkhanists, unexpectedly for the government, turned, in fact, into the demonstration of colonial oppression of Altaians. This factor especially stimulated the continuation of the movement on its new (second) stage...  
... This verdict of the Tsarist court the leaders of Burkhanists used as a de-facto legalization of “white faith”...<sup>39</sup>

Thus, Ak jang continued developing and spreading throughout Altai. However, as it was developing, it had gradually undergone significant changes. First of all, it seems that it lost its character of “eschatological immediacy” – the expectations of the imminent and immediate “new world to come.” While Oirot, Shunu and other messianic figures remained prominent in the prayers and other practices of Ak Jang, their arrival was not expected as immediate anymore. As we will see, they became divine figures not unlike the Shamanic guardian spirits.<sup>40</sup>

Secondly, a very important change that happened to Ak Jang was the development of its own priesthood, *yarlykchi* (“messengers”) and of a set of prayers and standardized rituals.<sup>41</sup> While Chugul remained an important, nearly worshipped figure,<sup>42</sup> for many years, Chot practically disappeared from the Ak Jang “scene” after his arrest and release. When ethnographers and other travelers met him in 1910s, he was no different from any other Altaian.

The background of the members of the new priesthood, *yarlykchi*, was diverse. Some of them clearly belonged to the Altaian aristocracy, either wealthy householders or *zaisans*, the leaders of the *seoks*, while others were “ordained” because of their personal charisma, or status as elders in their community. Still others were the *white shamans* who

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<sup>39</sup> Danilin, 111. For the Russian original see Appendix 2, entry 15

<sup>40</sup> In general, at a closer look at the first phase (1904-1905) of Ak Jang, we see that most of the information on the “radical eschatology” of the initial Ak Jang message came not from the Altaians, but from their adversaries, who used it to stir the situation leading to the attack and arrest. Thus, we cannot even be sure if the “radical eschatology” of Ak Jang ever existed. In any case, after 1906 it never manifested. The only “radical” and well-recorded activity of the Ak Jang adherents was their continuous harassment of shamans.

<sup>41</sup> Danilin (p.112) dates the emergence of *yarlykchi* as early as 1905.

<sup>42</sup> Danilin, p. 111. Chugul was “employed” as a person with *charisma of blessing* and a healer.

converted to Ak Jang after having recognized its similarity with their practices.<sup>43</sup> Both women and men were becoming *yarlykchi*. Some were joining the Ak Jang priesthood after having experienced a state similar to “shamanic calling.” After 1906, Ak Jang continued gaining popularity among Altaians. In 1914, according to the account of M.Sokolov, who traveled around Altai for three years, only 10% of Altaians remained faithful to shamanic practices.<sup>44</sup> As Ak Jang developed its practices, it also began to change and develop “sects.”

The “main *yarlykchi*” who came to prominence during the arrest of Chot Chelpanov, Tyryi Agemchi, organized and standardized the ritual. He implemented a special “order,” *shaby*, young men and women who assisted the *yarlykchi* at his/her services. Before becoming a *yarlykchi*, Tyryi Agemchi worked as a translator for the Russian government agent in Mongolia and frequently visited Mongolian Buddhist monasteries. He brought to Ak Jang a peculiar “fad” – the use of Buddhist artifacts at the Ak Jang services.<sup>45</sup>

Others changed the practice as well. While the key deities and semi-divine figures specific exclusively to Ak Jang – Ak Burkhan, Uch Kurbustan, Oirod and others, remained the focal figures of the religion, it quickly began to appropriate older, traditional deities of Altaians, especially the *Jajyk* - a shapeless deity which served as the messenger between Sky Gods and humans, including shamans.<sup>46</sup> *Jajyk*, as the

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<sup>43</sup> Danilin, pp. 119 – 125.

<sup>44</sup> Danilin, 126 and Burkhanizm... pp. 291-306

<sup>45</sup> This is one of the reasons for seeing “Buddhist influences” in Ak Jang. As we will see later, the borrowing of the Buddhist artifacts was not, in fact, an influence over the content of the religion (in the sense that it became more “Buddhist”). These artifacts were used in a manner very similar to the use of “foreign objects” in cargo movements.

<sup>46</sup> *Jajyk* is a deity whose presence in the pre-modern Turkic-Mongolian tradition is not documented. However, a deity with this or different name and exactly the same functions (of a messenger) is present

intermediary – a “living connection”<sup>47</sup> between Ak Burkhan - Uch-Kurbustan and people, gained enormous prominence. Different “sects” addressed different Jajyks – kerel<sup>48</sup>-jajyk, many-jajyk, or koyon-jajyk:

The setting sun, golden kerel,  
Almighty, the guardian of the house.  
With the golden rainbow four guardians  
Guard us from the evil spirit.  
From the dark mind of evil *aza*<sup>49</sup> they protect,  
The front corner [of the yurt] is guarded  
By almighty White Burkhan.<sup>50</sup>

However, despite all regional “mutations,” Ak Jang kept on developing as a coherent unity. It experienced some setbacks in 1915 when many *yarlykchi* died from the typhoid during the epidemic. Since they had no “powers” to save their flock from the same disease, some Ak Jang followers returned to shamanic help or got baptized.<sup>51</sup> Ak Jang proved to be unifying force for Altaians, and manifested itself as such on several occasions in the 1910s and 1920s. In 1914-1916, *yarlykchi* and other followers of Ak Jang protested against the draft of Altaians to the Russian Army (1st World War). Again, eschatological motifs of Ak Jang came to prominence.

Finally, in 1918, already after the Communist Revolution and during Civil War, a unique event happened in Altai: Altai intellectuals, among them the famous Altai artist Choros-Gurkin and physician Tiber-Petrov and other influential people attempted to organize “Karakorum-Altai Executive Committee” – an independent government of Altai and neighboring territories: Tuva and Khakassia. While all published information about

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among all contemporary Turkic and Mongolian traditions and is very important, which may indicate its ancient character.

<sup>47</sup> Maybe, somewhat similar to the Holy Ghost in Pentecostal Movements.

<sup>48</sup> “shining”

<sup>49</sup> General title of evil spirits – Erlik’s demons, ghosts, etc.

<sup>50</sup> The prayer to kerel-jajyk by Tyryi Agemchi. Danilin, p.122. For the Russian original, see Appendix 2, entry 16.

<sup>51</sup> Danilin, p. 125.

this government does not tell much about its ideology, except for pointing at “capitalist-nationalistic counterrevolutionary elements” that constituted the government,<sup>52</sup> A.M. Sagalaeв, on the basis of carefully studying photographs of the session of the office, finds the unmistakable presence of elements of Ak Jang religion at the stage during sessions.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, the character of the address to the opening session of the Office by its chairman, V.I.Anuchin, shows the clearly recognizable pathos of Turkic-Mongolian supra-ethnic, or “imperial” consolidation under the leadership of a kagan, traditional for the pre-modern Turks and Mongols:

“We aim at unification of the lands of the former “Oiroт state” in an autonomous republic. This is not difficult to do, and this is why. The population of Altai Highlands, Mongolian Altai, Khakass, Uriankhais, Soyots (i.e.Tuvans – L.P.) and the population of Dzungaria are the same tribe, same clan; language, customs – they all have the same ones, they all are “kizhi.”<sup>54</sup> Once they were all a great people, Oiroт. It is necessary to unite them in one family, in one state, because they are abandoned, and yearn for the unification. They will form a great Asian republic.”<sup>55</sup>

and:

Aiming at exciting the nationalistic sentiment among the participants of the session, Anuchin... ..was praising the ancient “Oiroт” state, i.e. the feudal Dzungaria... ..Following this report by Anuchin, the meeting voted for the organization of the Oiroт Republic...<sup>56</sup>

In the following years, approximately until the first half of the 1930s, Ak Jang continued to be practiced by the majority of the Altaians. However, one after another, the waves of persecution, now by Communists, came upon it. Many *yarlykchi* allied

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<sup>52</sup> Potapov, *Ocherki*... pp.383-385. The Karakorum Office was eliminated by Communists a year later, and all of its delegates were either executed or eventually died in the camps.

<sup>53</sup> Sagalaeв, A.M. *Altai v Zerkale Mifa*. (Altai in the Mirror of Myth). Novosibirsk: “Nauka,” 1992, p.167

<sup>54</sup> “people”

<sup>55</sup> from Potapov, 385 (see Appendix 2, entry 2)

<sup>56</sup> Potapov, 385. (see Appendix 2, entry 2)

themselves with the White Army,<sup>57</sup> the anti-Communist force during the Civil War, and fought against the Red Guards (Communists), which, after the Communist power was secured in Altai in the late 1920s, had tragic consequences for them. After the Civil War was over, the followers of Ak Jang tried to continue practicing the religion, but now they were facing the anti-religious campaigns of the 1920s-1930s.<sup>58</sup>

During Stalin's purges, millions of people were arrested and executed on the basis of their alleged "contacts with capitalist saboteurs." In the beginning of 1930, the bizarre rumor about connections between Ak Jang and Japanese spies, invented by missionaries, was resurrected.<sup>59</sup> As a result, most of the active Ak Jang followers, both *yarlykchi* and lay people, were imprisoned and executed during 1930s and 1940s. The religion seemingly ceased to exist, and no interpretation of it besides the one offered by official Soviet propaganda, was allowed until the 1990s.

To eliminate all the notions of Oirot from the collective Altai mind, even the title of the Altai, Oirot Autonomous Region, which, according to L.P.Potapov, "received the name Oirot not without influence of the local bourgeois nationalists"<sup>60</sup> was changed to "Gorno-Altai Autonomous Region" in 1948. Thus, as we see, the history of the first period of the development of Ak Jang ends in the 1930s, with the persecution and seemingly total elimination of this religion. However, in the late 1980s, as soon as the practice of religion in the USSR was no longer a criminal offense, Ak Jang re-emerged and continued vigorous development. As we will see in the Chapter 5, its second

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<sup>57</sup> Danilin, p. 146.

<sup>58</sup> Still, in 1927-34, Danilin found many practicing *yarlykchi*.

<sup>59</sup> It is hard to say whether the famous Russian Anthropologist, the Director of the Institute of Anthropology and Ethnography, L.P.Potapov, was personally responsible for re-creating this allegation, or just publicized it in his works (L.P. Potapov, *Ocherki...* ). He even reproduced the falsified Ak Jang prayers mentioning "Yapon," "Tokio," etc. in his monographs. Until his death in 2001 he had not changed his views.

<sup>60</sup> Potapov, L.P. *Ocherki...*p. 392

emergence brought out more diversity in its vision and interpretation by its adherents than in the formative period.

Most of the sources on Ak Jang, academic or otherwise, were either created during this first period of its existence, or dealt only with it. In the next chapter, these sources and the interpretations of Ak Jang are going to be analyzed.



### **Chapter 3. Ak Jang and its interpretations: a critical review of the sources.**

The records of Ak Jang are scarce. However, the scarcity of the sources is not the main problem. The main problem is that all records of Ak Jang, published or not, can be used as a case study of the influence of ideology on research. Most of the sources on Ak Jang that were published before the mid- to late 1980s, pursued in their descriptions and interpretations of Ak Jang goals, which were very far from objective academic research – they “tailored” their interpretations according to the demands of the ruling ideology, be it pre-communist ideology of the Russian Empire or later Soviet ideology.<sup>1</sup> Thus, while these sources presented very few verifiable facts on Ak Jang, a number of ideological and academic myths about Ak Jang were generated by them.

As a result, this chapter, the review of the sources, is dedicated mostly to the analysis and deconstruction of the biased interpretations of Ak Jang which resulted in the creation of the main academic-ideological myth, namely that of the syncretistic character of Ak Jang. In other words, the goal of this chapter is to show that Ak Jang is an indigenous rather than imported, Altai tradition.

There is a number of short accounts of Ak Jang, made by a variety of eye-witnesses of the movement – missionaries, police, journalists, travelers, and others. These accounts, being the earliest descriptions of the movement, are important, although not

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<sup>1</sup> Ideally, to “prepare the stage” for the reconstruction and interpretation of Ak Jang in this paper, one would have to “deconstruct” and trace the biases and “ideological contaminations” of every single source. However, this topic (academic research in Anthropology and religion and the Soviet ideological influence) alone, whether only about the “case” of Ak Jang or more generally, can easily occupy several large volumes. To some degree, L.Sherstova did the source analysis for Ak Jang in her work, Taina Doliny Tereng. R.Hutton, in his work, Shamans: Siberian Spirituality and the Western Imagination. New York: Hambledon And London, 2001, traced some of more general trends of interference between Communist ideology and the study of indigenous religious traditions in Russia.

always trustworthy. While the academic research of Ak Jang has been very limited, it is possible to name five persons who have played the most significant role in it. They are:

A.V.Anokhin, A.Danilin, L.Potapov, A.Sagalaev, and L.Sherstova.

A.V.Anokhin (d.1931) lived in Altai from the 1910 until 1931. While working as a music teacher in Ulala (Gorno-Altai), he actively studied folklore, music, and religion of the Altaians. His work, Materialy po Shamanstvu u Altaitsev,<sup>2</sup> published in Leningrad in 1924, remains the most complete and detailed account of Altai Shamanism up to date.

Anokhin studied Ak Jang from the 1910 to 1930, and was able to observe its developments. While in his initial account<sup>3</sup> he interprets Ak Jang as a syncretistic movement, later he radically changed his views. However, none of Anokhin's data on Ak Jang, with an exception of the mentioned short article, has been published. His large archive is the property of the Institute of Anthropology and Ethnography in St.Petersburg, and the access to it is very limited.

Another person who extensively studied Ak Jang "in the field" (in 1927-29 and 1934-35) was A.Danilin (1896-1942). His PhD Dissertation was dedicated to Ak Jang. Published in 1993, it remains the only published source with detailed description of Ak Jang as a religion.

The role of L.P.Potapov in the study of Ak Jang was different. L.P.Potapov (1905-2001) was born in Altai and began his academic career as a protégé of Anokhin in the 1924. By the late 1930s, he became one of the most influential figures in Soviet Anthropology and Ethnography. His area of expertise was Siberia, especially the Turkic groups of the

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<sup>2</sup> Anokhin, A.V. Materialy po Shamanstvu u Altaitsev (Materials on Altai Shamanic Practices), Leningrad: 1924 and Gorno-Altai: Ak Chechek, 1994

<sup>3</sup> Anokhin A.V. "Burkhanizm na Zapadnom Altae" (Burkhanism in the Western Altai). *Sibirskie Ogni*, 1927, #5, pp.162-167

Southern Siberia, including the Altaians. From 1948 on, he was a Director of the Leningrad Institute of Anthropology and Ethnography, and de-facto – the “Soviet Anthropologist #1.” Almost all currently active ethnographers and anthropologists who specialize in the study of Siberia were his students. While being a foremost specialist in the study of Siberian cultures and religion, L.Potapov also played a crucial role in the construction of the Soviet ideological paradigm as applied to the aboriginal cultures as well as to scholarship.

In the case of Ak Jang – both its practice by Altaians and academic study of it, the influence of Potapov was crucial. In the late 1930s, he produced a verdict on Ak Jang, interpreting it as a result of the Japanese subversive activity, which, due to his authority, effectively terminated both the practice of Ak Jang and its study for the next fifty years. A.M. Sagalaev, a professor of History at Tomsk State University, has been the first scholar who resumed the study of Ak Jang in the mid-1980s. Bypassing Potapov’s ideological interpretation of the movement, he has been attempting to describe it in the context of Altai culture. His views on Ak Jang underwent evolution, similar to Anokhin’s: While in his early works he sees it a syncretistic movement, in his later publications he acknowledges its indigenous character and origin.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, L.Sherstova is a historian, currently working in Novosibirsk. He has defended a PhD Dissertation on Ak Jang in Leningrad in 1985. Her dissertation and the book, Taina Doliny Tereng,<sup>5</sup> published in 1997, while important in their own right, signaled the end of the Soviet ideological legacy in the interpretation of the movement.

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<sup>4</sup> This change in Sagalaev’s views has been the result of the release of new information on Ak Jang, namely, the publication of works by Danilin and Sherstova as well as the easier access to the archives in the post-Soviet Russia.

<sup>5</sup> The Mystery of Tereng Valley, Gorno-Altaiisk, Ak Chechek, 1997

The order of the sources' presentation is not going to follow the chronological order of their creation. The fact of the matter is that all of the seminal sources – namely, the works of Danilin and Anokhin, which contain detailed descriptions of Ak Jang and were written in the 1920s and 1930s, have not been available to either general public or specialists until 1990s. The work of Danilin, Burkhanism, the only monograph on Ak Jang and the only source of detailed information on its theology and practice, was written in 1930s, but was published only in 1994. Another, very important source, the papers of Anokhin, has not been yet published. Also, the collection of primary sources made by Maidurova and Tadina,<sup>6</sup> was published only in 1997. This means that the late Soviet and post-Soviet researchers<sup>7</sup> who tried to reconstruct the nature of Ak Jang in their works, had to rely on a very little information, which, in addition, often was incorrect. While all of the sources, published in the 1910s and later in the Soviet period, consistently tried to interpret Ak Jang while having very few reliable facts about the nature of this movement, a number of “myths” about it, which persist to this day, have been created.

Ak Jang is presented as a) a transient, haphazardly formed movement, resulting from the Russian colonial oppression and the crisis that ensued, or b) as a syncretistic movement, which borrowed much of its ideology and practices either from Christianity, or from Buddhism, and the rest – from Shamanism, or finally, c) as a political movement, inspired by foreign influence.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Maidurova, N.A. and Tadina, N.A. Burkhanism: Dokumenty i Materialy. (Burkhanism: Documents and Materials). Gorno-Altaiisk, 1994

<sup>7</sup> E.g., A.M. Sagalaev in his earliest work, Mifologija i Verovaniia Altaitsev: Tsentral'no-aziatskie Vliianiia. (The Mythology and Beliefs of Altaians: Central Asian Influences). Novosibirsk: “Nauka,” 1984

<sup>8</sup> This last interpretation, belonging to the Orthodox Mission and later “picked up” by L.Potapov, is acknowledged by all post-Soviet students of Ak Jang as a blatant lie, typical for the Stalinist era and not based on any facts whatsoever. However, it is necessary to remember that this was the *only* published and accessible information on Ak Jang for fifty years!

## The first reports

The earliest cluster of sources on Ak Jang belongs to its early formative period, 1904-1913. Danilin (in 1937) counts about twenty records.<sup>9</sup> Maidurova and Tadina<sup>10</sup> collected 39 documents, both published (articles in newspapers, etc) and unpublished (telegrams, protocols of the court, missionary reports and others).

Many of these documents are unreliable – they are either superficial, or biased. However, all information on the first years of Ak Jang is based on them. These documents served as the source in the reconstruction of the first years of Ak Jang (especially, the first months, until the arrest of its activists) in Danilin’s work as well as in the book by Sherstova and the reconstruction above.

Generally, the documents in question can be divided into three categories: The testimonies of the missionaries and police authorities, the research of the court defense (for the purpose of building the defense case for Chot Chelpanov and others) and the records of various, more or less random, witnesses of the events. As was mentioned above, Mission and police documents give almost no objective information on the development of Ak Jang. From its very beginning, the Mission began interpreting the movement as a “Japanese subversive action” (later changed to “Chinese-Mongolian Lamaist”) and saw the movement as “pure politics” – among other things, falsifying “first-hand” information on Burkhanist claims, prayers, and practices.<sup>11</sup> As L.Sherstova

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<sup>9</sup> Danilin, pp.4-9.

<sup>10</sup> Burkhanizm: Dokumenty...

<sup>11</sup> It is important to mention that, while police records see Ak Jang as “unrest among the Kalmyks” and are, as a rule, negative about it, they are much milder than the Mission reports. For example, in his report, police deputy, Buchinskiy sees “no politics” in the movement and, unexpectedly, provides a very brief, but valuable account of the practices of Ak Jang. (Sherstova, p.25)

reported in her book, they repeatedly tried to connect various accidental travelers from Mongolia, both Lamas and lay people, to the “subversive character” of Ak Jang.<sup>12</sup>

The reports of the defendants of the Ak Jang activists – Klements, Sokolov, Shvetsov and others, some of which<sup>13</sup> were published after the trial, provide more information both on the “first events” of the development of Ak Jang and on its practices. However, their presentations are also very abbreviated and heavily “interpret” the movement. The objective of these presentations was not academic research; the lawyers were aiming at creating a picture of Ak Jang that would lead to the acquittal of their clients in court. The general pattern of these presentations can be summed up as follows: Ak Jang is a transient movement, created, in part, by a socio-economic crisis resulting from the abuse of Altaians by the Russian colonial administration and Orthodox Mission – especially, by the depriving of the Altaians of their traditional pastures.

Nonetheless, in this view the movement has absolutely no political agenda – it is a desperate and naive<sup>14</sup> attempt of Altaians to create a “religious hope” and consolidation:

D.Klements deliberately diminishes political side of the story both in his articles and his trial speeches: old Siberian Populist, known as a fighter for the rights of the “aboriginals,” naturally was trying to soften the sentence.<sup>15</sup>

In some reports Ak Jang was compared to the first Christians and other “movements of the oppressed” – apparently, to address the liberal sensibilities of the jury.

Another strong tendency in this category of reports is their constant comparison of Ak Jang with a form of Christianity. While Ak Jang is never called a “Christian” movement,

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<sup>12</sup> Sherstova, pp. 27, 31-32 and further.

<sup>13</sup> See *Burkhanizm: Dokumenty...*, entries 2 (pp. 30-35), 3 (pp.35-40), 5 (pp.42-52) and 39 (pp. 291-307)

<sup>14</sup> The “naïve” character of the movement is strongly and repeatedly highlighted in these reports. It is likely that this was a tactical maneuver on the part of Klements and others, helping them to represent the “lack of danger” in Ak Jang *contra* “sinister” interpretation by the missionaries.

<sup>15</sup> Danilin, p. 27. For the Russian original, see Appendix 2, entry 17

it is frequently implied that many of the patterns such as dualism, anti-shamanic tendencies and rejection of bloody sacrifices, consolidation, alleged monotheism, messianic expectations and others were, in fact, an imitation of Christianity and, therefore, a step towards it. In more “academically sound” works of the same period<sup>16</sup> Ak Jang is not linked to “Christian influence” as directly as in Klements’ reports. Anokhin presented Ak Jang as a “progressive” movement from “polytheistic Shamanism” towards monotheism.

### **The field study of Ak Jang: Anokhin, Danilin, and others.**

After the Communist Revolution of 1917 and the end of Civil War, there was a short period, from 1917 to approximately the end of 1920s, when Ak Jang was still widely practiced, the “hard” Imperial form of Stalinist ideology was not yet imposed either on religious practitioners or academics, and some opportunity for the academic research of Ak Jang was available.

While the massive purges of Stalin’s period had not yet begun, this did not mean that ethnographers who worked in Altai were entirely free of Communist ideology, either imposed or sincerely believed in. However, at this point, the scholarly interpretation of the movement continued the “populist” trend of the 1910s, according to which various sectarian, especially ethnic, revitalisation movements were the expression of the masses’ tendencies to liberation from Tsarist Imperial (and Christian Orthodox, as its religious representative) oppression.

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<sup>16</sup> E.g., in the work by A.V. Anokhin, written in 1910 (Anokhin, A.V. Manuscript (property of the Institute of Altaic Studies, Gorno-Altai), Part1. *Burkhanizm v Zapadnom Altae* (Burkhanism in the Western Altai), 1910) but published (in abridged version) only in 1927( Anokhin A.V. “*Burkhanizm na Zapadnom Altae*” (Burkhanism in the Western Altai). *Sibirskie Ogni*, 1927, #5, pp.162-167). Krader presents Ak Jang on the basis of this publication. Anokhin’s first (and only) publication on Ak Jang belongs to the discussed category of reports in its attempts to represent Ak Jang as an “innocent oddity.” Later (in 1924 and 1931), he returned to the analysis of Ak Jang (Manuscript of the Institute of Altaic Studies, Parts 2 and 3) and radically changed his views on it.

During this brief period, two ethnographers worked in Altai – Anokhin (1910-1931 (d.1931)) and Danilin (1927-29 and 1934-35). They remain the only people who produced detailed accounts of Ak Jang practices. While they belonged to the “second” wave of study of Ak Jang, their work was not published at the time, and thus, did not enter the “evolution” of the academic discourse on Ak Jang until very recently.<sup>17</sup>

However, one early and short paper by Anokhin, namely “Burkhanizm v Zapadnom Altae,” must be discussed due to the fact that information on Ak Jang presented in it, laid the foundation for all attempts to reconstruct the movement, both by Russian and Western scholars. Anokhin wrote this paper in 1910, during his first year in Altai. The paper was based, as it seems, on rumors and some brief written reports. This paper was published much later, in 1927, in a local Siberian journal, *Sibirskie Ogni*, and, for a long time to come, remained the only published and hence, accessible description of Ak Jang - Burkhanism. All of the researchers who attempted to present Ak Jang as a reconstruction and bypass the Communist falsifications of it, had to rely on this paper as their main source.<sup>18</sup> Anokhin is a very well-respected researcher, and his genuine love for Altai and Altaians is acknowledged by Altaians themselves. It is unlikely that his presentation of Ak Jang in the above-mentioned paper was dictated by any ideological biases – he simply used the material that he could access at the time. The picture of Ak Jang that emerges from his description, based on fairly unreliable and “secondary” sources, as well as on some analysis of Altai “Buddhist” legends (which later were proven to be false<sup>19</sup>), is as

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<sup>17</sup> Danilin’s book: Danilin, A.G. Burkhanizm (iz istorii natsional’no-osvoboditelnogo dvizheniia v Gornom Altae). (Burkhanism (from the history of a national liberation movement in Gorny Altai). Gorno-Altaiisk: Ak Chechek, 1993, Gorno-Altaiisk Publishing House, and Anokhin’s still remains in manuscript – although many researchers “privately,” without reference to it, seem to have consulted it.

<sup>18</sup> Among these researchers – Krader and Sagalaev (in his early works).

<sup>19</sup> Muiteva, Commentaries in: Verbitsky, pp. 257-269.



follows: Ak Jang is a syncretistic movement, a hybrid, as it were, between Shamanism and Buddhism, with a strong prominence of the latter. This paper profoundly influenced both Anokhin's contemporaries and later researchers. Later on, Anokhin, having gained first-hand experience with religious practices of Altai, including those of Ak Jang, completely changed his opinion, but his later, much deeper and more detailed interpretations of Ak Jang, still remains unpublished.

A few more semi-professional researchers produced descriptions of Ak Jang in this period. The most articulate are the works by Bakai and Mamet.<sup>20</sup> Both are interpreting Ak Jang as a liberation movement with religious overtones. It is presented movement, which was an example of "class-struggle" of the poor Altaians against their oppressors – local aristocrats and Russians. The religious character of the movement is essentially likened to the medieval European peasants' revolts.

Soon, however, the rise of Stalinism changed the approach to Ak Jang. The first "academic" victim of the purges, in 1931, was L.P.Mamet who was accused in the central Communist Russian newspaper, "Pravda," of "considering of the national question ignoring the classes and class struggle."<sup>21</sup> Mamet had to repent in the same newspaper. He wrote:

In the book "Oirotiia" I made numerous mistakes of anti-Leninist nature, which objectively serve as support to both imperialistic chauvinism and local nationalism and make the book malevolent... ..I promise to struggle to correct these mistakes...<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Bakai's work is not available (Danilin refers to it in his article, Bakai N. "Legendarnyi Oiroi-Khan (iz istorii natsional'no-osvoboditel'nogo dvizheniia na Altae)." (Legendary Oiroi-Khan (from the history of the national liberation movement in Altai)) *Sibirskie Ognii*, 1926, #4  
L.P. Mamet worked in 1920s as a lecturer of the Communist University of the Workers of the East. He dedicated a chapter to Ak Jang-Burkhanism in his book of essays, Mamet, L.P. *Oirotiia*. Moscow: 1930 and Gorno-Altaiisk: Ak Chechek, 1994.

<sup>21</sup> Sherstova, 176

<sup>22</sup> Sherstova, 176. For the Russian original, see Appendix 2, entry 17.

According to Sherstova, later, as a consequence of the “mistake,” Mamet was executed.<sup>23</sup>

### **The 1930s: The myth of “Japanese subversive activities” resurfaced**

The direction, or rather directive, concerning both “general” and academic treatment of Ak Jang, which was accepted from 1930s on, was the resurrection of the patently false, promoted in 1904 by the missionaries “Japanese subversive activity” interpretation of it. The remaining active followers of Ak Jang were imprisoned and executed,<sup>24</sup> and the academic study of Ak Jang was terminated.

The “Japanese” version of Ak Jang was presented by L.P.Potapov – a classic of Russian Ethnography and Anthropology, laureate of many high awards, and the former (d. 2001) director of the Institute of Anthropology and Ethnography in Leningrad. Also, for more than 40 years, he held a “monopoly” on the study of Altai and neighboring regions (Tuva, Khakassia). Essentially, he has been the determining influence in the interpretation of the South Siberian religious traditions practically until now.

In his monumental monograph, Ocherki po Istorii Altaitsev,<sup>25</sup> for which L.P.Potapov received the Stalin’s Award,<sup>26</sup> he dedicated a chapter to Burkhanism (Ak Jang).<sup>27</sup> There, he presented some elementary features of Ak Jang practices (about two pages), having dedicated the rest of the essay to the “unveiling” of the “conspiracy

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<sup>23</sup> The career of Danilin was ruined by his academic supervisor, Potapov. In 1932, he published a paper, “*Altai Burkhanism and its counterrevolutionary character*” in the central Ethnographic journal of USSR – apparently, to protect himself and his main work, the monograph. However, his monograph was not published (until 1993, in abridged version), and he later died from hunger (in 1942) in Leningrad.

<sup>24</sup> Andrei Znamenski, the author of the book, Shamanism and Christianity, where one of the chapters is dedicated to Burkhanism-Ak Jang, in the last 3-4 years has been working in the Russian archives (in particular, KGB archives) where he found many records of interrogations and torture of the Ak Jang followers. In personal communication, he told me that he was planning to publish a paper, dedicated to the whole subject of their persecution.

<sup>25</sup> Potapov, L.P. Ocherki po Istorii Altaitsev (Studies in Altaian History), Moscow-Leningrad: Academy of Sciences of the USSR, 1953.

<sup>26</sup> The highest acknowledgment of the academic achievement in USSR in Stalin period.

<sup>27</sup> Ocherki..., pp. 343-394.

between the exploiters' classes and Japanese espionage" in the formation of Ak Jang.<sup>28</sup>

All falsified prayers mentioning "Tokio" and "Yapon-khan," collected by the missionaries, are presented in the book as "legitimate" Ak Jang materials.<sup>29</sup> L.P.Potapov sums up his lengthy verdict on the nature of Ak Jang with the following statement:

It is wrong to consider burkhanism as a national liberation movement, and as such – as a progressive element in the history of the Altaians. Burkhanism is absolutely not a movement aimed at national freedom and independence of Altaians, allegedly directed against tsarist colonial oppression. On the contrary, burkhanism was a reactionary nationalistic movement, fabricated by the Japanese imperialists... ..Orientation towards separation of Altai from Russia, the movement of Altaians under the protectorate of Japan, which was the interest of the Japanese imperialistic circles, was also profitable to the oligarch-nationalistic top of the Altai society, which aimed at monopoly in the exploitation of their compatriots...<sup>30</sup>

The rest of Potapov's presentation of Ak Jang is a delirious and morbid construct of a "conspiracy" in the best traditions of Stalinist spy-mania. While it is difficult to condemn Potapov for this and other similar presentations of Ak Jang made during Stalin's period, it is worth mentioning that he has never changed his opinion on Ak Jang, and as late as late the 1980s was vehemently opposing to any study of it.

### **Late Soviet and post-Soviet reconstructions of Ak Jang.**

It was only since the late 1980s that the first attempts to reconsider Ak Jang-Burkhanism have been made. In 1985, L.Sherstova defended a PhD dissertation: "*Altai-*

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<sup>28</sup> In his evaluation of Ak Jang as a political movement aiming at the separation of Altai from Russia/USSR, L.P. Potapov continues an old Russian tradition of "securing the Eastern periphery," which was actively promoted by Yekaterina the 2<sup>nd</sup> in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and continued throughout 19<sup>th</sup> century in such activities as the expeditions of Przheval'sky, the network of Cossack garrisons in Siberia and so on. The Russian Empire as well as its Soviet heir have always seen Native movements in Siberia, religious or others, as a threat to the Russian influence and as separatist. It is difficult to say, to what extent Potapov saw his interpretation of Ak Jang as "geopolitically justified." However, the fact of falsification of information on Ak Jang and the promotion by Potapov of the falsified data, remains and is relevant to this paper.

<sup>29</sup> E.g., pp.348-349. Also, a number of "Japanese" prayers that I was not able to find among the missionaries' forgeries, have been added.

<sup>30</sup> Ocherki, 350. For the Russian original, see Appendix 2, entry 19.

*kizhi v kontse XIX- nachale XX v.: Istoriia formirovaniia etnokonfessional'noi obshnosti.*”<sup>31</sup> Her work was based on the “primary” documents on Ak Jang, the reports mentioned above. Thus, the information on the content of Ak Jang, available to her at the time, was very sparse. Using these sources, she postulated two defining characteristics of Ak Jang. The first one was similar to the early Soviet views: Ak Jang was a reaction of the indigenous population to the crisis brought about by Russian colonialism. The second, very important observation she made was that Ak Jang was the “transcendence” of the previously seok-based (and seok-limited) self-identity of Altaians, which was, among other things, represented by the shamans, and, as such, was an attempt to create an ethno-confessional unity – a religion, which would address all of the Altaians and culturally consolidate them. In her dissertation, L.Sherstova did not speculate about the origins of Ak Jang such as whether or not it derived from Shamanism, etc. Also, she limited her research to the formative years of the movement. Though she knew that Ak Jang was still (or rather, again) being practiced,<sup>32</sup> admitting to this in 1985 was still dangerous for both practitioners of Ak Jang and scholars.

Another person who attempted a re-interpretation of Ak Jang was A.M.Sagalaev,<sup>33</sup> a Siberian scholar specializing in the analysis of Siberian mythology, who uses in his work concepts similar to Structuralism and the theories of V. Propp. In his earliest work where he briefly touches the mystery of Ak Jang, drawing his information from the paper by Anokhin and (false) Altai “Buddhist” legends, Sagalaev

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<sup>31</sup> Sherstova, L. Altai-kizhi v kontse XIX – nachale XX v.(Istoriia formirovaniia etnokonfessional'noi obshnosti) (Altai-kizhi at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: A history of formation of an ethno-confessional unity). PhD Dissertation. Leningrad, 1985.

<sup>32</sup> As she mentions in Taina Doliny Tereng (p.180-181 ).

<sup>33</sup> Sagalaev, A.M. Mifologiya i Verovaniia Altaitsev: Tsentral'no-aziatskie Vliianiia. (The Mythology and Beliefs of Altaians: Central Asian Influences). Novosibirsk: “Nauka,” 1984, p.38-65

interprets it as a form of folk-Buddhism.<sup>34</sup> Later, however, he completely changes his views – to a large degree, having been influenced by the dissertation of L.Sherstova. In his later work,<sup>35</sup> he approaches Ak Jang as a religion, which draws its tenets mostly from the indigenous culture rather than from “imported,” Buddhist or Christian, elements.<sup>36</sup>

### **The post-Soviet publications of works on Ak Jang**

In 1993, the Gorno-Altai publishing house, Ak Chechek, published the work by A.G.Danilin, Burkhanism (iz istorii natsional’no-osvoboditel’nogo dvizheniya na Altae).<sup>37</sup> In the foreword to the book, its editor, V.P.Diakonova, tells the story of Danilin’s work in Altai and, later, the end of his career due to the “disagreement” with his supervisor, L.P.Potapov.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, pp.140- 178.

<sup>35</sup> Sagalaev, A.M., Oktiabr’skaia, I.V. Traditsionnoe Mirovozzrenie Tyurkov Iuzhnoi Sibiri: Znak i Ritual. (The traditional Views of Turks of Southern Siberia: Sign and Ritual). Novosibirsk: “Nauka,” 1990 and Sagalaev, A.M. Altai v Zerkale Mifa, pp.138-165 (“*The legend of the White Rider*”)

<sup>36</sup> ...[t]here is no ground to see Burkhanism as an Altaian version of Buddhism. From Buddhism, Altaians only borrowed some elements of the cult, often without any idea about their use in the host religion. Some elements were copied from the external elements of Buddhist rituals, but randomly and haphazardly. Burkhan of Altai hymns is not at all Buddha, but simply a convenient – due to its vagueness – denotation of some superior power. Burkhanism, which begun from the rejection of shamanism, limited its anti-shamanic activities to harassing the shamans themselves. Burkhanists left unaltered many elements of the [shamanic] rituals. The representatives of the good and evil, Ul’gen’ and Erlik, have disappeared, being replaced by the universal “burkhan,” identical to Ul’gen,’ and the rejection of Erlik became one of the main tasks of Burkhanism. Strictly speaking, the teaching did not create anything “new”: a “revival” of the characters of the historical folklore took place, and their names acquired different meaning in the changed historic-cultural context. The **Eternal** themes and images of Altai: milk, mountain, birch, homeland, good khan acquired a new life in Burkhanism. The main mythological source of Burkhanism was, at the last account, the local spiritual culture.(Sagalaev, *Altai v Zerkale Mifa*, p. 164)  
For the Russian original see Appendix 2, entry 20.

<sup>37</sup> Burkhanism (from the history of the national liberation movement in Altai).

<sup>38</sup> The reason for the postponing of the publication of the manuscript were the differences of opinion between the author and the chief editor, L.P.Potapov. The latter saw the monograph as giving too brief and vague characteristic of the social-economic reasons of the emergence of Burkhanism. Danilin was accused of not putting stress on political causes of Burkhanisms’ emergence in 1904-1905... ... [t]he editor especially regarded as a dangerous mistake the fact that A.G.Danilin did not notice the Japanophile nature of Burkhanism... ... A.G.Danilin provided an extant and substantiated response to this criticism of the chief editor. In his opinion, there were no documental facts that would have confirmed any Japanophile nature of Burkhanism. In his response he wrote:

This is what L.Sherstova says about Danilin's work:

In the beginning of 1930s the situation was becoming more difficult, and Danilin could not help noticing, how it was affecting the life of the population of Gorny Altai. He collected enormous amount of materials on burkhanism. However, he could not honestly and directly express it anymore. Thus he, as he thought, reached a compromise: in his paper (*the paper, Burkhanism and its counterrevolutionary nature, mentioned above – A.V.*), he abandons the point of view of the scholars of the 1920s and writes that burkhanism is a national liberation movement, but, catering to the political climate, says that it has counterrevolutionary character. The idiocy of this combination is clear to everyone. It seems that Danilin clearly understood the incompatibility of these evaluations. It also seems that he deliberately avoided analysis the development of burkhanism in the later years and its changes that followed the changes of the general political climate. This was his only chance to say at least something about this unique movement... ..In our times, after the merciless extermination of burkhanism and its followers, the materials, collected by A.G.Danilin are the only body of relatively complete information about it.<sup>39</sup>

The work by A.G. Danilin remains the only published source that deals with both theology and practices of Ak Jang in detail. Danilin's book, published from the set of manuscripts that were, as it seems, still in the process of editing, looks like it was written by three different persons with three different opinions on what Ak Jang was. Apparently, this "disconnectedness" of the work reflects the desperate attempts by Danilin to tailor and re-edit his work in such a way that it could be published despite the worsening ideological climate in the USSR.

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These miasmatic ideas were created and promoted by the government and missionaries. Burkhanists were oriented towards the Lamaist Mongolia... ..they spoke of common pre-shamanic faith, "white faith," which they had during Oirot-Shunu and Amyr-Sana. They spoke of the need of uniting on the old territory (hence – Bulan Tokoi). Thus, in this question, it is impossible, basing oneself on facts, postulate that the Altai oligarchs promoted any Japanophile program. (Diakonova, V.P. Foreword to Danilin, pp.10-11)  
For the original Russian text, see Appendix 2, entry 21.

Even in 1993, after the fall of Communist ideology, the work by Danilin was published not in Moscow or St.Petersburg, but in Gorno-Altai. The influence of L.P.Potapov was still very strong...

<sup>39</sup> Sherstova, 178-179. For the original Russian text, see Appendix 2, entry 22.

Some chapters (or parts of chapters) represent Ak Jang as a political – either liberation, or “counterrevolutionary,” movement – almost without reference to its religious aspects. Other chapters of the book see it as a religious movement, inspired to a large degree by Lamaism. Still other chapters (especially, Chapter 8 – “*Burkhanist Cult*”<sup>40</sup>) present a thorough analysis of the religious structure and content of Ak Jang, according to which the religion is neither a political movement, nor is it inspired or influenced by Buddhism (Lamaism).<sup>41</sup>

In 1994, a compendium of all early documents – police and trial reports, essays, the statements of the missionaries, real and falsified prayers, etc., a total of 38 records, collected by N.A.Maidurova and N.A.Tadina,<sup>42</sup> was published by the Gorno-Altai State University Press.<sup>43</sup> In the foreword, the authors acknowledge the work of L.Sherstova and A.Sagalaev in providing the “seeds” of an adequate interpretation of Ak Jang. Also, they trace the origins of many political, (e.g. “Japanese”) and religious, (e.g. “Lamaist”) myths-interpretations of Ak Jang.<sup>44</sup> In their opinion, Ak Jang is definitely not a political movement – it is a religion which, in 1994, was still being practiced and was developing:

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<sup>40</sup> Danilin, pp.153-199

<sup>41</sup> Chapter 8 (the last chapter) of Danilin’s work is the unique source of information on Ak Jang theology and practices. The original manuscript of Danilin’s book had more chapters on the religious structure and content of Ak Jang:

Chapter 9: Religious spots and places of prayer in Ust’-Kan region;

Chapter 10: Ongudai region;

Chapter 11: Shebalino region;

Chapter 12: Annual prayer cycle;

Chapter 13: Weddings and other community rituals among Burkhanists;

Chapter 14: Burkhanism among Teleuts;

Chapter 15: Biographies and genealogy of yarlykchi.

Thus, out of 7 chapters dedicated to the analysis of Ak Jang as a religion, only one (Chapter 8) is available in the published book. The chapters 1 to 7 of the published material are dealing mostly with historical and political aspects of Ak Jang’s emergence. We can only hope that the rest of the book will be found and published.

<sup>42</sup> they work at Institute of Altaic Studies (Gorno-Altai).

<sup>43</sup> Maidurova, N.A. and Tadina, N.A. Burkhanizm: Dokumenty i Materialy. (Burkhanism: Documents and Materials). Gorno-Altai, 1994

<sup>44</sup> Burkhanizm, pp.11-17.

Now, a deep and diverse analysis and evaluation of Burkhanism is required – not so much the analysis of its external, ritualistic form, but rather of its religious dogmatics and content; the search and analysis of prayers and songs of burkhanists should be a priority of such an analysis... ..it seems necessary that the history of “white faith” must become a subject of a separate research.<sup>45</sup>

In 1994, a book, Taina Doliny Tereng<sup>46</sup> by L.Sherstova was published in Ak Chechek Publishing House in Gorno-Altaiisk. This work was the substantially re-worked PhD Dissertation of L.Sherstova. While the “core” idea of the dissertation – the view of Ak Jang as the formation of an ethno-confessional unity, remained in the book as well, most of the book is dedicated to the analysis of the formative period of Ak Jang, and special attention is paid to the analysis of the “ideological abuse” of Ak Jang in the publications of the time as well as in the Soviet academic-ideological view of it including the stories of repression of Danilin, Bakai and others who “misinterpreted” Ak Jang in the eyes of Soviet ideology. To create a glimpse into the absurdity and brutality of the ideological atmosphere of that period, L.Sherstova ends her discussion with the following passage:

...I remember well the story of one man, maybe – the only one who let his pain out. The story, from which it is clear that Altai has forgotten neither Tereng nor what happened already in the Soviet times:  
He was arrested and got eight years in Kolyma camp. He did not know any Russian, so he did not understand what he was accused of... Three years later, already in the camp, having learned the language, he asked the guard to tell him what was he charged for. He laughed, “Don’t you know? You’re a Japanese spy!”  
For as long as historical science and the real past exist as if they were in the parallel worlds, it is difficult for them to reach one another across the sea of lies and falsifications...<sup>47</sup>

L.Sherstova acknowledges the contemporary existence of Ak Jang:

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<sup>45</sup> Burkhanizm... p.10. For the original Russian text, see Appendix 2, entry 23.

<sup>46</sup> Sherstova, L. Taina Doliny Tereng (The Mystery of Tereng Valley). Gorno-Altaiisk: Ak Chechek, 1997

<sup>47</sup> Sherstova, 180. For the original Russian text, see Appendix 2, entry 24



And what about burkhanism? “Ak jang” is alive. Just be careful and attentive, and especially – respectful. Signs and traces of this faith are scattered all over Altai. Here, at the mountain pass, the wind is playing with the white ribbons on the larches’ branches. Near the sacred spring we see offerings... In ail we smell juniper, and a granny is telling her grandson a story about the “times of Oirot-khan.”<sup>48</sup>

### **The manuscript of Anokhin’s papers.**

There is still another seminal source for the study of the content of Ak Jang. This source is an unpublished manuscript of ethnographer and musicologist A.V.Anokhin, who spent more than twenty years in Altai and was the most thorough researcher of Altai religious traditions.<sup>49</sup> The manuscript is the property of the Archive of the Institute of Altaic Studies in Gorno-Altai. It is certain that Danilin used materials from it for the Chapter 8 in his work.<sup>50</sup>

Anokhin’s manuscript consists, in fact, of three separate works written in different periods: 1910, 1924, and 1931. The first part of the manuscript is called “Burkhanizm v Zapadnom Altae”<sup>51</sup> and is a larger version of his paper published much later, in 1927. The first part of the manuscript is a type-written essay, written by Anokhin during his first year in Altai (1910).

The second part is called “Burkhanizm na Yugo-Zapadnom Altae”<sup>52</sup> and was written in 1924. In the second paper of the manuscript, Anokhin substantially changes his views. This part of the manuscript is, essentially, a detailed description of Ak Jang

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<sup>48</sup> Sherstova, 181. —“— entry 25

<sup>49</sup> Most of the works on Altai Shamanism by L.P.Potapov, for example, are based on Anokhin’s materials.

<sup>50</sup> Danilin mentions the manuscript by A.V.Anokhin:

<sup>51</sup> Anokhin, A.V. Manuscript (property of the Institute of Altaic Studies, Gorno-Altai)

Part 1. *Burkhanizm v Zapadnom Altae* (Burkhanism in the Western Altai), 1910.

<sup>52</sup> Part 2. *Burkhanizm na Yugo-zapadnom Altae* (Burkhanism in the Southwestern Altai), 1924.

theology.<sup>53</sup> Summing up his description of Ak Jang deities, Anokhin admits that the Buddhist influences in Ak Jang are very few, if any.

Finally, the third part (1931) is called “Kratkii Analiz Shamanstva Altaiskih plemen.”<sup>54</sup> Finally, the third part of the manuscript is, despite its title, not about Shamanism. In it, Anokhin attempts to present Ak Jang (Burkhanism) and Shamanism as a complex system, of which two traditions in question serve as complementary aspects. Throughout the paper, Anokhin remains undecided regarding the question whether Ak Jang has emerged to *replace* Shamanism, or to complement it. He tries to connect both traditions to the Sun worship according to various “grand” evolutionary theories of Religious Studies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While Anokhin’s evolutionary speculations are somewhat simplistic, in this manuscript he makes two unique (and from my point of view, true) statements regarding the nature of Ak Jang: its deeply indigenous (as contrary to imported) nature and its structurally integral place in the mosaic of Altai indigenous spirituality, and its structural complementarities with “Shamanism.”<sup>55</sup>

One of the great values of the manuscript is the possibility to trace the changes of Anokhin’s perception and interpretation of Ak Jang through the years.

### **Altai publications**

Another category of sources on Ak Jang is papers, published by Altai scholars in 1990s.<sup>56</sup>

While Altai indigenous scholars have not yet produced a concise description or reconstruction of Ak Jang, their papers solve many mysteries regarding the sources of

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<sup>53</sup> In my opinion, this manuscript can be regarded as the key source on Ak Jang content. Most of the “theological” materials of Ak Jang presented by Danilin is obviously borrowed from it (with some being omitted). The great value of Anokhin’s materials lies in the fact that they are not censored.

<sup>54</sup> Part 3. *Kratkiy Analiz Shamanstva Altaiskih Plemen* (A Brief analysis of the Shamanic practices of the Altai tribes), 1930.

<sup>55</sup> Manuscript, part 3.

<sup>56</sup> That is, since the time when it became safe to talk about it. There are about 10-15 papers. Unfortunately, not all of them are easily available.

various practices, elements of belief and sacred personae of the movement. Some papers are dedicated specifically to Ak Jang,<sup>57</sup> while others deal with its aspects in the context of the totality of Altai religious tradition(s).<sup>58</sup> While these papers are usually very short, they are extremely significant in the study of Altai tradition. Without entering into a polemic with the Russian Anthropologists and their interpretations of Altai traditions, Altai scholars present the facts that very often undermine the constructs of the Soviet scholarship and create entirely new picture of Altai religion. Thus, for example, T.Sadalova described the Messianic tradition of Altaians, providing an alternative to the “Christian” interpretation of Ak Jang’s eschatology. Another Altai scholar, Muiteva, traced the alleged “Buddhist” folklore of Ak Jang to its origin, which turned out to be a mistake of the collector of the data, Verbitsky, and so on.

### **Works on Ak Jang in English**

There are two publications on Ak Jang in English. The first one is the short paper by L.Krader, “*A Nativistic Movement in Western Siberia*,”<sup>59</sup> based primarily on the paper by Anokhin. The second one is a chapter in the recent book by Andrei Znamenski, Shamanism and Christianity.<sup>60</sup> Both Krader and Znamenski interpret Burkhanism as revitalization movement, initialized by the socio-cultural crisis in Altai, with a “syncretistic-synthetic” religious base. While Krader sees in it a combination of elements of Shamanism, Lamaism, and Christianity, A.Znamenski notes primarily elements of

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<sup>57</sup> e.g., Sadalova, T.M. K voprosu ob arhaichnyh osnovah syuzhetov o Shunu. (On the archaic roots of the Shunu narrative). In: Problemy Izucheniia Kul’turno-Istoricheskogo Naslediiia Altaia. Gorno-Altaiisk, 1994, pp. 97-99

<sup>58</sup> These papers are even more valuable, because they place Ak Jang in the context of the Altai tradition as its organic part.

<sup>59</sup> *American Anthropologist*, 1958, #56, pp.282-292

<sup>60</sup> Znamenski, A. Shamanism and Christianity: Native Encounters with Russian Orthodox Missions in Siberia and Alaska, 1820-1917. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999, pp.228-251

Christianity in the movement. For example, A.Znamenski relates the early Ak Jang eschatology – the expectation of Oirot-khan – to the Christian eschatology, and Oirot-khan – to Christ.<sup>61</sup>

### **The interpretations of Ak Jang – summary and analysis**

Thus, the sources on Ak Jang, while having very little information on the details of its belief and practice, have vastly different interpretations of its nature and character. Post-Soviet Russian reference publications, e.g. Encyclopedias, etc. as well as various popular presentations of the Altai culture, have formed the following image of Ak-Jang:

It is a political and religious revitalization movement, triggered by the crisis of Altai culture. The interpretations of the crisis vary from colonial-political to economic or religious ones (“the crisis of Shamanism”<sup>62</sup>). Ak Jang-Burkhanism is a syncretistic religious movement, based on Shamanism, Mongolian Buddhism,<sup>63</sup> and (mentioned less often) Christianity. The first statement has much truth in it. Indeed, Ak Jang has been a revitalization movement triggered primarily by socio-economic crisis. However, two factors show that Ak Jang cannot be limited to the “crisis reaction.” First of all, it continued to exist, spread and develop far beyond the “crisis period.” Its vigorous reappearance in the post-Soviet period confirms this. Also, as Anokhin observes in his work,<sup>64</sup> Ak Jang, as it developed, lost its eschatological character (which was an indication of the “crisis-reaction” according to most interpretations) and was later practiced as a “regular” religion fitting day-to-day life of Altaians.

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<sup>61</sup> Znamenski, 239

<sup>62</sup> e.g. in reports by Klements (Burkhanizm: Dokumenty... pp.30-40)

<sup>63</sup> Some sources even call it the “Altai form of Buddhism”

<sup>64</sup> Anokhin, Manuscript, parts 2 and 3.

The second factor is that, despite the scarcity of information on theology of Ak Jang, we can clearly observe a development of a coherent and detailed theology and ritual content in it. Again, if the tradition in question were a mere “crisis-reaction” phenomenon, it would have neither need nor resources to develop such a content.

Some early observers of Ak Jang, L.Krader, and, finally, A Znamenski, saw Christian syncretistic elements in Ak Jang. As was mentioned before, those early observers of Ak Jang who wanted to give it a “Christian” interpretation, pursued other than academic goals in doing so. In fact, the reports of Klements (for the trial) and, later, Sokolov, built their “Christian” interpretations of Ak Jang on the following set of phenomena:

- 1) The prayer meetings of the Ak Jang followers were massive, which was very different from the shamanic pattern, and included prostrations...
- 2) Ak Jang was allegedly a monotheistic religion and, thus, “a movement from Shamanism to Christianity”
- 3) The eschatological message of Ak Jang;

As it will be shown, all of these elements of Ak Jang can be readily explained not by its “syncretism,” but by the fact that they have been present in the indigenous tradition of Altai and Turkic-Mongolian world as their integral part. While the prayer meetings of Ak Jang have been indeed massive, their origin lies in an indigenous Altai ritual, which has nothing to do with Christianity. Ak Jang, as it turned out, has never been a monotheistic religion. Eschatological message of Ak Jang, as we will see later, has not been based on Christian eschatology.

While the early reports on Ak Jang as well as Krader's paper can be excused for alleging Christian influences in it because of very limited information, available at the time, the case with the work of A.Znamenski is far stranger:

On the whole, Orthodoxy, Lamaism, and especially Shamanism became building blocks of a new spiritual culture that was represented by Burkhanism...  
...The most important adoption was the idea of a second coming of Christ, personified in the image of Oirot Khan.<sup>65</sup>

Frankly, it is difficult to fathom why, having access to all contemporary materials, such as works by Danilin and Anokhin as well as the works by Altai scholars,<sup>66</sup> dedicated specifically to the question of Ak Jang messianism, did A.Znamenski make this statement. As will be shown, the image of Oirot Khan does not come from a Christian source at all.

The question of Buddhist influences in/on Ak Jang is more complicated. All of the reports on Ak Jang, including Danilin and Anokhin, mention some Buddhist elements in it. The first reports about the "Lamaist impact" on Ak Jang came from the missionaries. L.Sherstova in her work traces the occasions on which such reports were created.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Znamenski, 238-39

<sup>66</sup> e.g., Sadalova, T.M. "*Traditsiia messianstva u tsentral'no-aziatskikh narodov.*" (The tradition of Messianism among the peoples of Central Asia). In: Altai i Tsentral'naiia Azia: Kul'turno-Istoricheskaia preemstvennost. Gorno-Altaiisk: 1999, pp.47-54

<sup>67</sup> Brunnov (*police chief – A.V.*) honestly admitted to Makarii that he "did not succeed in finding direct positive evidence" that "the source of Chot's teaching was Buddhist Lamas from neighboring Mongolia." Probably, at this point Makarii came up with a new plan, but for its execution he needed... a Lama. Here, he was in luck: there was a Lama already sitting in Biysk prison... ..He was arrested on the territory of the Russian Empire. Where could he be going? The answer was simple: of course, to the rebels! For what? To seduce them with his preaching into an allegiance to the "Son of Heaven." And, of course, to inspire them against the power of the Russian Empire. Such a turn did not leave any chance for Chot's acquittal... .. But the plan did not work out. Lama was arrested hundreds of kilometers away from Tereng, at Chuya river. He was very upset and immediately told Makarii that he did not understand the cause of the arrest. He has poor sight, and Russian merchants advised him to travel to Biysk to buy glasses..... the poor short-sighted Lama was soon released.

However, there were some real contacts between Mongolian Buddhists and the activists of Ak Jang. Especially when Tyryi Akemchi became the head yarlykchi of Ak Jang, some elements (or rather, artifacts) of Buddhism became parts of Ak Jang ritualistic paraphernalia.<sup>68</sup>

While the followers of Ak Jang used various religious objects of Mongolian Buddhism and highly valued them, their use was by no means “Buddhist.” Here, a peculiar tendency can be seen, similar to the “cargo” use of foreign objects in cargo cults: the objects in question are used not because they constitute an integral part of the tradition’s belief and practice, consciously borrowed (imported) together with the content of such a practice from some other tradition, but because these objects are foreign. Interestingly, in Altai folklore, Lamas and Buddhism in general are seen as respected, but

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However, the episode with the lama had an unexpected continuation. Several decades later, Soviet historians would write that a Mongolian Lama was arrested in Tereng, and that it was he who set up the prayer meetings... (Sherstova, 154–155)  
For the original Russian text, see App.2, entry 26.

<sup>68</sup> In the solemn silence, jakshilars – respected people, or elders – sat in a circle. Kurdan took a book (sudur) wrapped in silk, unwrapped it and put it on the top of his head, against his forehead and his chest. After some time, he quickly shuffled the pages and repeated his movement... .. then, he wrapped the book back and hid it behind the curtain of his altar.

After a long pause he began to tell what was “written” in that book and what Burkhan “sent him in his mind.” Altaians... ..were surprised to see how quickly he shuffled the book and still was able to “absorb” its content: obviously, his thoughts and words were inspired by Uch Kurbustan. Loudly “reading” the book, Kurdan told the version of the common beliefs of yarlyks and the signs of the prompt arrival of Oirot...(Danilin, 141)

Behind jajyk they sometimes hang the pieces of white cloth, which Altaians call “icons” – burkhans, 50x70 cm, on the front face of which there are prints of Avalokiteshvara (Aryabola) in squares... (Danilin, 173)

An entirely new object, not known from the shamanic rituals, is *mandal*. This is small, 12.5 cm in diameter, metal plate, or, rather, a disc with low raised edges and convex depiction of the Mount Sumeru in the middle and the world elements around the perimeter... .. [t]he change in the functions of this object in Burkhanist milieu is very typical [for all such objects]: we were told that yarlyk took mandal to the prayer meetings, where from time to time he would beat the mandal with a copper ochir, which also was obtained from some lama. (Danilin, 175)

For the original Russian text, see App.2, entry 27

emphatically alien.<sup>69</sup> Another reason why Ak Jang was linked to Buddhism by some researchers,<sup>70</sup> was the presence of various Buddhist personae: Mangdy-shir (Manjusri), Shige-mine (Shakyamuni) and others in Altai, not specifically Ak Jang, folklore, which implied some interpenetration of Mongolian Buddhist and Altai cultures. As it turned out, the folklore in question turned out to be... a fake. The single source of the folk stories where these personae are present, is the book by a missionary-ethnographer Verbitsky, Altaiskie Inorodtsy.<sup>71</sup> As the author of a very large and informative Afterword to the new edition of the book, Altai scholar V.A.Muitueva states,

The “Verbitsky text” of the myths is used by contemporary students uncritically, without acknowledging the fact that in the religious mythology of Gorny Altai there are no Buddhist characters...<sup>72</sup>

The matter was that Verbitsky collected “Buddhist Altai myths” from a single informant, a certain Yefim Korta. This person, while being an Altai native, was a trader in close contact with the Mongolian, including Buddhist, community, and simply presented to Verbitsky Mongolian folklore as Altaian.<sup>73</sup> These myths resulted in many voluminous discussions about the “estimated Buddhist elements” in Altai culture.

Having somewhat cleared the fog created by various misinterpretations of Ak Jang, it is possible to see that the element of syncretism in it has been minimal. In other words, Ak Jang derives from the indigenous Altai tradition, carrying practically no elements of Buddhism or any other “imported” religion.

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<sup>69</sup> E.g. Verbitsky, pp.11-158; also, Anoskii Sbornik, pp.218-232. It is also interesting to mention that the same ambivalent attitude is common among Altaians towards the Dzungarian Khanate. Symbiosis of Altaians and Dzungars in it did not mean the assimilation of the former, and Altaians’ cultural independence had to be constantly emphasized.

<sup>70</sup> E.g., Zhukovskaya, N.L. *Lamaizm na Altae*. (Lamaism in Altai) In: Buddizm: Slovar’ (The Dictionary of Buddhism). Moscow: “Respublika,” 1992, p. 168.

<sup>71</sup> Verbitsky, V.I. Altaiskie Inorodtsy (Altai Natives). Moscow: 1893, facsimile reprint with the commentaries by Muitueva, V.A. Gorno-Altai: 1993.

<sup>72</sup> Altaiskie Inorodtsy, 258. For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 28

<sup>73</sup> Altaiskie Inorodtsy, 257-259



## **Chapter 4. The background and sources of Ak Jang: The religion of Turks and Mongols and its continuity in Altai tradition.**

In the previous chapter, it was shown that Ak Jang cannot be regarded as a syncretistic, or imported tradition. Therefore, its roots and sources must be sought in the indigenous tradition of Altaians. However, the analysis of only the late pre-modern (19<sup>th</sup> century) and contemporary (20<sup>th</sup> century) Altai tradition will be insufficient for creating the context of Ak Jang. There are two main reasons for this. First of all, as argued further, Ak Jang has been an attempt at “regenerating” the complex and multi-layered tradition of Turks and Mongols, which was reduced to its most elementary level in the post-Dzungarian period (from mid-18<sup>th</sup> century on) due to cultural and societal disruption, aggravated by Russian colonial influence. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this reduced form of Altai tradition could not satisfy the religious and social needs of the Altaians and thus Ak Jang emerged. Ak Jang can be seen as an effort of linking Altaians to their past, the ancient tradition of Turks and Mongols of which Altaians have been a part, and to a wider “cross-cultural” context – that is, to the whole of Turkic-Mongolian culture, from which Altaians were split in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the tradition of the Turks and Mongols that existed prior to their division into the ethnic-based, colonial “provinces” by the dominating colonial powers (Chinese or Russian). The first part of this chapter provides a brief analysis of this tradition.

The second reason for the need to consider the old tradition of Turks and Mongols lies in certain misinterpretations of the modern Altai tradition by the scholars, especially by the Soviet ethnography. While the tradition of Altaians in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was much “simpler” than its Turkic-Mongolian prototype, it still carried most of the elements of its ancient architecture, albeit in a latent form. These latent elements, upon

their “activation” in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, constituted the core of Ak Jang. However, Soviet scholarship largely ignored the inner diversity of the Altai tradition, repeatedly interpreting it as “shamanism” and downplaying the continuity between the old tradition of Turks and Mongols and the contemporary Altai tradition. While the misinterpretation of Altai tradition as shamanism is analyzed in the second part of the chapter, the demonstration of its continuity again requires the presentation of the main elements of both the old Turkic-Mongolian tradition and the contemporary Altaian one. Here, the Turkic-Mongolian tradition is meant to serve as a template, which provides both the author and the reader with the “blueprint” upon which the presentation of the modern Altai tradition, alternative to the view of the Soviet scholarship, can be constructed.

#### **4.1. Elements of Turkic religious tradition: an overview.**

There is no argument among scholars about the fact that contemporary Altai religious tradition is the heir of the religion of the pre-modern Turks and Mongols. The deities, recognized by Altaians as well as by other successors of the Turkic-Mongolian culture, are the same as the ancient deities of Turks. The ceremonies and rituals of the pre-modern Turks and Mongols are also largely traceable into modern times.

However, there is an obscure area in the analysis of the continuity between the pre-modern Turkic and Mongolian tradition and its modern successors. All of the scholars who studied the pre-modern tradition and attempted to reconstruct it,<sup>1</sup> pointed at an extremely important factor, crucial for the understanding of the architecture of it: the existence of semi-autonomous religious complexes, which corresponded with the existence of the very similar, also semi-autonomous, levels of social organization of the

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<sup>1</sup> J.-P.Roux, S.G.Klyashtorny, L.N.Gumilev and others.

Turkic-Mongolian society. The religious complex and the social structure were reciprocal in their support and validation of one another. The most pronounced religious strata, identified for the pre-modern Turkic-Mongolian tradition, were the high, or “imperial” religious complex, and the popular one.<sup>2</sup> According to the opinion of J.-P.Roux, the two complexes were, at times, mutually complementary, while at other times they were conflicting. The “imperial” complex was related to the supra-ethnic formation and the figure of *kagan*, discussed in the previous section. The popular one was related to the lower levels of the social organization, which were either subordinate to the imperial one, or existed on their own during the periods of “dissipation,” discussed above.

Since none of the contemporary Turkic and Mongolian ethnic groups has the explicit social representation which would correspond to the “imperial” level and the figure of a *kagan*, the observation of the historians regarding the pre-modern tradition has never been applied to its modern successors.

The absence of such an analysis in the case of the contemporary Turkic and Mongolian societies prompted the scholars who studied contemporary religious traditions of the Turks and Mongols to create an extremely reductionistic view of their religion, limiting it to “shamanism,” which, as will be argued later in the thesis, is the representation not of the whole of the tradition, but only of one of its institutions, which addressed the lowest stratum of the social organization of Turks and Mongols. This reductionistic picture was created intentionally, with ideological purposes – to “prove” the primitive and archaic nature of both religion and social organization, or stratification among contemporary “tribal” Turks and Mongols. Moreover, this reductionistic view

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<sup>2</sup> Roux, J.-P. *Turkic Religions*. In: Eliade, Mircea (Editor in chief). The Encyclopedia of Religion. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, Vol.14, pp. 89-90

was also “projected” by some scholars<sup>3</sup> into the past, which brought up the debate on whether or not the pre-modern tradition of Turks and Mongols can be called<sup>4</sup> “shamanism.” This issue will be approached further in this chapter.

However, the gods and religious institutions that according to the historical analysis belong to the “imperial” level, are still prominent among the modern Turks and Mongols. Further in the thesis, it will be argued that Ak Jang has been an attempt to reconstruct, or regenerate this “high” level of social and religious structuring among the Altaians. However, to provide the background for the analysis of the structure of the modern Altai tradition, it is necessary to analyze the main elements of the pre-modern tradition of the Turks and Mongols, which is the purpose of the following section.

The section is based on the reconstructions of the historical tradition of Turks and Mongols, provided in the works of two scholars, S.Klyashtorny and J.-P.Roux. While Klyashtorny analyses only the ancient and medieval tradition, J.-P. Roux’s analysis includes the late pre-modernity (18<sup>th</sup> century), until the time of Russian and Chinese colonization of the Turkic-Mongolian oikumene. Both researchers used as their primary sources a variety of materials: archeological data, ancient Turkic inscriptions made upon the kagans’ orders on stone stelae, Chinese chronicles, a few written Turkic sources, such as Irq Bitiq, “The Book of Divination” written in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and found at Dunhuang, and the accounts of foreign visitors to the Turkic and Mongolian states.

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<sup>3</sup> In the case of Altai tradition, by Potapov.

<sup>4</sup> Or, expressing it more directly, reduced to shamanism.

## Creation and Cosmography in Turkic-Mongolian tradition.

The records Creation myth of the Turks and Mongols are fragmentary – Runic inscriptions say that “In the beginning there were Blue Sky and Brown Earth, and then, between them, “the sons of men emerged.”

And:

“Time, when Sky was pressing from above, Earth parted below... ..above was darkness, below was dust... ..beasts, birds and men were lost in their ways... ..this continued for three years and came to an end.”<sup>5</sup>

However, fragmentary as it is, it provides a basic setting for the structure of the religious universe, and even the figures of the two chief gods – the Sky (Tengri) and the Earth (Yduk Jer-sub)

The universe of ancient, medieval and modern Turk and Mongolian religion consisted of three levels: the Lower World, the Middle World, and the Upper World. This universe is populated and maintained by several main gods together with a large number of minor deities and spirits. While the minor deities were not mentioned in royal Turk inscriptions,<sup>6</sup> the main ones were listed and addressed in them. The fact that they were uniformly worshipped in Middle Ages over a huge geographic area, from Manchuria to Danube, is proven by geographic distribution of the inscriptions.<sup>7</sup>

J.-P. Roux considers two “universal” Turkic-Mongolian deities, mentioned in the inscriptions and other documents, as the main deities of the near-monotheistic “imperial” cult.<sup>8</sup> These deities are *Tengri* and *Umai*.

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<sup>5</sup> Turkoyazychnyh narodov mifologiya, (The Mythology of Turkic peoples) In: *Mify Narodov Mira*. Moscow: Rossiiskaia Entsiklopediia, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1994, Vol.2 p.537

For the original Russian text, see App.2, entry 29

<sup>6</sup> This fact (of omission of minor, “Shamanic” deities), formed the base of the theory of J.-P.Roux – that is that Imperial Cult was opposing Shamanism and oppressing it. My view on this is different, see p. .

<sup>7</sup> Klyashtorny and Sultanov, pp.156-159.

<sup>8</sup> Roux, *Turkic religions*

## Tengri (Tengeri, Tangra, Tangri)

Tengri is the god that is most consistently and frequently mentioned on the inscriptions and in other accounts:

Obvious prominence of Tengri and universalism of his functions incline some scholars towards defining the religion of ancient Turks as a distinctive, close to monotheism, faith, which can be termed as “Tengriizm,” however, acknowledging the presence in it of the more ancient strata.<sup>9</sup>

The name “Tengri” as “Tangra” is mentioned in nearly all runic inscriptions from the Danube Bulgar kingdom (6<sup>th</sup> century) to Caucasus and Tajikistan to Eastern Mongolia. Tengri is a male god, apparently – a creator. Essentially, it is impossible to say whether Tengri is a creator, or an “emanation” of some sort of a spontaneous process, as the fragment of the creation myth, quoted above, states.<sup>10</sup> However, being Sky, or Heaven, Tengri is the lord of the Upper World.<sup>11</sup>

The worship of Tengri is documented among Huns, the predecessors of ancient Turks, in the first centuries C.E.<sup>12</sup> Some scholars<sup>13</sup> relate the theonym “tengri” with the Ancient Chinese “t’ien li” (meaning “heaven” as well),<sup>14</sup> which hypothetically stretches the “genealogy” of the god down to 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> millennia B.C.E. The reconstruction provided by Roux presents Tengri as the heavenly analogue of a *kagan*, who validates (by the “mandate”) *kagan*’s power. This explains the prominence of the texts, dedicated to

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<sup>9</sup> Klyashtorny and Sultanov, p.157.

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 30

<sup>10</sup>Sogdian inscription of Buguts, an epitaph to Taspar-kagan (+581), mentioned constant questions that kagan asked god(s?) concerning various state affairs. Tengri is vaguely anthropomorphic – he possesses human senses; he expresses his will verbally, but his decisions he executes not directly, but rather through human and natural agents. *ibid.*, p.158

<sup>11</sup> It is Tengri, who, sometimes together with other deities, is in charge of everything that happens in the world, especially – of the humans’ destinies: Tengri “determines the [life]spans,” but the births “of the sons of men” is the authority of the goddess Umai, and their death – of Erklig. *ibid.*, p.158

<sup>12</sup> Source: Bishop Israel (682). In: *ibid.*, pp. 160-161.

<sup>13</sup> Pulleyblanc in Potapov, L.P. *Etnicheskii sostav i proiskhozhdenie Altaitsev*. (The Ethnic makeup and the origin of Altaians). Leningrad: “Nauka,” 1969, p.11

<sup>14</sup> It is unclear, which one of the two theonyms “Turk” or Chinese, is considered “original.”

Tengri, on the Runic inscriptions. The inscriptions were produced specifically by kagans, and, in a manner of speaking, served as “manifestoes” to their divine election:

Tengri bestows upon the kagans wisdom and power, gives kagans to the people, punishes those who sinned against kagans and even ”gives orders” to kagans in the matters of war and state.<sup>15</sup>

### **Umai (Ymai)**

Another deity of the Upper World was Umai: the goddess of fertility and of the newborns, who represented femininity. Together with Tengri she was the patron of warriors. In the same manner as the kagan is identified as an image of Tengri, so his wife, the queen, is Umai: “my mother-queen, who is like Umai.” Here we have a clear indication of the myth of the divine couple – Tengri and Umai, the representation of which in the world is the royal couple.<sup>16</sup> Umai is also frequently mentioned on the stelae – always, in conjunction with Tengri (and vice versa).

Umai is depicted as a formidable woman wearing a three-horned tiara.<sup>17</sup> Among the scholars, a debate concerning the nature and character of Umai and her worship is going on. Some scholars see her as an ancient, pre-patriarchal goddess. Indeed, the petroglyphs, showing the “mother-goddess” with the tiara, are found throughout Eurasia and belong to a much earlier date, than the rise of Turks to prominence.<sup>18</sup> Another factor, which points at the “matriarchal” and ancient nature of Umai, is her prominence as the goddess of childbirth not among all modern Turks and Mongols, but also among the groups that belong to the Samodian family.<sup>19</sup> However, by

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<sup>15</sup> Klyashtornyand Sultanov, p.158.

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 31.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p.158.

<sup>17</sup> *Turkoyazychnyh narodov mifologiya*, p.538

<sup>18</sup> In Siberia, Turks gradually replaced Indo-Europeans around 3rd to 1<sup>st</sup> centuries B.C.E.

<sup>19</sup> So-called “Northern nations” – Nentsy, Khanty and others.

the time of the formation of the first Turkic states, Umai firmly occupied a place in the “imperial” pantheon alongside with Tengri.

The two deities described above constitute, according to the views of both J.-P. Roux and S.Klyashtorny, the “core” of the religious complex, associated with the *kagan*’s power and the largest, super-ethnic level of the consolidation of the Turks and Mongols. However, there are two more “universal” deities, whose names are often found in a variety of ancient and medieval sources. They are not, as J.-P.Roux states, explicitly related to the “imperial” religious and ceremonial stratum, but their importance is acknowledged by their frequent mentioning on the kagans’ stelae.

### **Yduk Yer-Sub**

The main deity of the Middle World was “Holy Earth-Water.” In the inscriptions on Orkhon stelae it is never mentioned separately, but rather, together with Tengri and Umai or only with Tengri as the patron of Turks who punishes the sinners. According to the accounts of visitors to the Turks, the Earth deity was an object of a special cult. Thus, Theophilact Simokatta<sup>20</sup> writes, the Turks “sing hymns to the Mountain.”<sup>21</sup> In Chinese sources, the sacred mountain, venerated by Turks (6<sup>th</sup> century) is called “the Earth god.” The Cult of the Sacred mountains was the part of the general cult of Earth-Water among ancient Turk tribes.

While Tengri and Umai are definitely personified, the representation of Yer-Sub is more complicated. While Klyashtorny sees Yer-Sub as a person, other scholars<sup>22</sup> see it as a “collective deity” – a large group of deities of variable “scale” and importance who,

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<sup>20</sup> A Byzantine envoy to Turks (8<sup>th</sup> century), mentioned in Klyashtorny and Sultanov, pp.155-160.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p.159.

<sup>22</sup> e.g., J.-P.Roux, in *La Religion...*, and Basilov, V.N. *Yer-Su*. In: *Mify Narodov Mira*. Moscow: Rossiyskaia Entsiklopediia, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1994. Vol.1, p. 599.



essentially, are the “masters of the place,” be it a whole of the known world, or just a single mountain range or summit.<sup>23</sup> J.-P.Roux does not specify whether or not the ritual complex, related to Yduk Jer-Sub belonged to the “imperial” type. However, Klyashtorny mentions the annual sacrifices, related to Yduk Jer-sub in which kagan not only participated but also acted as the high priest.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps, some modern materials on the ceremonial complex, related to the Middle World and Jer-sub, might help to place it within the vertical hierarchy of the Turkic tradition. Among modern Turks and Mongols, the deities of the Middle World are addressed by the *clans* and are the “divine representatives” of particular clans. Thus, we can explain the participation of the *kagan* in the Middle World worship not by the fact that he was a *kagan*, but by his membership in a clan, which he represented, among other clan leaders, at the ceremony.

### **Erlík (Erklíg)**

Finally, it is necessary to consider Erlík, or Erklíg, who later became a very important and controversial deity in Altai religion: the Lord of the Dead, Lower World, and misfortune. Erlík is the Ancient Turk-Mongolian god with the most developed iconography and persona among the gods of Ancient Turks and Mongolians:

The proof of the existence in ancient Turk mythology of the complete three-level model of the Universe was the recent discovery in the runic texts of Yenisei and Eastern Turkestan of the most important and colorful character of the Lower World – its lord, Erklíg-khan, who “parts” people and sends them “the messengers of death.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Tioukhteneva, S. “*Ob evolyutsii kul'ta gor u altaitsev*” (On evolution of the cult of mountains among Altaians) In: *Shamanizm i rannie religioznye predstavleniia* (Shamanism and the early religious views), Vol.1, Moscow: 1995, pp.173-180

<sup>24</sup> Klyashtorny and Sultanov, p. 163

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p.158

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 32

His name comes from the ancient Uighur Erklig Kagan (“the mighty sovereign”).<sup>26</sup> Usually, the kingdom of Erlik is situated beneath the earth’s surface. However, sometimes the “other world” is placed somewhere to the side of the world of the living (e.g., among Kalmyks and Altaians – in the West), or infinitely far away, or “in a different dimension,” so to speak. Erlik is represented as a mighty old man of huge proportions, who has divided beard that reaches his knees, who hangs his moustache over his ears, has black eyebrows and eyes.<sup>27</sup> While none of the three “universal” deities (at least, in its ancient form) is known to be related to shamanic practices, Erlik is the patron of the shamans par excellence.<sup>28</sup>

Now, given his universal nature, is Erlik a part of the “imperial” complex or not? Definitely, his importance is recognized even at the “imperial” level, which is testified by the texts on the inscriptions. Again, modern data suggests that he was not worshipped along with Tengri and Umai – in other words, was not a part of a ceremonial complex, related to them. The office, which addressed Erlik and the Underworld, the Kingdom of the Dead, was that of the professional shamans, different, according to J-P. Roux, from the “imperial” priesthood.<sup>29</sup> This issue will be considered further on, because it is extremely important for the reconstruction and analysis of the Altai tradition.

### **Other deities.**

In addition to the four main deities mentioned in ancient and medieval texts, Turks and Mongols acknowledged and venerated a vast number of secondary deities and spirits –

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<sup>26</sup> Neklyudov, S.Yu. *Erlik*, In: *Mify Narodov Mira*. Moscow: Rossiyskaya Entsiklopediya, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1994 Vol.2, p.667

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p.668.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, also Heissig, W. *The Religions of Mongolia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, pp. 54, 79

<sup>29</sup> Roux, *La Religion...*, pp.203-247

some related to the four deities (or being their “constituent parts,” as it is in the case of Yer-Sub), or completely independent.<sup>30</sup> In his book, La Religion des Turcs et des Mongols, J.-P. Roux attempts a general reconstruction of the Turk-Mongolian ancient and medieval pantheon. Among other spiritual forces, he includes in it animal totems, astral deities, heroes such as Geser-khan, and ancestors (all of them attributed to the “popular religion”), using both historical and contemporary data.<sup>31</sup>

S.G.Klyashtorny mentions the veneration of the Sun, Moon, “Heavenly thunders,” specific tall trees, and ancestors among the data in the ancient and medieval documents. Interestingly, the word “sun” – “Kuar” among the Huns of the Caucasus has Iranian origin.<sup>32</sup> Klyashtorny quotes bishop Israel, an Albanian missionary of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, who interprets the astral and nature deities as dependent on and subordinate to Tengri. The role of the ancestors in the cult practice is important, but obscure.

### **The practices and “theology” of ancient and Medieval Turks.**

Due to the limited data on the practices of the Ancient and Medieval Turks and Mongols, only limited reconstruction of their practices is possible. In the chronicles and other documents, two types of sacred sites, where the ceremonies, honoring Tengri-khan were conducted, are mentioned. First one is the “pagan temples,” where “idols”, probably, the depictions of Tengri, were placed.<sup>33</sup> Another one were the sacred groves, where the tallest

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<sup>30</sup> The interaction of the modern specialists with many of these “independent” spirits do not have a “religious” character (which implies prayer, or “looking up” at the object of worship) – it is very “down-to-earth” negotiation, or even threatening, or exorcism on the part of the practitioner – a “subtle politics” of sorts.

<sup>31</sup> Roux, J.-P. La Religion des Turcs et des Mongols. Paris: Payot, 1984

<sup>32</sup> “In the name Kuar, as it was already mentioned by V.Henning, we can obviously see the Middle-Persian khwar, “sun.” The worship of sun-god in Scythian-Sarmatian and Sarmato-Alanian cultures is well-known... and in the pantheon of Huns his image merged with Tengri-khan” (Klyasht., p.162).  
In Altai sun is called “kun.”

<sup>33</sup> The terms, “pagan temples” and “idols” come from the Christian sources, quoted by Klyashtorny. We can only guess what these sites of worship looked like.

trees represented Tengri-khan. While the structure of the ceremony of Tengri is unknown, historical accounts mention that horses were sacrificed at these ceremonies. Then, their blood was sprinkled on the ground in front of trees, heads and hides were hung on the branches, and bodies were burnt on the sacrificial fire. Sacrifices were accompanied by prayers, addressed to the image of Tengri-khan. Also, a variety of accounts mention the special type of “sorcerers” who “summoned” the Earth.<sup>34</sup>

Klyashtorny mentions the following trend in the Turkic inscriptions:

Orkhon inscriptions constantly declare the heavenly origin of the kagan’s ancestry. Together with the ideas of Tengri and Umai as a divine couple – the patrons of the dynasty, this late mythological cycle carried a visible imprint of its birth within the class society and was an undeniable part of the state cult of Turk kaganate.<sup>35</sup>

This statement characterizes the most important trend, or function of the “high religion” of Turks and Mongols. The prominence of the accounts of Tengri worship, compared with the scarcity of data on any other ceremonies, brought J-P. Roux to suggest that the “near-monotheistic” religion of Tengri and Umai was in the conflict with the “vigorous polytheism” of the popular cults.<sup>36</sup> L.P. Potapov, in his last large work, Altaiskii Shamanism, partially abandons his usual position of reducing Turk (ancient or modern) religion to Shamanism and describes modern traces of the Sky worship among Turks of Altai and Sayan, comparing it with ancient and medieval data. Potapov relates the practice of prayer to the Sky with the institute of White Shamans who “... usually did not

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<sup>34</sup> Klyasht., 162

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 163

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 33.

<sup>36</sup> Roux, J.-P. *Turkic Religions*. In: Eliade, Mircea (Editor in chief). The Encyclopedia of Religion. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, Vol.14, pp.88

go into ecstasy and performed *kamlanie*<sup>37</sup> with a fan instead of a drum...<sup>38</sup> This is an extremely important statement – especially, if we take into account the fact that it comes from the person who consistently tried to present both the old tradition of Turks and the modern Altai tradition as shamanism. Throughout his career, Potapov has been avoiding mentioning the “white shamans” who, according to many other scholars,<sup>39</sup> are not shamans at all.

The question, “Can the religion of Ancient and medieval Turks and Mongols be qualified as Shamanism?” created a polemic between J.-P.Roux and L.P. Potapov, the main interpreters of the Turkic religion.<sup>40</sup> This question is extremely important, because the characterization of the pre-Modern Turkic-Mongolian religion affects the characterizations of its modern successors, including the tradition of the Altai. It is likely that the opinion of L.Potapov on the pre-modern Turkic-Mongolian tradition, which he characterizes as shamanism, is motivated by his interpretation the modern Altai tradition.<sup>41</sup>

In the opinion of J.-P. Roux, Shamanism was present in the ancient-medieval period among Turks and Mongols, but it constituted a part of a “popular religion” which, essentially, was in conflict with the Tengri “imperial” cult described above. In addition to shamans, J.-P. Roux mentions other “specialists” of popular religion: *yadadji* (rain-

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<sup>37</sup> Shamanic performance, which implies the state of trance, etc.

<sup>38</sup> Potapov, L.P. “*K voprosu o drevnetyurkskoi osnove i datirovke altaiskogo shamanizma.*” (On the ancient Turk origin and dating of Altai shamanism) In.: *Etnografiia Narodov Altaia i Zapadnoi Sibiri*. Novosibirsk: “Nauka,” 1978, p. 34  
ibid., p.64.

<sup>39</sup> E.g., Dugarov.

<sup>40</sup> Klyashtorny is not a part in this polemic, because his reconstruction a) barely acknowledges the presence of the shamans among the Turkic-Mongolian “priesthood,” but it takes into account mostly the ancient and medieval tradition, while J.-P.Roux has attempted to reconstruct the tradition of Turks and Mongols to its near-modern (18<sup>th</sup> century) manifestations, which, in the view of Potapov, was “dangerously close” to the contemporary tradition of Altai and, thus, required a response.

<sup>41</sup> The views of L.P.Potapov on contemporary Altai tradition will be discussed further in the chapter.

maker), and “all kinds of sorcerers, diviners, and prophesiers...”<sup>42</sup> In addition to shamanism, he mentions a number of family, genii loci and other sub-cults – still within what he calls “popular religion.”<sup>43</sup>

Shamans and their practices are not mentioned in any of the ancient Turk runic inscriptions. This fact is interpreted by J.-P. Roux as evidence of the struggle between the “imperial cult” and “popular religion” (including Shamanism) where the former took care of excluding any mentioning of the latter on the monuments.<sup>44</sup> However, the numerous medieval travelers’ accounts mention figures who are undeniably recognizable as shamans, practicing even at the kagans’-khans’ courts,<sup>45</sup> which hardly indicates the struggle between the “popular” and “imperial” religions.

L.P.Potapov, on the other hand, consistently tries to prove that *all* of the religion of Ancient Turks and Mongols was Shamanism.<sup>46</sup> He presents a large number of medieval accounts of “court shamans,” thus disproving the point of view of his opponent. Also, he traces a Turk name for shaman, *kam*, to an ancient date. However, he counts as “shamanic” such practices as *oboo* sacrifice (which are not performed by shamans)<sup>47</sup>, and as shamans – such practitioners as *yrymchi* (a diviner, not a shaman), *yadachi* ( or *yadadji* - rain-maker), and so on. However, proving that shamanism is an ancient phenomenon and reducing all of the Turkic-Mongolian religion to Shamanism, are two different tasks. While Potapov succeeds in the former task,<sup>48</sup> he fails in the latter.

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<sup>42</sup> Roux, *Turkic...* p.90

<sup>43</sup> Roux, *La Religion...*, pp.99-155

<sup>44</sup> Roux, *Turkic...*p.90.

<sup>45</sup> Potapov, “*K voprosu...*”, pp.4-11

<sup>46</sup> Potapov, L.P. *Altaiskii Shamanizm* (Altai Shamanism). Leningrad: “Nauka,” 1991, pp.1-4.

<sup>47</sup> See Appendix 3, Fig 4.

<sup>48</sup> It is necessary to say that neither Roux nor Klyashtorny have doubts that shamanism is ancient.

The approach of J.-P.Roux in his division of the Turkic-Mogolian tradition into different strata is essentially correct, and is corroborated by other scholars.<sup>49</sup> However, some of its features, particularly, the idea of the conflict between the “higher” and “lower” religious strata, represent projection of Western “socio-religious” assumptions onto a culture that has a structure, different from “pyramid-type” (or center-periphery) organization, characteristic for Western centralized states and religious institutions.<sup>50</sup> In the approach of L.P.Potapov, one encounters the desire to reduce all the religious phenomena within the culture in question, motivated by Soviet ideology.

While there is merit in both views of the Ancient Turk-Mongolian religion and their modern heirs, it would be, perhaps, more balanced to look for the truth somewhere between the two. While Tengri cult and practices related to it, as well as other practices such as *oboo* cult, are distinct from Shamanism, this distinction is not necessarily an evidence of opposition. Shamans and the Tengri cult simply performed different functions, and addressed society not at fundamentally different and “irreconcilable” levels (“court vs. masses”), but at different scale – at the family/household scale, clan scale, and, finally, at the supra-ethnic, or “imperial” scale. For example, a *kagan* could and would participate in a complex of ceremonies, addressing one set of deities, as a householder (along with other families), another one – as a clan representative, and still other one, as a *kagan*.<sup>51</sup> Thus, the reference to shamans and/or shamanic deities is absent from the runic descriptions not because of the “censorship” imposed by the imperial cult,

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<sup>49</sup> Klyashtorny, Heissig, Dugarov, Diakonova.

<sup>50</sup> The approach of J-P.Roux resembles the view which, probably, would be appropriate for the Roman Catholic Church in the 13<sup>th</sup> century – with a center in Vatican, and a number of peripheral “village” phenomena, laden with superstitions and heresies, or to the Roman view on the “high” religion of the State and “religio paganorum” of the periphery.

<sup>51</sup> This is illustrated, for example, by the relation between Genghis Khan and a shaman, who by no means represented the “imperial level.” See: Vladimirtsov, B. Ya. Chingiskhan (Chingis Khan). Gorno-Altaiisk: Ak Chechek, 1992

as Roux tends to believe, but due to the fact that the practitioners and deities in question were prominent at the clan, or family, “vernacular” level. These gods and practices had no place in the royal inscriptions simply because they were functioning at a different social scale, which did not oppose the “imperial” one, but rather was complementary to it, following the “two-tier” traditional structure of the Turkic society, with clan as a basis, and the “royal” level as a periodically overarching and consolidating superstructure.

The Shamanic deities and spirits of Turks and Mongols that are currently recognized, except for the main one, *Erlık*, are absent from the ancient and medieval records, and thus will not be a part of this discussion. However, it is necessary to mention that the wide geographic distribution of some of them, for example *Ul’gen*, whose name can be found as far from Inner Asia as Caucasus, Turkey, and Volga area, attests to their antiquity among the Turks and also among Mongolians and Tungus-Manchus.

The fact of the wide presence of deities, which are related to specific clans, among the pre-modern Turks and Mongols, as evidenced by the wide distribution of their theonyms among their descendants, suggests one more level within the Turkic-Mongolian tradition, in addition to the “two-tier” hierarchy proposed by J.-P.Roux. In between what he calls the “popular” stratum and the “imperial” one, there is the clan level of the religion. At this level, the deities different from both “universal,” or “imperial” gods, such as Tengri and Umai, and the “shamanic” god, Erlık, are addressed. The deities specific of the clan level complex are clan ancestors or patrons. The data on the pre-modern Turkic and Mongolian tradition is insufficient to postulate the existence of this level for the ancient, or medieval cultures. However, the presence of this distinct



level among all of the contemporary Turks and Mongols is well documented, which suggests that it existed in the pre-modern cultures as well.

Little is known about the “theology” of ancient and medieval Turks and Mongols. From Runic inscriptions, it follows that a kagan and his wife enjoyed some sort of a “heavenly mandate,” being analogies of Tengri and Umai on Earth. Another fundamental belief of Turks and Mongolians, summed up by J.-P.Roux,<sup>52</sup> is the belief in the clan’s origin from a certain totemic, often animorphic, deity or creature. Thus, *all* of the Turks trace their origin to a she-wolf through the Ashina clan – the first and the most respected royal family of the Turks who is seen as the common ancestor. However, the origin from Ashina, acknowledged by all Turks, does not “cancel” other totemic-ancestral myths, specific for every clan. Many of these ancestral myths are interconnected through sophisticated narratives of the relations between the clan deities represented in them. It is likely that these ancestral myths reflect historical realities of the clans’ origins.<sup>53</sup>

Another fundamental belief of Turks and Mongols is “qualified animism,” which does not imply possession of the vital force-spirit by *any* object, but rather perceives universe as a hierarchy of horizontal “domains,” distinct from “vertical” ones, but corresponding to them in such a way that the “sum total” of the horizontal domains constitutes one “vertical stratum.” In other words, for example, a yurt has spirits of fire and ancestors, the location where it is placed – spirits-masters of the place (a mountain, a valley, a spring), which, in turn, are under the “stewardship” of the master of general location (e.g. Altai eezi – “Master of Altai”), which, in the form of Jer-su, is the representation of the Middle World. The accounts of human destiny are fragmentary and

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<sup>52</sup> Roux, La Religion..., pp.177-203

<sup>53</sup> Potapov, Etnicheskii sostav...

do not provide more detail than the basic information, such as the statement above on Tengri, Umai, and Erklig.

It is necessary to mention that modern Turk and Mongolian mythology has a wealth of Creation myths, clan origin myths, and some eschatological accounts. More often than not, these accounts (within the same culture, e.g. Altai) radically contradict one another (that is, one culture has more than one Creation, or soteriological account), which indicates that many of them were imported from the numerous religious traditions to which Turks and Mongols have been exposed during their rich history.

#### **4.2 The problem of interpretation of Siberian traditions as Shamanism.**

Before moving on to describe the contemporary tradition of Altaians, it is necessary to address an extremely important issue, regarding its interpretation in the Soviet academic literature. This issue is its consistent interpretation as Shamanism.<sup>54</sup> In the previous section of this chapter, it was shown that the “shamanic reductionism” was projected even onto the pre-modern Turkic-Mongolian tradition, as is evident from the polemic between L.P. Potapov and J.-P. Roux. While such an interpretation looks innocent enough, it effectively served as a convenient academic-ideological cliché in the Soviet Anthropology, which was not unlike the “Social Darwinism” in the Western Anthropology in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, to “deconstruct” the “shamanocentric” view on Altai tradition, or at least suggest its erroneous character, it is necessary to look at the reasons for its construction in the Soviet scholarship.

In addition to the ideological influences on the interpretation of Ak Jang, which we have discussed above, there is one significant reason to the continuous attempts of

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<sup>54</sup> This “shamanocentrism” in the interpretation of aboriginal traditions of the former USSR is not limited to Altai. In a manner of speaking, it was a “backbone” of Soviet scholarship and of the ideology that determined its character.

Russian scholars to define this religion as syncretistic. The matter is that the “substrate” religious tradition of Altai is defined as “Shamanism” and described<sup>55</sup> as an integrated and homogenous religion. If such a description is correct, then, indeed, there is “no space left” for the emergence of any substantial and distinct tradition within Altai religion. Therefore, Ak Jang ought to be an “imported and syncretistic” movement. However – can Altai religious tradition be called “Shamanism”? Is it as homogenous and shaman-centered as Russian scholarship of the 20<sup>th</sup> century states?

### **Shamanism and traditions of Siberia**

The term “shamanism” has become a major scholarly and popular metaphor, used for the description of variety of phenomena – healing, conjuring of the spirits and other magical, healing and religious practices. The essence of the most “wide” definition of Shaman/shamanism is expressed by G.Samuel:

The regulation and transformation of human life and human society through the use (or purported use) of alternate states of consciousness by means of which specialist practitioners are held to communicate with a mode of reality alternative to, and more fundamental than, the world of everyday experience.<sup>56</sup>

Such a definition would include as “shamans” a huge variety of “specialists of the sacred” – mediums, diviners, healers, and so on.<sup>57</sup> While such a definition has “heuristic” value as a metaphor for major cross-cultural comparisons, it can hardly be used for analysis of particular cultures that actually *have* shamans. The reason for this is very

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<sup>55</sup> E.G., by Potapov, Altaiskii Shamanizm

<sup>56</sup> Samuel, Geoffrey. Civilized Shamans. Washington-London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993, p. 8

<sup>57</sup> In fact, even the priesthood from the Christian denominations (Orthodox and Roman Catholic) that put much importance on the continuity of Ordination (beginning from the Pentecost) and, therefore, imply the reproduction of the Pentecost experience in the liturgy, fit the definition above.

simple: at a close look, every culture that has identifiable shamans,<sup>58</sup> also has a number of specialists of the sacred that are distinguished from the former.<sup>59</sup>

Therefore, the definition of a shaman and, consequently, of the practices and beliefs that shamans employ (“Shamanism”) that we are going to use, is based on who is recognized as shaman, and what is recognized as Shamanic practices and beliefs within the tradition of Altai.

### **Shamanism as a scholarly construct.**

One major problem that is faced when trying to define Shamanism and place it in the context of Altai tradition is that in Russian scholarship of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, consequently, in the Western scholarship due to its use of both Russian data and interpretations, Shamanism is usually defined as a religion of aboriginal Siberians and vice versa: their religion is defined as Shamanism.<sup>60</sup>

The “deconstruction” of this erroneous notion is a monumental task, for which we have neither space nor sufficient data. However, in the last 10 years, a number of works that approach this problem from different angles and aim either at exposing the scholarly biases, or at the reconstruction of the diverse picture of Siberian traditions, have been published.<sup>61</sup> Even in Russia, where the inertia of the Soviet methodology lasted longer,<sup>62</sup> some work on the re-evaluation of the structure of Siberian aboriginal traditions has been going on.

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<sup>58</sup> Here, we mean the cultures of Siberia, whence the term “shaman” came in the first place. “Identifying the shaman” in, for example, South America, is a much more difficult and less certain task.

<sup>59</sup> For particular examples, see R.Hutton.

<sup>60</sup> This is not specific for Altai; most of the aboriginal religions of Siberia have been defined as “Shamanism.”

<sup>61</sup> E.g., Humphrey, C. and Onon, U. Shamans and Elders: Experience, Knowledge, and Power among the Daur Mongols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996., and Hutton, R. Shamans: Siberian Spirituality and the Western Imagination. New York: Hambledon And London, 2001

<sup>62</sup> See Hutton, p.116

In the case of Altai tradition, the creation of the notion of Shamanism being the religion of Altains, consisted of two chronological parts.<sup>63</sup> As the first travelers, traders, missionaries and students penetrated into Siberia,<sup>64</sup> they encountered religious practices of Aborigines. The most spectacular and noticeable of these was, indeed, a shamanic performance. Missionaries defined shamans as their main enemies and, therefore, as their own “analogues” – that is, the “priests” of the aboriginal religion. At this point, nobody was interested in or attempted a systematic study of Aboriginal traditions:

From the very beginning of the ethnographic study of Siberia, the attention of the students and other observers was primarily captivated by the “exotic” cultural phenomena. In Northern Asia such a phenomenon was Shamanism, and it is no surprise that the figure of a shaman overshadowed other sacred specialists... . . . Such an approach still exists, but it is necessary to acknowledge that the “lonely leader” image does not agree with the whole structure of the traditional view of reality, which is oriented towards the *types* and *typical*. As more data is being collected, we are facing the problem of correspondence between the shaman and other sacred specialists. However, this problem is still far from being solved.<sup>65</sup>

It is necessary to mention that the ethnographers of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, including the missionaries,<sup>66</sup> while concentrating their attention on the description of (or struggle against) shamans, never made any “final” pronouncements regarding the nature of Altai tradition and the place of Shamanism in it. The same applies to the ethnographers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Anokhin, the most important student of Shamanism, studies it not as the “religion” of Altaians, but as a phenomenon within its context.

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<sup>63</sup> As Hutton demonstrates, the “case” of Altai is typical for most aboriginal traditions of Siberia (and former USSR in general).

<sup>64</sup> The first accounts of the religious practices of Siberians that have descriptive value, date from 18<sup>th</sup> century (Hutton, pp. 29-30)

<sup>65</sup> Sagalaev, A.M., Oktiabr'skaia, I.V. Traditsionnoe Mirovozzrenie Tyurkov Iuzhnoi Sibiri: Znak i Ritual. (The traditional Views of Turks of Southern Siberia: Sign and Ritual). Novosibirsk: “Nauka,” 1990, p.88

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 34

<sup>66</sup> E.g., Verbitsky.

The “solidification” of the notion of Shamanism as the religion of Altaians and other aboriginal Siberians came with the Soviet period. Part of this process depended on the interpretation of religious phenomena according to Marx and Engels theories of social and religious evolution, where shaman and shamanism conveniently fit in the “evolutionary ladder” as a primitive and archaic form of religion.

Another trend was coming from the ideological and political demand – to define, search and destroy the focal religious personae of various traditions. For the aboriginal traditions of Siberia, including Altai, such personae were conveniently defined in/as shamans, and, reciprocally, the tradition (“religion”) they represented – as Shamanism.<sup>67</sup> Thus, for example, L.P.Potapov in his book, Altaiskii Shamanism<sup>68</sup> defines the religion of Altai as Shamanism and lumps a diverse variety of shamanic and non-shamanic deities, spirits, and practices in a bewildering mix, trying hard to prove their shamanic nature.<sup>69</sup>

However, having stated that traditional set of Altai religious beliefs and practices cannot be reduced to Shamanism, we will have to begin the description of Altai tradition from Shamanic practices. The reason for this is twofold. First of all, shamans and shamanic practices are by far the most researched religious phenomena of Altai tradition

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<sup>67</sup> R.Hutton describes this trend in detail, pp. 47-129, esp. pp. 113-129

<sup>68</sup> Potapov, Altai Shamanism, 1991

<sup>69</sup> Some older students of Siberian Shamanism have identified with this notion that Shamanism is the religion of Siberia, so well that the fact that Siberian religions are still being practiced in the absence of the shamans, comes to them as a genuine surprise. A veteran student of Tuvan Shamanism, S.I.Vainstein, shared this sense of surprise in his paper, Batianova, Ye.P., Vainstein, S.I. “*Shamanisty bez shamanov (istoriko-etnograficheskii aspekt problemy na sibirskikh materialah)*” (Shamanists without Shamans (historical-ethnographic aspect of a problem on a basis of Siberian data)), In: Proceedings of the International Interdisciplinary Scientific and Practical Symposium, “Ecology and Traditional Religious and Magical Knowledge,” Moscow-Abakan-Kyzyl, 2001, pp.300-305

The topic of the history of the “construction” of Shamanism in academic discourse in the Soviet period cannot be dealt with here in detail. Until now, it has not been discussed by Russian scholars. However, a book by R.Hutton, Shamans: Siberian Spirituality and Western Imagination,<sup>69</sup> which is dedicated to this question, has been published in 2001. It is a truly groundbreaking work, and is highly recommended.

and, in general, of the traditions of Siberia. Even pursuing the goal of the “deconstruction” of the reductionistic notion of equating the tradition of Altai with Shamanism, Shamanism has to be considered.

The second reason is that, just prior to the emergence of Ak Jang, shamans and shamanic practices were, in fact, the central figures of Altai tradition. As mentioned before, and as will be discussed below, this state of affairs was a result of certain socio-cultural conditions in Altai in the late 18<sup>th</sup>- early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, namely the destruction of the traditional cultural, economic, and, especially, kinship patterns (the near-elimination of the clan structures due to a demographic crisis and Russian colonization). These conditions were “friendly” towards the (over)-development of one particular religious office of Altai tradition – namely, *manjaktu kam* - the “shamans with the costumes” who were not bound to particular clans and addressed in their ceremonies the “universal” God of Underworld – Erlik.

As the social and demographic situation among Altaians gradually improved throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, other traditional religious offices as well as “their” deities, began coming to the fore (simultaneously with the regenerating social strata) from the latent state they were in since the 1750s. The following section is going to look at the diversity of the practices and sacred personae of Altai tradition.

### **4.3. The structure of Altai religious tradition.**

This section is dedicated to the description of the context from which Ak Jang emerged – the Altai tradition, both in its manifested and “latent” aspects, as it existed in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The descriptions of the structure of the core Altai tradition may look like an expanded version of the description of the Turkic-Mongolian tradition in the beginning of this chapter, and thus as repetitive. However, the similarity between the two descriptions is deliberate. It is aimed at the demonstration of the similarity of the structures, or rather of the continuity of the structure of the pre-modern Turkic-Mongolian tradition and it heir, the tradition of Altai, including Ak Jang.

The two-level model of the pre-modern Turkic-Mongolian tradition, provided by J.-P.Roux and S.Klyahstorny, to which one “middle” level, namely the *clan (seok)* level, is added, serves as a template for the description of the Altai tradition in this chapter. The description of Altai tradition below and of Ak Jang, presented in the next chapter, are intended to demonstrate the main arguments of this thesis: namely that Altai tradition continues the socio-religious trend established for the pre-modern Turkic-Mongolian tradition, and that Ak Jang is part of this continuity.

The constituent elements for the reconstruction and analysis of the Altai tradition and Ak Jang in their complete form are available from publications concerning such issues as the presence of the “high” deities of Turks and Mongols in Altai tradition, the role of Epics in the religious tradition, the diversity of Altai sacred offices, and others. However, due to the fact that Altai tradition has been interpreted for more than 60 years of Soviet scholarship as “shamanism,” and its practices as limited to the professional shamans (*manjaktu kam*), the publications that presented its diversity and complexity remained marginal. Even in post-Soviet times, nobody has yet attempted to “deconstruct” the reductionistic interpretation of the Altai tradition and to present a synopsis of the available data, which would lay the foundation for the more integral view of it.



While the description below cannot be regarded as a complete and detailed presentation of such a view, it aims at the demonstration of the crucial elements-markers, upon which this view may be constructed. Based, as mentioned before, on the hierarchical model-template of the Turkic-Mongolian tradition, this section is constructed as a “jigsaw puzzle,” the elements of which are taken from a variety of sources and combined to fill the template. Thus, the chapter develops, filling the “slots” in the template of the tripartite hierarchical structure of the Altai tradition, beginning with the pre-Ak Jang Altai tradition and continuing with Ak Jang. It begins with description of a place and role of the historical Turkic-Mongolian deities in the contemporary Altai tradition, and continues with the overview of the Altai “sacred offices” – again, matching the contemporary sacred vocations with the pre-modern ones.

The religious tradition of Altai is a version of the old tradition of the Turkic-Mongolian nomads, both in its content (the pantheon) and its structure (the sacred offices). The deities and spirits of Altai tradition are numerous, so only the main ones are going to be considered. The pantheon of Altai tradition can be approached following different “grids”, such as, for example, placing the deities from more “particular,” appeared as “their own” only by certain *seoks* or even persons (as it is in the case of “shamanic ancestors”) to more “universal,” or by placing them within an hierarchy that follows the social levels at which they are addressed (i.e. household, *seok* level, etc.). The most natural way, however, would be to consider the deities of Altai tradition according to their location within the vertical structure of the sacred universe. Incidentally, the deities’ vertical distribution through the Altai sacred Universe to a large degree (but not entirely) reflects the levels of social organization (undifferentiated community to

household to *seok*-level to supra-ethnic, consolidated, or “imperial” level) at which the offices competent to address the respective deities are located. The Altai sacred Universe consists of three levels: Underworld or Lower World, Middle World, and Upper World – Heavens and “Astral realm.” As in many other traditions, the Lower World and its deities is the realm of death, Middle World – of everyday individual and community’s life, and the Upper World – of mythic and benevolent ancestors and benefactors.

The description will begin with the Lower World and gradually move up.

### **Erlík and kara tos.**

The plethora of gods and spirits of the Lower World is united and ruled by the “chief,” the god of Death and Underworld, Erlík. This god has been universally recognized by all Turks and Mongols from the ancient times and, as it seems has always carried the same function. Being the god of death and misfortune, Erlík naturally has a very important role within the traditional pantheon – he has to be appeased and negotiated with in the case of an individual or community’s crisis.

Erlík’s retinue and “executives,” the *kara tos* (“impure, or black ancestors”) consists of several categories: Erlík’s numerous sons and daughters, various demonic spirits and, finally of a very important category – the souls, or ghosts of the dead shamans (usually, historical personae). These ghosts are responsible for the formation of new shamans, “pressing” them (by disease or misfortune) into accepting their vocation.

A special order of shamans, *manjaktu kam*, is the only category of people responsible and authorized to deal with the Underworld.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> More on *manjaktu kam* below.

## **The Middle World.**

The Middle World is the most “densely populated” spirit realm of Altai tradition. The spirits of the Middle world are literally uncountable - they include numerous local spirits, Masters of the game, and so on. They are united, either as a “collective entity,” or as subordinates, to a god (goddess?) *Yduk Jer-su* (“The Holy Earth-Water”) – again, an ancient Turkic-Mongolian deity. In Altai tradition, this deity is often called *Altai eezi* (“The Master of Altai”).<sup>71</sup>

Within the realm of *Altai eezi*, or *Jer-su*, there is a very “socially” important category of spirits – *taika eezi* (“The master of the mountain”). Their worship among Turks and Mongols is documented since the Middle Ages. They are addressed on a *seok* level, being a sort of “earthly protectors” of the *seoks*. Each *seok* has its own mountain with a *taika eezi*. Shamans of the Lower World (*manjaktu kam*) do not have authority to perform relevant ceremonies, which are reserved for a different sacred office – *ak kam* or *jelbichi*. Also, these spirits can be addressed privately or via mediation of a variety of seers.

In addition to the spirits, subordinate to *Yduk Jer-su*, there are two “universal” and ancient Turkic-Mongolian goddesses, which are not exactly “heavenly.” While they are usually not “localized” in the modern Altai tradition, they are addressed as if they were Middle world deities. These goddesses are *Ot-ene* (The Mother of Fire) and *Umai*, the patroness of childbirth and child-rearing. It is important to mention that *Umai* is presented in medieval records as the spouse of the supreme heavenly deity, *Tengri*.

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<sup>71</sup> Anokhin, A.V. *Materialy po Shamanstvu u Altaitsey* (Materials on Altai Shamanic Practices), Leningrad: 1924 and Gorno-Altaiisk: Ak Chechek, 1994

However, in Altai tradition she is not associated with him.<sup>72</sup> *Ot-ene* is addressed at all ceremonies and on all levels, by private individuals, households, seoks and shamans alike. Apparently, the competence of performing the appropriate rituals depends on one's reputation (as wise and righteous) rather than on specific vocation (such as shamanic). Thus, the most authoritative people to address and propitiate her are the *elders* of both sexes.<sup>73</sup>

*Umai* is the goddess, addressed mostly (if not only) by women. During the medieval period, ceremonies dedicated to her were, as noted in the first section of this chapter, part of the "imperial" ceremonial complex, where she was addressed as a part of a "dyad" – *Tengri-Umai*. Currently, she is addressed mostly at the household level. Again, as in the case with *Ot-ene*, the main determining factor in efficacy and competence in addressing her is one's qualification as an *elder* (in this case, it is a female elder, often "professionally" related to childbirth). Shamans (*manjaktu kam*) do not address *Umai* – in fact, their "professional link" to the misfortune, death, and Underworld makes them the least likely to address her.

### **The Upper World: aru tos and the seok worship.**

Before moving on to the description of the main "inhabitants" of Altai Upper World, the *aru tos*, it is necessary to make a few comments regarding their representation in the bulk of Soviet Ethnographic literature. Almost all sources on Altai religion<sup>74</sup> state that the ("shamanistic") Altaians worshipped *Ul'gen* as the supreme heavenly creator-god.<sup>75</sup> As the recent works by Altai scholars as well as work by the most competent Russian student

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<sup>72</sup> Potapov, Altaiskii... pp.285-297

<sup>73</sup> Diakonova, V.P. *Altaitsey*. (Altaians). Gorno-Altaiisk, "Uch-Sumer," 2001, pp.140, 183

<sup>74</sup> Note that almost all sources on Altai religion are the works of L.P.Potapov.

<sup>75</sup> This view was transferred to the Western sources.

of Altai, A.V. Anokhin,<sup>76</sup> show, *Ul'gen* is by no means a creator and is neither “universal” for all Altaians nor, strictly speaking, a god. Anokhin considers the term “*ul'gen*” to be a generic term, denoting (with a proper name added – Anokhin listed about a dozen of them in his work) a spirit called *aru tos* (“pure ancestor,” literally – “pure base”) of a given *seok*. Altai scholar Muiteva states:

Ul'gen' is not a god, or a deity, but a *tos* (spiritual ancestor) of a number of Altai clans. They addressed him... Other Altai clans did not address Ul'gen' – they had their own clan *tos*-ancestors of the same rank... ...Here comes the question: why did *tos*-ancestor of a few Altai clans became a “god-creator of the world” in the academic literature? Most likely, because of the sloppy collection of the later published data by some scholars, and uncritical acceptance of this information by others...<sup>77</sup>

Essentially, *aru tos* play the same “heavenly” role as *taika eezi* – in the Middle World, being a form of a totemic spirit-ancestor of the *seok*. In some sources, it is indicated that *aru tos* are interconnected as a family, which probably reflects the origin of the human Altai *seoks* and their relations – a very important marker due to very strict and elaborate set of traditional inter-*seok* kinship (exogamous marriages in particular) among the Turks and Mongols.<sup>78</sup> Thus, *aru tos* and the worship associated with them is the key religious function, performed exclusively at the *seok* level – a manifestation of *seok* identity.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> A.V. Anokhin, Manuscript, parts 2 and 3.

<sup>77</sup> Muiteva, V.A. “*O Kosmogonicheskikh predstavleniiakh Altaitsev.*” (On Altaian views on Cosmogony). In: Problemy Izucheniia Kul'turno-Istoricheskogo Naslediia Altaia. Gorno-Altaiisk, 1994, p.90

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 35

<sup>78</sup> Sagalaev, in Sagalaev, A.M., Oktiabr'skaia, I.V. Traditsionnoe Mirovozzrenie Tyurkov Iuzhnoi Sibiri: Znak i Ritual. (The traditional Views of Turks of Southern Siberia: Sign and Ritual). Novosibirsk: “Nauka,” 1990, approaches the question of importance of *aru tos*' religious complex and its relation to the clan level in detail.

<sup>79</sup> While the mentioning of *aru tos*' names has not been found in medieval records, their wide distribution among modern Turkic and Mongolian cultures testifies to their conservative nature and ancient origin, tied to the origin of the clans.

With regard to the question of who was the authority to address the *aru tos*, the available information is somewhat unclear. While *manjaktu kam* (the Lower World shamans) could not address them “in the role” of *manjaktu kam* that is, wearing the attire and instruments of a “classical shaman,” they *could* address the *aru tos* by “changing their personae” into a different ritual pattern (including clothing, etc.).<sup>80</sup> Also, there was a different “order” of shamans,<sup>81</sup> *ak kam* (the “white shamans”), which had little in common with *manjaktu kam*. These were the most common ritual personae to address the *aru tos*. In addition, it seems that *aru tos* could be addressed by designated elders and by *jelbichi* (“fanner” - a special type of priest which may or may not have been the same as *ak kam*). How interchangeable these persons were, is impossible to say at the moment.<sup>82</sup>

Another very important spirit that belongs both to the Upper and Middle Worlds is *Jajyk*. This entity is entirely shapeless, thus being similar to the view of “spirit” in the Western religions. Its role is extremely important at all kinds of ceremonies, especially at those addressed to the spirits on high. All types of ritual performers as well as laity address *jajyk* as a messenger, connecting the Middle and Upper Worlds. While this spirit, unlike other spirit beings of Altai tradition, does not require an elaborate sacrifice, it is a vehicle that carries messages (including prayers) to their respective destinations. It is important to mention that in the case when the Lower World is addressed, *jajyk* is not

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<sup>80</sup> Anokhin, Manuscript, Part 3. *Kratkiy Analiz Shamanstva Altaiskih Plemen* (A Brief analysis of the Shamanic practices of the Altai tribes), 1930, and Sagalaev and Oktiabr'skaia, pp.75-78.

<sup>81</sup> Dugarov, who studied similar patterns in Buryatia, doubts that this order can be called “shamans.” (Dugarov, D.S. *Istoricheskie Korni Belogo Shamanstva*. (The Historic Roots of White Shamanism). Moscow: “Nauka,” 1991, pp.19-30)

<sup>82</sup> Potapov, “*K voprosu...*”

“functional”: its place is taken over by the soul-spirit of the sacrificed animal (*pura*, or *bura*).<sup>83</sup>

## **Tengri**

Finally, it is necessary to consider the Turkic-Mongolain “chief god proper,” *Tengri*, or Sky. The figure of *Tengri*, as was shown in Chapter One, was very prominent in ancient and medieval religion of Turks and Mongols. He was the main addressee of the “high” ceremonies, thus being closely connected with the figure of a kagan and the largest scale, or highest level of the Turkic social architecture – the federation, or empire.

*Tengri* is widely mentioned in all sorts of Altai sacred narrative – Epic, legends and myths. Every Altaian knows about him. However, this god is mostly latent, being practically a “retired deity.”<sup>84</sup> The degree to which *Tengri* is “retired into the background” is difficult to estimate, because there is very little published data related to the role of this deity in Altai tradition. Apparently, *Tengri* is never addressed at a private level. Also, the worship of *Tengri* is absolutely beyond the competence and authority of the shamans<sup>85</sup> - to the point of total banning of shamans from attending the ceremonies dedicated to *Tengri*. There are several records of the ceremony dedicated to *Tengri* among Altaians and their close relatives, Khakass. The “office” of this ceremony is not easy to define, but it is likely that the modern Altai culture it largely coincides to the office of *aru tos*’ worship.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Anokhin, A.V. *Materialy po Shamanstvu u Altaitsey* (Materials on Altai Shamanic Practices), Leningrad: 1924 and Gorno-Altai: Ak Chechek, 1994, pp.12-17

<sup>84</sup> Among the “cultural siblings” of Altaians, Tuvans and Buryats, *Tengri* is very “active” and is indeed the chief god, linked to the (potentially royal) leadership.

<sup>85</sup> Taking into account the fact that most of the scholarship on Altai religion was limited to the study of Shamanism (and limited Altai religion to Shamanism as well), it is probable, that the very little information on *Tengri* is due to the fact that he was, in a manner of speaking, “beyond the scope of observation” of Soviet ethnographers.

<sup>86</sup> See the description of the *Tengri* ceremony in Appendix 1.

Having considered the main spirit figures of Altai tradition, it is necessary to look in more detail at the sacred offices, or specialists. While there is a certain correspondence between deities and specialists that address them, this correspondence is not “linear” where a given office is strictly linked to a particular deity, or a group of deities. The sacred offices of the Altai tradition differ not only with respect to their “object” (i.e., a deity), but also in their function, thus creating an intricate system of “religious specializations.” Moreover, some sacred specialists such as *kaichi* do not seem to be linked to a particular deity and/or ceremonial complex at all while at the same time they carry very important religious function.

### **The diversity of religious offices.**

As in the case with the Altai pantheon, the religious specialists of Altai tradition will be considered from the “bottom up” – that is, beginning with those who address the Lower World. The correspondence of the Altai sacred offices and the religious strata, again, partially coincides with the hierarchy of the realms, addressed by these offices: The Lower World professional shamans, *manjaktu kam*, do not embody, or represent a particular social stratum, being a sort of “free radicals” within the community. The specialists of the “minor” religious offices do not explicitly represent *seoks*, but are more integrated into the *seok* structure than the *manjaktu kam*. The *ak kam*, the “white shamans,” represent the *seok* identity and its particular religious stratum. Finally, the *jelbichi* and/or elders, who officiate at the ceremonies of the *Tengri* worship and whose function and role overlaps with the one of *ak kam*, represent the social stratum that overarches *seoks* and is analogous to what J.-P.Roux calls the “imperial level.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Roux, *Turkic...*, p.89-90



## **The Lower World and Manjaktu kam.**

*Manjaktu kam* is the Altai title for a shaman who addresses the Lower World – Erlik and his retinue.<sup>88</sup> Manjak is the “trademark” and the essential instrument of the *manjaktu kam*, enabling him or her to travel to the Lower World. It is a very heavy and elaborate costume, depicting the map of Lower World, spirit-helpers of the shaman, and his or her shamanic genealogy. Essentially, the costume is the representation of the totality of the narrative of a *manjaktu kam*. Another key instrument (and also, an important part of shamanic lore) of *manjaktu kam* was his or her drum, used exclusively for the travels to the Lower World.

A new *kam* was forced to become a *kam* through the “pressure” of the *kara tos* (the “impure ancestors”) who made him or her very sick until he or she surrendered into becoming a *kam*. In Altai, such a situation has been seen more as a curse than a blessing with special spiritual powers: there are many known instances when a “called” person preferred to kill him- or herself just to avoid becoming a shaman.<sup>89</sup> The *kara tos* were chiefly the ghosts of the deceased shamans (either famous and well-known shamans of the past, or the direct genetic ancestors of a given person – shamanic vocation usually ran within a family), who needed the formation of a new shaman to feed them. In exchange, they served as spirit helpers in the *manjaktu kam*’s journeys into Lower World and negotiations with its denizens:

The cult of ancestor-shamans constituted among Altaians the basis of shamanic lineage...<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> It is important to mention that Soviet scholarship presented *manjaktu kam* as practically the only religious office/specialist of Altai tradition (and hence, Altai tradition itself –as “shamanism”)

<sup>89</sup> Anokhin, *Materialy...*, pp.32 and further, Potapov, *Altaiskii Shamanizm*, p.130 and further

<sup>90</sup> *Altaiskii Shamanizm*, 66

*Manjaktu kam* were not tied to, or represented *seoks*. In fact, when certain communities “hired” such a shaman, it was commonly preferable to hire a foreign one, for the simple reason that such a shaman would not have any personal preferences and antipathies within a given community and would not perform black magic (soul-stealing) because of them.<sup>91</sup> While being very important due to their expertise in the matters of negotiation with the Lower World in the cases of personal or community’s crisis, such as disease, bad weather, hexes, revenge and so on, *manjaktu kam* were seen with great ambiguity due to their alien nature, “impurity” and the absence of “community ethic” – that is, they were not restricted by their membership (which they did not have) in the community in the choice of beneficial or negative actions.

Every shaman (*manjaktu kam*) had a close relation with the God of the Underworld, Erlik. It seems that, having accepted the calling (of the ancestor-shamans), a shaman also “automatically” connected him- or herself with Erlik and his (non-human) spirits. This connection has been the defining one in the emergence of the *manjaktu kam*.<sup>92</sup> Such a shaman could perform healings, soul-returns and other “trouble-shooting” procedures, which were the main function of a shaman, due to the connection with Erlik. Since all the troubles, according to Altai beliefs, were, essentially, coming from Erlik and his spirits, having him as a patron, and his domain – accessible, enabled a shaman to deal with the crises efficiently. In other words, *manjaktu kam* were professionals, functioning independently from the *seok* structure.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> S. Tioukhteneva, Seminar, Gorno-Altaiisk, August 2001.

<sup>92</sup> Much of the *manjak* sophisticated and highly symbolic ornamentation serves as a map, or guide specifically through Erlik’s domain (Underworld).

<sup>93</sup> Potapov, *Altaiskij*, p.130

The “sacred narrative” of *manjaktu kam* was limited to their respective genealogies, spirit travel itineraries, and “case studies” – stories of exploits or losses, either their own, or these of their colleagues. Also, the segment of the Altai pantheon specifically “within the realm of competence” of a *manjaktu kam*, was the Lower World alone. The main functions of every *manjaktu kam* were the negotiations with the spirits (primarily, Erlik) in the case of a personal or community crisis.

The spectacular shamanic sessions, when a shaman performed an ecstatic dance and communication with the spirits, dressed in *manjak* and beating a drum, observed by many ethnographers, were examples of the former – of the “troubleshooting,” intimately tied with the main source of trouble – Erlik’s realm. This is not to say that Erlik and his spirits were always the cause of the trouble – more often than not, an individual or a community in crisis were the initial cause of it, due to an instance of misbehavior or carelessness. Erlik in such cases served as a vigorous and somewhat corrupt “policeman,”<sup>94</sup> never letting the “culprit” escape unpunished. The function of the shaman was to negotiate a ransom for such a person. This ransom always was in the form of a sacrifice – often, a very large one (several horses), which was delivered to Erlik during the shamanic session.

### **The Middle World: “minor” sacred vocations.**

While in scholarly research, the “non-shamanic” sacred personae of Altai were overshadowed by the prominent figure of a shaman, and almost no research has been

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<sup>94</sup> Erlik’s role comparison with a policemen was recorded by Anokhin from an explanation of a shaman, who called him “a police ...” (*oshkoshlo stanoboi pristap*) (Anokhin, *Materialy...* p. 7)

dedicated to them, it is known that Altai tradition has had many “sacred personae,” some of whose functions overlapped with the shaman’s, while others did not.<sup>95</sup>

The question whether the diverse sacred personae, or sacred offices, are simply fragments of a shamanic vocation - somehow “underdeveloped” shamans, or represent the “primary” and underlying diverse and diffused network of sacred functions with Turkic-Mongolian tradition, is a point of a major argument among scholars. Some scholars, such as W.Heissig, J.-P.Roux and, to a degree, A.Sagalaev, see these offices and functions as a testimony to the diversity of religious functions among Turks and Mongols, while others, primarily Soviet scholars, see all the sacred figures as either “appendices” to a shamanic vocation, or simply (and without explanation), call all the figures in question “shamans,” as did L.P.Potapov in his work.

Drawing the data from the variety of Medieval accounts, J.-P.Roux notes the following “minor offices” of the Turk-Mongolian religious practice in addition to the Shamans and the “high priesthood” of *Tengri* and other universal gods:

- 1) (non-Shamanic) healers;
- 2) Diviners (4 different types – a diviner on the sheep’s shoulder blade, a dream-seer, a diviner with a book, and a diviner with the stones)
- 3) Mediums

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<sup>95</sup> The traditions of the Mongols and Buryats, which are almost identical with the Altaian tradition, have been reconstructed in detail by W.Heissig and Dugarov, respectively. These reconstructions indicate a great diversity of sacred offices, ceremonial complexes, etc., entirely independent from the “Lower World shamanism” and often opposite to it:

Alongside these forms of ecstatic shamanism there was, however, a large group of manifestations of religious life which did not involve the shamans as performers, but were the concern of individuals or of the social group involved, the clan or the family. These too (like shamanism itself) reached back into the mists of antiquity; and they too were supposed to summon the protection of the gods. The cult of the eternal blue sky, the veneration of fire, the invocation of Geser Khan and the veneration of the Ancestor of the princely family, Chinggis Khan, incense offerings in general to the *tngri* (heavenly beings) as well as prayers to the hills and mountains and to the powers which dwelt within them, all these belonged in this class of religious activities, as did blessings and curses. (Heissig, 3)

- 4) The owner of the “weather-stone”<sup>96</sup>

While this list partially differs from the accounts of later observers of Altai tradition, it has an important value: a substantial number of sacred personae and their functions, mentioned by Roux, are identical to the later Altai “sacred offices.” This points at the conservative and stable nature of these functions. Verbitsky<sup>97</sup> mentions the following sacred vocations of Altai tradition:

- 1) Rymchi – a medium
- 2) Tel’ gochi – diviner
- 3) Yarynchi – diviner, who uses the shoulder blade of a sheep
- 4) Kol-kureechi – chiromancer
- 5) Jadachi – the possessor of the “weather-stone”

Sagalaev (speaking of the modern or near-modern period) mentions more than 30 different terms for the specialists – possessors of the arcane knowledge, have been known in Altai-Sayan region alone. Among them – diviners on a burnt sheep shoulder blade (*arynchi – yrynchi*), the “whisperers” (from alt. *arbysh* – “charm, whisper,” those who performed, fanning with the piece of cloth or a birch branch (*jelbegchi, chilbegchi*), those who affected the weather with the use of a magic stone *jada (jadachi)*, and others.<sup>98</sup>

S. Tioukhteneva<sup>99</sup> distinguishes many diverse categories of the sacred personae.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Roux, *Turkic...* 90

<sup>97</sup> Verbitsky, p.64

<sup>98</sup> Sagalaev, Oktibr’skaia, *Traditsionnoe...* p. 99.

<sup>99</sup> Tioukhteneva, S. “Neo-shamanstvo na Altae v 1980-1990h godah: yasnovidenie i snovidenie v praktike shamanstvuyushih” (“Neo-shamanism in Altai in 1980s-1990s: clairvoyance and dreaming in the practice of the shamanizing”)

<sup>100</sup> 1) *Alkyshechy* – a person with charisma of blessing;

2) *Archyn koror* – a person, who heals and divines by the use of the juniper (*archyn*) smudging

3) *Arzhangas ulus bashkarar* – a person, entitled to take people to the Sacred (healing) springs and competent in the relevant rituals;

4) *Kara kostu* – a person with an “evil eye”

As the comparison of these lists, based on information from different periods: ancient-medieval (Roux), 19<sup>th</sup> century (Verbitsky), and 20<sup>th</sup> century (Sagalaev and Tioukhteneva), shows, the “minor” sacred offices tend to manifest their conservative nature and exist *along* with the shamans.

All of these figures, as well as the functions associated with them, belong to the Altai tradition in both its pre-Ak Jang and later, Ak Jang manifestations. Just as the professional *manjaktu kam*, they are usually not linked to a given *seok*. Some of their functions (e.g., the clairvoyance of *kospokchi*, or a “hexing gift”) are shared with the shamans,<sup>9</sup> while others (mediumism, or the “blessing gift”) are not. However, unlike the *manjaktu kam*, who always occupy an important but ambiguous and ambivalent place in the community, the “minor” specialists of the sacred (called in Altai “*biler kizhi*” – “the people of knowledge”), especially those whose charisma is benevolent (e.g. *algyshchi*, or *arzhanga ulus bashkarar*) are well-respected and liked, often being *elders* in addition to their specific gift or ability. Unlike *manjaktu kam*, they are not professionals and are the dedicated members of the *seoks* they belong to and serve.

All of these “minor” specialists of the sacred are “of” the Middle World that is, those of them who have some affinity (in their function) to a deity or a spirit, have it with a spirit of the Middle World. Thus, a *kospokchi* ( a clairvoyant) may have a particular

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- 1) *Kara tyldu* – a person, who knows hexes
  - 2) *Kargyshchi* – another hexer
  - 3) *Koru tush koror* – a person, who sees the premonitory dreams
  - 4) *Kospokchi* – a “spirit-seer,” clairvoyant
  - 5) *Ugaachy* – a spirit-hearer, a “psychic”
  - 6) *Kabakchy* – a person, who sees with the forehead (eyebrows)
  - 7) *Tarmychi* – still another hexer
  - 8) *Jadachy* – a possessor of the weather-stone
  - 9) *Yrymchi* – a medium

relation to a *taika-eezi* (the Master of a Mountain) who “provides” a hunting party, of which *kospokchi* is a member as an “expert,” with game; or an *arzhanga ulus bashkarar* – a guide to the sacred springs (and the ceremonial authority at such pilgrimages) might have a special relation with a spirit of a spring. It is possible that such vocations as *algyskhi* and *archyn koror*,<sup>101</sup> as well as *yrymchi*, have connections with the “spirits on high,” but it is not certain.

However, while these sacred personae of Altai tradition testify to the diversity of its offices and functions, they, in a manner of speaking, are “inert,” or neutral with regard to the religious activities directly aimed at upholding or consolidating the *seok* structure. In other words, they function *below* the *seok* level. However, other specialists of Altai tradition, whose spiritual “addressees” belong to both Middle and Upper Worlds, are, in a manner of speaking, the hinges of the *seok*-level religious representation, the *aru tos*.

### **Middle and Upper Worlds: the “socially marked” sacred offices.**

#### **Ak kam: the “different” shamans.**

All works dedicated to Altai tradition mention an important sacred figure, different from the *manjaktu kam*, the *ak kam* (the “white shaman”). However, despite this mentioning, not much is known about the specific functions of this figure, compared and contrasted with the much more thoroughly researched and described functions of *manjaktu kam*. Another problem with the analysis of this figure, or office, lies in the fact that some *manjaktu kam* also functioned as *ak kam*. These two functions never mixed in

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<sup>101</sup> The reason for this assumption is the fact that these two vocations are linked to the performance of the Upper World ceremonies, which will be discussed below.

the same ritual: to act as *ak kam*, *manjaktu kam* had to change his<sup>102</sup> “ritual persona” by entirely changing the ritual attire – costume, ritual instruments, etc. However, most of the *kam* (shamans) of Altai belonged to only one of these categories.

While Potapov sees the institute of *ak kam* as secondary and a “weak” derivative of what he calls “classical shamanism” (seeing the latter in the drum- and *manjak*-armed *manjaktu kam*, or the shamans of Lower World), other scholars see it as an entirely independent phenomenon, different in its role and functions from the *manjaktu kam*. In addition, Sagalaev and Dugarov state that *ak kam* were actually considered as “stronger” and much more respected personae than the *manjaktu kam*. The two-fold division of the Lower World shamans and *ak kam* has been well-documented throughout Southern Siberia, among all Turkic and Mongolian groups as well as Tungus.<sup>103</sup> Even the Tungus term, *saman*, which later became the generic name for all “shamans,” was first introduced into academic literature by Shirokogorov as designating specifically *ak kam*.<sup>104</sup> Interestingly, Shirokogorov did not regard the *saman*, whom he called the “priest,” as having the same, or similar role as the drum- and *manjak*-geared “shamans of Lower World,” or classical shamans.<sup>105</sup> However, ironically, the term became the generic academic title for the latter.<sup>106</sup> Unlike *manjaktu kam*, *ak kam* did not address the spirits of the Lower World and Erlik. Thus, they did not function as the “troubleshooters” or crisis managers. These very important and highly demanded functions were reserved to

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<sup>102</sup> While *manjaktu kam* were both female and male, *ak kam* were only male.

<sup>103</sup> ... Black shaman is the evil-doer, while the white shaman is a shaman, who makes sacrifices to different spirit-patrons (*oron khangaida*) and asks for various material and other blessings for the people. This Buryat views are similar to Tuvan ideas... shamans who served the spirits of the Dark world and *Erlik*, were called “black” (*kara-kham*), and the rest – “white” (*ak-kham*). The white shamans were afraid of the black ones, believing that the latter may harm or even kill them. (Dugarov, 21)

<sup>104</sup> In: Hutton, p. 116.

<sup>105</sup> Many recent publications (e.g., Dugarov), discuss the same question – whether or not *ak kam* can be regarded as a shaman (in the common academic understanding of this phenomenon).

<sup>106</sup> Hutton describes this mistake in detail, p.113 and further.



the *manjaktu kam* and, to some degree, to the specialists with the “minor” vocations, described above.

*Ak kam* addressed primarily the *aru tos*, the heavenly patrons-ancestors of the *seoks*. Also, they held the authority in performing the ceremonies dedicated to the *taika-eezi* (the Master of the Mountain, who is the patron of a given *seok*, by analogy with the heavenly *aru tos*) and the spirits of the *Jer-su* complex (the Middle World) - namely, to those who were connected as the Middle World patrons of the *seoks* or larger social structures. They were the key ceremonial figures at the large seasonal *seok* rituals. Unlike the *manjaktu kam*, the *ak kam* were not “professional.”<sup>107</sup> Their function was entirely related to a *seok* and, in a manner of speaking, they were the embodiments of the *seok* religious identity. According to Anokhin, *ak kam* were also involved in the ceremonial complex related to the “universal” Turkic-Mongolian gods, inherited by Altaians: Ot-ene, Umai, and others. However, Anokhin does not provide any detail about this practice.

Unlike the *manjaktu kam*, *ak kam* did not have the spirits of deceased shamans as their guardian, or helper-spirits. Instead, they had “heavenly patrons” - the *aru tos*, who, obviously, were the patrons of the *seok* they belonged to and represented. The *aru tos* were not the “guardian spirits” in the sense as the guardian spirits of the *manjaktu kam*, with whom he or she conversed and traveled to the other realms: rather, *ak kam* were “inspired” by the *aru tos*, which made them being chosen, due to this charisma, to become the authorities at the *aru tos*’ propitiation.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Anokhin, *Materialy...* and Dugarov, pp.19-30 and Afterword.

<sup>108</sup> Compare to Sakha (Yakut) materials:

...Among Yakuts, the priests of the almost extinct clan cult were, as it seems, the “white shamans” *aiyy oiyyuuna* who had very little in common with the shamans proper – *abaasy oiyyuuna...* (Tokarev, S.A. *Rannie Formy Religii*. (The Early Forms of Religion) Moscow: “Nauka,” 1964, p.289)

Another, extremely significant feature that distinguished *ak kam* from the *manjaktu kam* was the absence of “traveling” among the former. The chief characteristic of the “shamans proper,” (in this case, *manjaktu kam*), which became their defining “trademark” in the cross-cultural studies of shamanism, was their “traveling” to the spirit world during their trance sessions. While this traveling was, indeed, the key feature in the *manjaktu kam* function, *ak kam* did not travel, and either did not enter a trance, or entered it in a very light form.<sup>109</sup>

The ceremonies performed by *ak kam* and *manjaktu kam* were very different in their character. While the center of the *manjaktu kam* performance was the trance and communication with the spirits, aimed at alleviating a personal or community crisis through negotiation and struggle with the spirits, and was, essentially, a private ceremony involving only those who were directly linked to a crisis in question – the “clients,” *ak kam* acted more as *seok* priests, performing sacrificial rituals attended by the whole *seok*, where the social (vs. private) nature of the ceremony was stressed.<sup>110</sup>

This ceremony was performed, according to different sources, either once in several years or several times a year, at the seasonal gatherings.<sup>111</sup> Another very important occasion, on which an *aru tos* was addressed, was asking for *kut*.<sup>112</sup> Often,<sup>113</sup> no animal was sacrificed at the ceremony, but instead milk or alcohol were sprinkled

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<sup>109</sup> Potapov, “*K Voprosu...*” p.32-34.

<sup>110</sup> Anokhin, *Materialy...* pp.33-34

<sup>111</sup> Tioukhteneva, S. “*Ob evolyutsii kul'ta gor u altaitsev*” (On evolution of the cult of mountains among Altaians) In: *Shamanizm i rannie religioznye predstavleniia* (Shamanism and the early religious views), Vol.1, Moscow: 1995, pp.173-180

<sup>112</sup> Literally, “life-soul.” The request for progeny (human or of herds).

<sup>113</sup> Anokhin, *Materialy*, p.11

around. During such a ceremony, an *ak kam* used neither drum nor *manjak*: he was dressed in a white robe and a hat with ribbons (*chalu*).<sup>114</sup>

As was mentioned above, the ethnographic information on *ak kam* in Altai has been very limited compared to the wealth of materials on *manjaktu kam*. In addition to some possible biases of the “shaman-centered” (i.e., *manjaktu kam*-centered) approach to the study of Altai tradition that gave the study of *manjaktu kam* priority over other sacred offices, which were discussed above, there may have been another reason for the scarcity of the data. The issue is that the performances of *manjaktu kam*, being private, were neutral with respect to the integrity of the structured Altai community (*seoks*) and, as a result of it, were deemed less sacred, and therefore less concealed from strangers. Altai *manjaktu kam* even performed at the theater in the city of Tomsk to entertain a Russian audience!<sup>115</sup> On the other hand, the *seok* ceremonies, directed by *ak kam*, have been regarded as extremely important and sensitive in the religious life of the *seoks* and, as a result, their attendees were “screened” much more carefully. Usually, only the members of a given *seok* were admitted to them, while the Russian researchers, obviously, were not.<sup>116</sup>

### **Jelbichi, elder, and the Tengri worship.**

The figure of *ak kam*, and the ceremonies dedicated to *aru tos* and the *seoks*, are linked to the Tengri, or Heaven, ceremonies and the figures which officiated at them – the *jelbichi* and the *elder*. The difference between the *ak kam*, the elder and the *jelbichi* – and, in some cases, between the *aru tos-seok* ceremonies and the worship of *Tengri*, is unclear.

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<sup>114</sup> This characteristic features of the ceremony make it very similar to the “core” Ak Jang worship.

<sup>115</sup> Hutton, p.93. This is a very important note, because the *kam* mentioned by Hutton (Mampyi) was one of the greatest *manjaktu kam* of Altai and Tuva. Even he, however, considered his skill sufficiently “exoteric” to be presented for an audience of skeptical strangers.

<sup>116</sup> This opinion is shared by the Altai ethnographers – S.Tioukhteneva and others.

While the two types of ceremony were very similar in their structure,<sup>117</sup> the *aru tos –seok* ceremony was performed, as all sources state, by *ak kam* (that is, somebody who is still called “*kam*” – a shaman), while the *Tengri* worship was absolutely off-limits for the shamans (unfortunately, the sources do not specify, whether the shamans in question were only *manjaktu kam* or *ak kam* as well) – they were considered impure and went into seizures if they tried to attend the ceremony:

When the mutton is ready, “an elder, respected by everyone and who knows the old tradition and the words of the prayer, having in his hand a spoon and dipping it in the birch-bark, made right at the spot, plate, sprinkles in turns kumys, milk, airan, and broth to the sky, then – at the birch, meanwhile circumambulating clockwise the birches, reading special prayers... The ritual end with feast, when the mutton is eaten and the sacrificial araka (moonshine) is drunk. All the leftovers and bones are put in the fire. This prayer to “sky and dear sun” is considered being **beyond the sphere of the evil spirits**, and, therefore, the presence of a shaman at tigr taikh is not required; according to the Natives, if a shaman tries to attend the taikh, or, especially, to perform a prayer, goes mad and has a seizure.<sup>118</sup>

The *Tengri* ceremony was officiated by an *elder*, who wore a special ceremonial dress – white robe and a woman’s hat.<sup>119</sup> This dress, however, resembles the *ak kam*’s attire very closely. Moreover, both *ak kam* and the elder performing the *Tengri* ceremony, used, as their main ritual implement, a fan – sometimes a piece of cloth or a birch branch, “fanning the spirit” with it. Therefore, both specialists were called *jelbichi* – “the fanner.”

Are, then, *ak kam* and “*elder*” – the performer of the *Tengri* ceremony, the same figure, or two different offices, united only by the name, pointing at their ritual tool, *jelbichi*? In the case of Altai tradition, this is not known for certain at this stage of research. However, Dugarov, who did a cross-cultural study on *ak kam*, the “white

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<sup>117</sup> Potapov treats them as essentially identical (*Altaiskii Shamanizm*, pp.260-274)

<sup>118</sup> Yakovlev, cited from Sagalaev and Oktiabr’skaia, p. 84

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 36

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, p.83.

shamanism” among Turkic and Mongolian groups of Siberia (Sakha, Buryats and others) states that these figures are, indeed, the same. Furthermore, as the office of “heaven worship,” since *aru tos* are “heavenly,” and, as such, may be seen as subordinate to *Tengri*, they are clearly distinct from, or opposing, the office of the *manjaktu kam*, the shamans of the Lower World.<sup>120</sup> Thus, it can be assumed that the shamans who were banned from *Tengri* worship, were the *manjaktu kam*.<sup>121</sup>

Even though the ceremonies dedicated to *aru tos* and *Tengri*, were nearly identical in their structure and, perhaps, performed by the same specialists, they were still distinct with respect to the *social scale* at which they were performed. While the *aru tos* ceremonies were performed for the particular *seoks*, and their attendance was reserved to the *seok* members, the *Tengri* worship “transcended” the *seok* level, being addressed to the largest sample of the community possible – to the representatives of the several *seoks*, or to a whole ethnic group, or even, as Sagalaev notes, to an international participation among those Turks and Mongols who consider *Tengri* as a supreme god. This fact corroborates the historical data, presented by Roux and others, concerning the universal and consolidating aspect of the “overarching” *Tengri* cult.

### **Kaichi**

The last, and very important, sacred office of Altai tradition to be considered is *kaichi*, the Epic singer.

*Kaichi*, the singer of Epics, is a very significant person in Altai culture. In the Soviet period, when all forms of religion were thoroughly weeded out, *kaichi* were

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<sup>120</sup> This view is supported by several Altai legends, collected in Verbitsky. In these legends, the practice of *manjaktu kam* and the “*Tengeri*” cult are presented as fundamentally opposing (the *manjaktu kam* are “impure” vs. “pure” *Tengeri* cult, etc.)

<sup>121</sup> Which, again, brings back the question, discussed by Dugarov – whether or not *ak kam* can be called a “shaman.”

neither persecuted nor “marked” as religious, or sacred, figures. Their narrative, Altai Epics, was considered a purely secular, “cultural” vocation. It was extensively studied by both Altai and Russian scholars, who carefully avoided any religious interpretation of it. However, in the last 10 years, the *kaichi* were presented in many publications as extremely important sacred personae<sup>122</sup> (both in Altai and other Turkic and Mongolian groups), and their acknowledgement as significant contributors to and upholders of religious tradition has been steadily growing.<sup>123</sup>

While not being part of the core ceremonial – “liturgical” aspect of Altai tradition, *kaichi* function as its embodied “holy writ” – the keepers and reproducers of the (epic) narrative, which, as will be shown, constitutes a unique pool for the Ak Jang mythology. This narrative has very little in common with Shamanic lore and frequently manifests as its antithesis.

During the performance of the epic, which is a very important and massive sacred event, surrounded by numerous prescriptions for its participants, *kaichi* “summons” the heroes of the Epic narrative. Some of these spirit-figures, such as *aru tos*, Tengri and others, are well-known in pre-Ak Jang Altai tradition. However, a number of key characters of the Epics – the heroes and divine figures such as Ak Burkhan or Oirof, constitute a sacred pattern, which was explicated by and in Ak Jang, although it was present in the Epic long before the emergence of the White Faith. Thus, *kaichi* and his

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<sup>122</sup> E.g., Yamaeva, Ye. E. Altaiiskii Geroicheski Epos (Sviasi s mifologiei, predstavleniiami, sotsial’no-bytovymi institutami). (Altai Heroic Epic (Relations with mythology, views and social institutions). PhD Dissertation. Leningrad, 1986, and Funk, D.A. “*Epicheski pevets i shaman v traditsionnom obshestve: Perspektivy issledovaniia*.” (Epic singer and shaman in a traditional society: some perspectives of studying), In: Proceedings of the International Interdisciplinary Scientific and Practical Symposium, “Ecology and Traditional Religious and Magical Knowledge,” Moscow-Abakan-Kyzyl, 2001, pp.280-282.

<sup>123</sup> On many occasions, they are compared to shamans, healers and so on.

narrative can be seen as a focal point, which both separates and unites the “pre-Ak Jang” Altai tradition and Ak Jang as a new, but still organic, part of it.

### **The sources of the mythic-religious narrative of Altai**

While a number of assorted myths, legends, blessings and other folklore has been collected in Altai over the years, almost no work of linking these narratives with the religious practice and their place in it has been done. Probably, A.Sagalaev has been the only person who has tried to link the narrative to sacred personae of Altai and their functions. It seems that the main “streams” or categories of Altai sacred narrative are: the shamanic (*manjaktu kam*) narrative, the “general” mythology – the Creation myths, myths about *aru tos* and the origin of the *seoks*, and the Epic narrative.<sup>124</sup>

Shamanic narrative, interestingly enough, is very limited.<sup>125</sup> While Anokhin,<sup>126</sup> using *manjaktu kam* or their relatives as informants, received from them very specific and

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<sup>124</sup> Of course, there are many more types of religious or para-religious narrative in Altai: for example, blessings, formulae for the household rituals, hexes, etc. However, while, probably, these “smaller” narratives, just like the “smaller” spirits and “smaller” sacred figure constitute the bulk of the religious and cultural structuring of Altai tradition, they are “inert,” or indifferent to the relation between Ak Jang and the rest of the Altai traditional context – therefore, they will not be discussed.

<sup>125</sup> In her paper, “*Tipologiya Syuzhetov o Shamanah.*” (The Typology of Narrative on Shamans). In: Problemy Izucheniia Istorii i Kultury Altaia i Sopredel'nyh Territoriy. Gorno-Altaiisk, 1992, pp. 141-146 Ye.Yamaeva gives the list of such themes:

- 1) Emergence of the first shamans
- 2) Receiving of shamanic vocation
- 3) The struggles of the great shamans with the deities and spirits;
- 4) The trials and persecution of the shamans
- 5) The stories of false shamans
- 6) The miracles, performed by shamans
- 7) Shamans and their relations with their spirits;
- 8) Return of the stolen souls;
- 9) Shaman’s marriage to a daughter of his patient ( as a payoff for his service)
- 10) Fights among shamans;
- 11) Fights between shamans and Russian sorcerers and healers;
- 12) Shamans and *kospokchi* (clairvoyants)

It is clear that, while shamanic narratives are diverse and fascinating, they are strongly “professional” and, thus, very narrow. A comparison that comes to mind is Psychoanalytical “narrative” rather than the one of a religious tradition.

<sup>126</sup> Materialy..., pp. 65-148

particular (to each shaman) stories about the parts of the universe and spirits each given shaman had to travel through, or deal with, he was able to collect very little material on the “general” cosmology, cosmogony, and “theology” of the Altai sacred cosmos. For the shamans, such information did not seem relevant, because both their competence and interest were tightly linked to their particular vocation, including the particular spirits and procedures, unique for each shaman. Those shamans (*ak kam*) who had among their patrons *aru tos* (the “pure ancestor” – a heavenly ancestor-patron of the *seok*) also “possessed” the *seok* narrative, which included the story of the *seok*’s origin and the complex of the lore, related to the *aru tos*.<sup>127</sup>

The bulk of the traditional lore, related to the mythological history of *seoks*, or general cosmology and cosmogony, or to household rituals and spirits, was “diffused” within the community among the *neme biler kizhi*, “the people of knowledge.” While this title also applies to the persons with more definite “sacred vocations,”<sup>128</sup> the carriers of the lore did not constitute any specific “sacred guild.” A.Sagalaev links them to the elders (or, more generally, people of certain age), but S Tioukhteneva insists that in modern Altai tradition, age of such a person has little relevance to his or her competence.<sup>129</sup>

Finally, the Epic narrative is the prerogative of *kaichi*, the bards. *Kaichi* and the Epic they perform represent both *seok* and wider Altai (and even Turkic-Mongolian in general) lore. As it has been mentioned above, until recently they were presented in

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<sup>127</sup> It is important to mention that among the *manjaktu kam*, i.e. those, who had an authority to address/deal with Erlik, only few had *aru tos* as well. In most cases, as seen from the data of Anokhin (Anokhin ), the division between those shamans who address Erlik and Underworld and those who addressed *aru tos*, was well-defined. The former ones were functioning strictly as “troubleshooters” and were not tied to a clan, or clan lore, while the latter were prime representatives of the clans.

<sup>128</sup> See the list above.

<sup>129</sup> S.Tioukhteneva, seminar, July 2001.



academic work as purely secular “professionals.” However, the research<sup>130</sup> of the last ten to fifteen years has been gradually revealing that their vocation is profoundly spiritually marked.<sup>131</sup> Altai Epic tradition is very rich – according to the review by S.Surazakov, the more or less full collection of Altai Epic narrative would occupy some 4000 pages.<sup>132</sup> Of course, not every *kaichi* knows all of it, but the main “all-Altai” Epics such as “Altai-Buchai,” “Maadai-kara” and others, are known and performed by every *kaichi*. Since Epic narrative is at the base of the Ak Jang theology, it is important to discuss it in more detail.

Unlike the “common” myths and shamanic lore, the former of which is not concerned with history, and the latter is concerned only with the history of a particular shamanic lineage, Epic stories deal with history, or mythological quasi-history of Altai and Altaians. It is important to mention that Epic is rarely related to a particular *seok*, addressing the “collective memory” of all of Altaians, and even more – of all Turkic-Mongolian world.

In the center of every major Epic is a hero (usually male, but, as in the legend “Ochi-bala” – female), who is born under miraculous circumstances.<sup>133</sup> The hero goes on a journey (a hunt, for example), returning from which he/she sees the destruction of Altai. The culprit in this destruction is either a foreign invader, or *Erlík*, who acts either with the help of his non-human retinue, or, more often, through a *shaman* who, as the story

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<sup>130</sup> Both Russian (Funk) and Altai (Surazakov, S.S. Altaiskii Geroicheski Epos (Altai Heroic Epics). Moscow: “Nauka,” 1985)

<sup>131</sup> Thus, they undergo a “calling,” similar to shaman’s (but much milder and seen positively) and other “people of knowledge.”

<sup>132</sup> Surazakov, Altaiskii, p.6

<sup>133</sup> The classic of the study of Siberian and Mongolian folklore, G.Potanin links all Altai and other Central Asian Epics to the story of Gesar, which served them as a sort of a typological archetype (from his point of view, the miraculous birth of the hero and other elements point at this): Anoskii Sbornik, pp.218-232.

develops, becomes the main adversary of the hero. In the case of a foreign invasion, the invader<sup>134</sup> is likened to, or identified with, a character from Erlik's Underworld kingdom.

The heroes themselves possess miraculous powers: they can shape-shift, have a number of miraculous tools<sup>135</sup> and animals (a horse, dogs, etc.). The hero can be seen (and has been seen by scholars<sup>136</sup>) as a "kind of shaman," but is different from the *manjaktu kam*, who is personified in the Epic by the hero's adversary, the servant of Erlik. While in some Epics the hero is related to *Ul'gen'*, *Koko-mongko* and other *aru tos* of Altai *seoks*, in the main, most important "all-Altai" epics his, or her patrons, benefactors, and, occasionally, relatives<sup>137</sup> are the gods, unknown to the "shamanic" part of Altai tradition: they are *Uch Kurbustan* and *Ak Burkhan*. The climax of the epic is, typically, a monumental battle between the hero and invader, or the Erlik's shaman, or the Erlik himself. At the end, Altai is restored, and a great ritual-feast is celebrated. During the feast, an old man in the white coat either descends from the sky, or rides in from somewhere. He presents himself as Ak Burkhan and blesses the hero, who becomes his and *Uch Kurbustan's* steward of Altai.

In such an epic, it is easy to recognize an actual pattern of the aspirations and expectations of Altaians at the onset of Ak Jang: massive prayers-celebrations, persecution of the *manjaktu kams* (the shamans, who addressed Erlik) and, especially, the hero himself – the "messiah" cultural hero, not linked or reduced to be the "property"

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<sup>134</sup> E.g. Kara-gula in *Maadai-Kara (Maadai-Kara)*. Gorno-Altaiisk, Ak Chechek, 1995)

<sup>135</sup> Which resonates with the *neme biler kizhi*, whose vocation is often based on possession of a tool (e.g., the "weather-stone")

<sup>136</sup> e.g., in Funk, "*Epicheskii pevets i shaman...*"

<sup>137</sup> I have not found a clear statement that would assert the fact that a hero is a *child* of Uch Kurbustan or Ak Burkhan. However, many Altai scholars draw this conclusion (Sadalova, T.M. *K voprosu ob arhaichnyh osnovah syuzhetov o Shunu*. (On the archaic roots of the Shunu narrative). In: *Problemy Izucheniia Kul'turno-Istoricheskogo Naslediia Altaia*. Gorno-Altaiisk, 1994, pp. 98)

of any particular *seok*, but the enlightener of the whole of Altai. While the hero-pattern in Epic is ancient, and most of the epic heroes are “fully legendary” – that is, they do not have any known historical prototypes, the historical and, at the same time, legendary messianic personae of Ak Jang – Shunu, Oirod, and Amyrsana, are also present in the epics as heroes. It is important to mention that the collection of epic material, where the key personae of Ak Jang are mentioned, first happened long before the emergence of Ak Jang.<sup>138</sup> Therefore, any “contamination” of the epic by later Ak Jang interpolations cannot be suspected.

Epic and, as was mentioned above, its performer, *kaichi*, may be seen as the “connectors” between the core Altai tradition and its newer offshoot, Ak Jang. Now, the place of Ak Jang within Altai tradition can be discussed.

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<sup>138</sup> By Verbitsky in 1860s

## Chapter 5. The Structure of Ak Jang

### Introduction

As the materials of Danilin and Anokhin show, most of the deities and practices of Ak Jang have been readily appropriated by it from the “core” Altai tradition that preceded its emergence. Essentially, all of the Altai tradition with the exception of the *manjaktu kam* and the worship of the representatives of the Lower World has become a part of it.

However, Ak Jang introduced a series of divine figures (heroes, *Uch Kurbustan*, and others), which were not explicitly present in the Altai tradition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it was first described. Yet, all of these figures have been present in the Epics, from which they were brought out as the objects of worship in Ak Jang. Also, as will be shown, these figures are recognized as religious personae among the cultural “siblings” of Altaians: Mongols, Buryats, and Kalmyks, which attests their traditional, rather than “invented,” character. This section is dedicated to the analysis of the origin of these “new” figures.

### 5.1. The pantheon of Ak Jang

While at its very beginning, Ak Jang rejected all the *aru tos* (“pure ancestors” – the heavenly seek spirits of Altai tradition), soon (approximately, by the 1910s) they were “admitted back” into the cycle of ceremonies. As Anokhin states:

Ul’gen<sup>1</sup> among Burkhanists is an old figure that was inherited from shamanism. However, this divine figure is treated by burkhanists differently: He is not offered bloody sacrifices, and shamans do not address him in ecstatic sessions. He is venerated only by sprinkling milk and the dedication of horses of light color. Such a horse is called *kyira-mal* and, after the ceremony, at which its mane is braided, it is released back into a flock... ..Ul’gen’s (Bai Ul’gan, Karshit, Baktygan) are considered among burkhanists as clan deities...<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Further in this quote, Anokhin uses the plural, because, according to his data, Ul’gen’ is not the proper name of *aru tos*, but a generic name.

<sup>2</sup> Anokhin, Manuscript, part 2, p.4-5

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 37

...Having acquired a new religion, burkhanists did not lose the principle of the clan worship of regional spirits of the mountains and passes. Every clan of burkhanists has its own venerated *taika* [the mountain], where this spirit dwells. In the head of a burkhanist, in agreement there is faith in two Altai spirits: one of them is universal – Kobo-Altai, and another – personal, Alu Altai. The latter receives short prayers... ..The Spirit of Altai gives to a burkhanist *kut*<sup>3</sup> or *sus*.<sup>4</sup>

*Ot-ene*, the spirit of Fire, was also adapted to the Ak Jang pantheon. Moreover, the ceremony *ot takyr*, dedicated to Ot-ene, inherited by Ak Jang from the pre-Ak Jang Altai tradition, became one of the three main ceremonies of Ak Jang, as mentioned by Danilin.<sup>5</sup>

*Jajyk*, the spirit –mediator between a shaman (or any person) and an *aru tos*, was not only adopted by Ak Jang, but acquired in it great importance, now having become the intermediary between the yarlykchi and Uch Kurbustan during the Ak Jang prayer meetings. The followers of Ak Jang distinguished two *Jajyks*: the *Ak Jajyk* (White *Jajyk*) – the mediator between the human and the heavenly Uch Kurbustan (or *aru tos*), and *Sary-Jajyk* (Yellow *Jajyk*), related to the hearth and the mediator between humans and the spirits of the Middle World (Altai and others).

All the “old” spirits, appropriated by Ak Jang, were seen by the followers of Ak Jang as the “fragments” of Uch Kurbustan, and, as such, were now called “burkhans.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, all of the *aru tos*, the spirits of the Middle World, and the old, “universal” gods of Turks and Mongols, as well as the practices associated with them, were adapted by Ak Jang without significant alterations in their form and function. In particular, all the “smaller” spirits of the Middle World – Masters of the places, spirits of the sacred springs

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<sup>3</sup> Life-soul, progeny and prosperity.

<sup>4</sup> Anokhin, Manuskript, part 2

For the Russian original, see App. 2, entry 38

<sup>5</sup> Danilin, p. 182

<sup>6</sup> Anokhin, Manuscript, part 2, pp.9-10.

(Arzhans), Masters of the game, and others – the spirits, with which every Altaian had to deal in his, or her everyday life, were unquestionably adapted, or rather assimilated, by Ak Jang. The sacred sites, the groves with ribbons or *oboo* (the stone piles, built to propitiate a spirit of the crossroad or a mountain pass), continued to be tended by the followers of Ak Jang without any change.<sup>7</sup>

The radical departure from the substrate tradition made by Ak Jang, consisted of two aspects. The first one was the complete rejection of Erlik, the god of death and the Lord of the Underworld, or of any spirit-force of the Underworld, as the object of any worship or “communication.”<sup>8</sup> Consequently, all the specialists ( *manjaktu kam* ) as well as the practices associated with Underworld were banned from Ak Jang.

The second aspect was the introduction of the “new” gods and divine heroes: *Uch Kurbustan*, *Ak Burkhan*, *Oirot*, *Shunu*, and *Amyrsana*. The analysis will begin with the Ak Jang “messiahs” – Oirot, Shunu and Amyrsana. Danilin emphasizes their central role in the Ak Jang belief:

In the hero Epic of Altaians, in their folktales, the central figures are miraculous heroes, gifted with superhuman qualities who, by force, cunning, and wisdom embody the leaders-liberators. Such are the legends of Amyr-sana, Shunu, or Oirot-khan. . . . In the folklore of Altaians who accepted the “white faith” one could encounter many divinized heroes. For example, in the common prayer, addressed to all “spirit-knights (heroes),” such names can be encountered: Shunu, Altyn-Tunter, Geser-khan, Khan-Tolpytte, Bakshi-burkhan, Altyn-kerel, Altyn-topchy, Ak-Anchilei and others. But especially important among others are three heroes – Oirot-khan or Kaldan-Oirot, Shunu and Amyr-sana. It is necessary to mention that they are so thematically close that often they either can be replaced by one another in a story, or act interchangeably together.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 3, Fig. 4 and 5.

<sup>8</sup> Even the “ambivalent” communication, with a purpose of paying ransom for a soul, etc. as *manjaktu kam* did.

<sup>9</sup> Danilin, p. 59

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 39

On the surface, all three heroes are linked to the Dzungarian period (17-century –1756) of Altaian culture. Among the three heroes, Amyrsana is the most “real,” historical figure:

The historicity of the figure of Amyr-sana is beyond doubt. This Dzungarian (Oiro) prince, the chieftain of the Hoit tribe in Tarbagatai, started a rebellion against Manchu-Chinese domination. The rebellion was brutally crushed, and Amyr-sana escaped to Russia in 1756, where he died in Tobol’sk from the smallpox...<sup>10</sup>

...Galdan-Oirot is also a historical figure. This is Galdan-Tseren from the Choros tribe/clan, who assumed the position of Dzungarian khan in 1677...<sup>11</sup>

The historical character of last figure of the “triple-hero,” Shunu, is undetermined.

While Danilin attempts to place him in a historical context, he has to admit that it is impossible.<sup>12</sup> While some of the quasi-historic Altai lore places Shunu into 18<sup>th</sup> century (he has children with the Russian Empress, Ekaterina the 2<sup>nd</sup>),<sup>13</sup> most of the folklore, related to Shunu, presents him as a typical culture hero, who is acting using his miraculous powers against equally miraculous adversaries.

The “tri-une” image of Shunu-Oirot-Amyrsana is extremely rich with symbolic weight in Altai culture and, more narrowly, in Ak Jang. While Amyrsana and Oirot create a historical context for the Ak Jang eschatological aspirations (the Dzungarian – Oirot kingdom), the figure of Shunu, as it seems, places it into a mythological matrix, linking Ak Jang with the religious-epic lore and thought of Altai and generally, Turkic-Mongolian cultural realm.<sup>14</sup>

### **The role and functions of the Shunu-Oirot-Amyrsana in Ak Jang.**

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<sup>10</sup> Danilin, p. 75-76

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 40

<sup>11</sup> During his reign, Dzungaria grew in size and power like never before or after. In this period, Altai and Altaians became “oirots” – the part of the Dzungarian Alliance.

<sup>12</sup> Danilin, p. 75-80

<sup>13</sup> A number of fragments of legends about Shunu is presented in Danilin, 70-78.

<sup>14</sup> Danilin (pp.60-63) presents evidence of the popularity (in 19<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. before Ak Jang) of the “triple-hero” among Kalmyks, Tuvans, Uriankhais (Chinese Turks), and Mongolians.

### **Shunu-Oirot-Amyrsana – Genghis – Gesar: A culture hero-messiah-king.**

The study of “hero-logy,” inside or outside the context of Ak Jang, has been growing in popularity among Altai scholars in the last 10-15 years. Several papers have analyzed the role, function and cultural links of Oirot-Shunu-Amyrsana. The first, most obvious function of the “tri-une” hero is the eschatological-messianic one:

Apart from the religious understanding of messianism when god in a human form descends upon the lowly world, more popular is the idea of the divine predestination of a selected person for the supreme power. The messianic idea of Turk-Mongolian people exists in this latter form, which has had a colossal influence on ideological, political, and ethno-psychological formation of the nomadic social mind.<sup>15</sup>

T.M.Sadalova traces the formation of the messianic mind of the Turk-Mongolian cultures to the ancient Turkic Kaganates (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E.) and to the name-title *Ashina* (wolf), who is a legendary first Turkic kagan, born from a she-wolf. She connects the name *Ashina* (known to all Turks and Mongols) with a name *Shunu* – the Ak Jang hero-messiah. Also, such figures as Genghis khan and Geser are, from the point of view of Altai scholars, clearly visible in the epics, dedicated to Amyrsana-Oirot-Shunu. There are several important markers that show these connections.

The linking of the Amyrsana-Oirot-Shunu to Genghis (not so much as a historical figure, but more as a cultural prototype) is explicit in the folklore and epic, dedicated to *Shunu*.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, “Oirot” has been regarded by both Altaians and other former

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<sup>15</sup> Sadalova, T.M. “*Traditsiia messianstva u tsentral’no-aziatskikh narodov.*” (The tradition of Messianism among the peoples of Central Asia). In: Altai i Tsentral’naia Azia: Kul’turno-Istoricheskaia preemstvennost.’ Gorno-Altaiisk: 1999, p.47

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 41

<sup>16</sup> Sadalova, T.M. “*K voprosu ob arhaichnykh osnovakh syuzhetov o Shunu.*” (On the archaic roots of the *Shunu* narrative). In: Problemy Izucheniia Kul’turno-Istoricheskogo Naslediiia Altaia. Gorno-Altaiisk, 1994, p. 98, and Tolbina, M.A. “*O nekotorykh osobennostiakh obraza Shunu v altaiskom pesennom folklore.*” (Some features of the image of *Shunu* in Altai folklore songs) In: Altai i Tsentral’naia Azia: Kul’turno-Istoricheskaia preemstvennost.’ Gorno-Altaiisk: 1999, pp.71-74



members of Oirat (Dzungarian) alliance as the legitimate, “archetypal” heir to Genghis, and, as such, the manifestation of an “ideal khan.” A number of epic tales show similarity, close to identity, of the stories of the Altai hero(es), legends of Genghis, and, finally, Mongolian and Buryat version of the Geser Epic.<sup>17</sup>

T.M.Sadalova sums up the question of the “messianic kinship”:

The genealogies of the Turk-Mongolian “first tribes” were fused in an integral whole into the genealogies of the “later tribes” through the genealogy of Genghis Khan... . From our point of view, Genghisism is not a new, but a transformed religion, which undergoes change as the new period presents new conditions; this religious-ideological system is known from ancient times among the Turks... . The cult of the leader among Central Asian people is peculiar in two ways. First of all, among the nomads, the figure of a khan – is an earthly, albeit supernormal, human. Secondly, among Turks and Mongols, the key significance was given to the faith in reincarnation of the royal ancestor in a new, concrete personality... . It is likely that the great upheavals of the Eurasian steppes always, or almost always were accompanied by the phenomena, similar to the emergence of Genghisism... As strange as it is, Genghisism, as a historical phenomenon, continues to manifest itself.”<sup>18</sup>

However, the most important marker of the genetic relationship of the Ak Jang and other epic heroes of Altai, which pertains specifically to the spiritual-religious sphere, is the “heavenly kinship,” which is common for Oirat-Shunu-Amyrsana and their earlier and more universal prototypes, Genghis Khan and Geser. All of the mentioned figures (among the tri-une Altai hero, most explicitly, Shunu) are the direct relatives of Uch Kurbustan – the supreme deity of a number of Turk-Mongolian cultures:

The third cycle of the songs about Shunu constitute the songs, in which a realistic, earthly picture is interwoven with a profoundly idealistic one, where he is called a son, or a nephew of Kurbustan – the supreme deity.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Anoskii Sbornik*, pp. 218-228 and further, especially p. 260 (link between Geser, Genghis, and Oirat-Choros, the Kalmyk name of “Oirat-khan”).

<sup>18</sup> Sadalova, “*Traditsiia messianstva...*” pp.49-51  
For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 42

<sup>19</sup> M.A.Tolbina, p.73

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 43

And:

Khormusta-tengri is seen as the father (or creator) of Genghis khan. Khormusta is the heavenly father of Geser... . . . According to the Buryat version of the Geser Epic, Khormusta has three sons<sup>20</sup> who either belong to the book version of the Geseriad, or borrowed from the historical lore and belong to Genghis khan and his brothers... . . . In Buryat Geser Epic, Khormusta send to Earth his son (in his earthly incarnation – Abai Geser Bogdo), who fights against evil forces that appeared from the body of the fallen [demon] Ata Ulan.<sup>21</sup>

In Ak Jang, the “tri-une” hero, especially its Shunu persona, quickly becomes divinized, and is treated in songs as a “royal deity”:

Sincere, honest kaan Shunutu  
Has a palace in heaven.  
It is surrounded by the white rainbow,  
Washed by the white hail.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, in Ak Jang, the main function of the “tri-une” hero, Oirod-Shunu-Amyrsana, is the one of the expected (and/or remembered) divine culture-hero. Does this mean that he/they is/are purely eschatological figures, not “participating” in the present?

A brief but extremely informative comment by Anokhin, worthy of being presented in its entirety, answers this question:

#### *Hero Gods*

To this category of the divine figures belong: a) Mythological king Oirod-kaan, and also the historical figures of Dzungarian kingdom b) Amyr-sana, c) Tamir-sana,<sup>23</sup> d) Shunu, and e) Galdan-Charu.<sup>24</sup>

In religious mind, these figures have received the status of divinities after the emergence of burkhanism, in the last few years. They are acknowledged to be possessing the supernatural might, using which they repel the evil spirits. Their role among other spirits of burkhanism is unimportant. When burkhanists perform the ritual of exorcism of the evil spirits, called “soilodu,” the representative of the cult, yarlykchi, calls them to assist along with other gods. Addressing the hero-

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<sup>20</sup> Here, in the image of three sons, is another link to the Altai “tri-une” hero.

<sup>21</sup> Neklyudov, Zhukovskaya. *Khormusta...*, p. 596

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 44

<sup>22</sup> Tolbina, p.73

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 45

<sup>23</sup> Not mentioned in any other source.

<sup>24</sup> Probably, a “split-off” of Galdan-Oirod.

gods, yarlykchi asks them to take a bow and arrows, put on a helmet and armor and go to the battle with the exorcised evil force.

Burkhanists think that the mentioned strongmen-gods and their acts have a decisive importance at the exorcism of the evil spirits.<sup>25</sup>

This statement has extremely important implications. Let us consider the structure of religious and cultural identity of Altaians prior to the emergence of Ak Jang. Altaians had two “lineages” of spirit-ancestors: the *aru tos*, the heavenly seek patrons, and the shamanic ancestors, which, strictly speaking, did not take part in the “identity pool” within Altai tradition, being monopolized by the shamans’ (*manjaktu kam*) authority and being ambiguous due to their relation to Erlik.

The only active “universal” spirit-figure of Altai, not depending on one’s seek affiliation, was Erlik and the Underworld – essentially, a universal, but negative force. In plain language, Altaians were “positively separated” (by the *aru tos*), while negatively united (by the “common trouble,” represented by Erlik, the Underworld, and the shamanic ancestors). The “hero-gods” of Ak Jang, therefore, created a universal and positive religious identity for all Altaians (followers of Ak Jang). The creation of the collective ancestor in religiously manifested (in Ak Jang figures of worship) epic has been completed, as Anokhin’s remark testifies, by the expansion of the function of the epic hero-god personae to the previously monopolized by the *manjaktu kam* “spirit competence,” empowering Altaians to become, in a sense, as competent (ideally) as *manjaktu kam* without the ambiguity of catering either to a *kam*, or to a much feared plethora of the Underworld forces. Such a change was extremely significant – it almost entirely restructured religious-existential priorities of Altai tradition, bringing it back, as

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<sup>25</sup> Manuscript, part 3, p.43.

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 46

argued, to the pattern of the historical tradition of Turks and Mongols as well as initiating the social re-structuring, or regeneration.

### **Uch Kurbustan**

Uch Kurbustan is a supreme god of Ak Jang. In addition to being on top of the hierarchy of the divine and other spirit-beings of Ak Jang, he<sup>26</sup> serves as a “unifying” element in religion and in universe: all the *burkhans* are his “parts.” This aspect makes him very similar to Tengri – the “Blue Sky” god of both ancient and modern Turk-Mongolian culture:

Khormusta, Khormusta-tengri, Khurmast (buryat.), Uch Kurbustan (alt.) in mythology of Mongolian peoples is a supreme heavenly deity. The name is traced to the Sogdian Khurmazta... .In medieval period, Khormusta obviously was quickly contaminated with the central uranic deity of the state Shamanistic cult – the Eternal Sky, Tengri, down to the complete identification with the latter (Khormusta-tengri sometimes is seen as “sky”).<sup>27</sup>

Uch Kurbustan is a shapeless deity, and the functions of it are unclear. While in some parts of the Turk-Mongolian world it is seen as a single deity, the Altai title, Uch Kurbustan, indicates its triple character. The attempts to interpret the “trinity” of Uch Kurbustan in scholarship range from presenting the “trinity” as a linguistic mistake, made by Altaians as the deity “migrated” from Dzungaria (or Mongolia, or Sogdiana) to Altai, which later was reified into actual three figures,<sup>28</sup> to the Christian (Nestorian) influences.<sup>29</sup> Still, there is no answer to this question. However, it seems that the trinity of

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<sup>26</sup> Uch Kurbustan is a “tri-une” deity, sometimes referred to as three (male) persons, while other times – as one. Below, Uch Kurbustan will be called “he.”

<sup>27</sup> Neklyudov, S.Yu., Zhukovskaya, N.L. *Khormusta*. In: Mify Narodov Mira. Moscow: Rossiyskaia Entsiklopediia, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1994  
Vol.2, pp.595-596

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 47

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p.596

<sup>29</sup> reference to Shvetsov in Sagalaev, Mifologiya... p. 52

Khormusta-Kurbustan is not an accident, because in the cultures where Khormusta is a definitely single deity, he is the father of three sons.<sup>30</sup>

The origin of the term, Kurbustan, is Ahura Mazda, an Iranian (shapeless) deity, which somehow – via Sogdian Buddhists, or not – penetrated into the rest of Central Asia, from Manchuria to Kazakhstan to Tibet<sup>31</sup> - in most cases, remaining important, or even supreme, but consistently inactive. In a few narratives, Khormusta (or three Kurbustan) act as culture heroes.<sup>32</sup> Otherwise, he/they do not communicate with humans directly. In Ak Jang, Uch Kurbustan is seen as a Creator (*Jajachy* – “Source”), or rather, emanator<sup>33</sup> of everything, including other deities and spirits:

All spirits depend on Uch Kurbustan and, as Altaians put it, “separate” or “carve away” from it.<sup>34</sup>

Uch Kurbustan is the god that gives the followers of Ak Jang *kut* and *sus*.<sup>35</sup>

Ceremonially, Uch Kurbustan is regarded very highly. During the group prayers, he is the recipient of the “central sacrifice” – the sprinkling of the mare’s milk. Uch Kurbustan communicates with the humans (and the rest of the Middle World) through his messengers: hero-gods, *jajyk*, and, most importantly, *Ak Burkhan*.

### **Ak Burkhan**

Ak Burkhan is another enigmatic divine figure of Ak Jang. His image is well known from the Epics and the first records of Ak Jang: He is an old man, with snow-white hair, dressed in a white coat and white headgear who rides a white stallion.

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<sup>30</sup> heroes, discussed above.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 51-56

<sup>32</sup> In Altai folklore, one folktale (not an Epic) about Uch Kurbustan – three brothers who fight demons, etc., was collected by Potanin (*Anosskii Sbornik*, p.243)

<sup>33</sup> Which, again, connects him/them to the image of Tengri in Central Asian cultures.

<sup>34</sup> Anokhin, Manuscript, part 2., p. 21

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 48

<sup>35</sup> Life force – progeny, herds, and wealth. Earlier, *aru tos* and *Umai* were mentioned as the givers of *kut*. Apparently, there is either no clear data on who, actually, gives them, or multiple deities are addressed.

However, strangely, none of the main researchers of Ak Jang – Danilin and Anokhin, mentions Ak Burkhan in the list of the deities addressed by the followers of Ak Jang. Danilin limits the White Rider’s role to that of the “announcer of the messiah,”<sup>36</sup> and Anokhin simply does not mention him, noting that “burkhan” is simply a generic name for the deities of Ak Jang. At the same time, Ak Burkhan apparently plays an important role in Ak Jang. Many *algys* (blessings) mention him, and he is a figure that “shows up” in visions and dreams of Ak Jang followers.<sup>37</sup> While Danilin does not mention Ak Burkhan as a person, he presents Ak Jang prayers, mentioning him:

We will ride a brown-gray horse  
If White Burkhan blesses us –  
- we will reach the white flower!<sup>38</sup>  
And,  
Bless, White Burkhan,  
Six-branched white juniper  
That gives the white blessing!  
Seven-branched white juniper,  
The blue blessing giving,  
White Burkhan gives help!<sup>39</sup>

In Anokhin, there is another reference to Ak Burkhan:

My Altai with white flowers,  
My Burkhan with Sun and Moon,  
I meet with white milk.  
Evil spirit will not separate me from my Sun,  
My white destiny  
Is made by White Burkhan.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Danilin, 153.

<sup>37</sup> Modern vernacular folklore of Altai is very rich with the allusions to Ak Burkhan – seminar with N.Ekeev, S.Tioukhteneva and V.Oinoshev, August 2001. Also: See Tioukhteneva, S. “*Ob evolyutsii kul’ta gor u altaitsev*” (On evolution of the cult of mountains among Altaians) In: Shamanizm i rannie religioznye predstavleniia (Shamanism and the early religious views), Vol.1, Moscow: 1995, p.175

<sup>38</sup> Danilin, 184

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 49

<sup>39</sup> Danilin, 193. Blessing a woman in labor.

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 50

<sup>40</sup> Anokhin, Manuscript, part 2, p.5.

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 51

However, the Ak Burkhan is not mentioned at the collective prayers – in any case, neither published sources nor the Altai scholars inform of addressing him.

Is Ak Burkhan a heavenly deity? A Middle World deity? What is his origin – and why is he, being so prominent, as it seems, in the collective mind of Ak Jang followers and in the Epic, not prayed to? A.M.Sagalaev provides an opinion which, from my point of view, is likely correct:

The position of yarlykchi was usually given by election. Thus, another step towards the formation of the professional priestly group was being made. The dress of yarlykchi emphasized the differentiation of the “white faith” from the “black” shamanism. Yarlykchi put on the “milk-white” coat – a robe made of white cloth with a large collar. Along the back and the sleeves descended white and yellow ribbons... . . . Yarlykchi always wore a braid as a sign of adherence to the old customs. . . . In the songs of burkhanists, such detail as the ribbons on the hat of yarlykchi, is stressed. There are compared with the braids of the deity:

You, who are beyond the white clouds

Beyond the blue skies,

Three Kurbustans!

You, who wears four braids,

White Burkhan!

Thus, the whiteness of the yarlykchi’s dress and the ribbons on his hat make him **identical** with the **white deity**. Moreover, to the prayer meetings yarlykchi arrived on a white horse, manifesting to the assembly as the White Rider...<sup>41</sup>

Ak Burkhan is addressed by the yarlykchi not as an external deity. The peculiarity of the figure of Ak Burkhan is that at the prayer meetings, he exists, embodied, rather than addressed, by the yarlykchi. While such a view on worship is not quite common for the Western culture, the aboriginal cultures of Siberia (and others) often apply the mode of identification with a spirit-deity in question. A.M.Sagalaev sees Ak Burkhan as a rather abstract, albeit embodied by yarlykchi, image-concept of the “higher power.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Sagalaev, *Altai v Zerkale Mifa*, p. 158

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 52

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164

While I agree with his opinion on “embodiment,” I think that there is a concrete prototype for the figure of Ak Burkhan. In the Turkic-Mongolian world, from ancient times up to the present day, there has been a very important, probably the most popular spirit figure – the White Old Man (Mong. Tsagan Ebugen).<sup>43</sup> Tsagan Ebugen is admitted in Mongolian Buddhist Canon due to his importance as the Spirit of the Land. All of the former “Oirots” – Kalmyks, Western Mongols, Buryats, and others, venerate Tsagan Ebugen either in Buddhist or aboriginal traditional context. While there is no space to analyze his image in detail, it is important to note its following features:

Tsagan Ebugen is an Old Man, dressed in white, riding either a white doe, or a white horse;  
He is a connecting link between the Heavenly deities and the Middle World;  
He is a manifestation-embodiment of the Middle world and, as such is a Master of Earth, the patron of happiness, long life, and family.<sup>44</sup>

While there is no direct evidence that Tsagan Ebugen and Ak Burkhan are the same figure, some features of Ak Burkhan corroborate his relation to Tsagan Ebugen. First of all, a number of prayers of Ak Jang either connect, or even equate Ak Burkhan with the spirit of Altai (Altai eezi):

You, the spirit of Altai, White Burkhan!  
You, who place your people in gold and silver,  
White Altai!  
Cold water of Altai –  
Burkhan is like rainbow,  
Warm arzhans of Altai –  
Burkhan is like white flame!  
Oh, my Altai – with cold water!  
Oh, my Burkhan – with the rainbow!  
Oh, my Altai – with arzhans!

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<sup>43</sup> For the detailed description of the role of Tsagan Ebugen among Mongols, see Heissig, pp.76-81

<sup>44</sup> Bicheev, B.A. “Sutra “*Belogo Startsa*” (*K probleme adaptatsii kul'tovogo personazha “Chernoï Very”*)” (*The Sutra of White Old Man (On the problem of adaptation of the cult character of “Black Faith”*)). In: *Altai i Tsentral'naiia Azia: Kul'turno-Istoricheskaia preemstvennost.* Gorno-Altaiisk: 1999, pp. 268-274

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 53



Oh, my Burkhan – with the white flame!<sup>45</sup>

Anokhin shows a close interrelatedness between Ak Burkhan, the Spirit of Altai and Jajyk.<sup>46</sup> In his view, *Jajyk* is the “sibling” spirit with Ak Burkhan (the latter merges with the Spirit of Altai). In a manner of speaking, *Jajyk* is the messenger “upwards” – from the worshippers, or *yarlykchi*, to Uch Kurbustan and/or *aru tos*, while Ak Burkhan and/or the Spirit of Altai are the “recipients” of the will of heavenly spirits and, as such, the Middle World mediators between them and the humans. This assumption explains the peculiarity of *yarlykchi*’s identification with Ak Burkhan instead of addressing him.

D.S. Dugarov, in his work Historical Roots of White Shamanism,<sup>47</sup> draws parallels from many Turkic-Mongolian cultures (Buryat, Sakha, Altai and others). According to his evaluation, the White Deity<sup>48</sup> is one of the fundamental “divine archetypes” of the Central Asia, “theologically located” in the Middle World, but genetically related (either as an “offspring,” or a messenger) to the Upper World, being its messenger and a steward.

## 5.2. The Origin of the Ak Jang ritual

In his list of the prayer cycle of Burkhanists, Danilin<sup>49</sup> mentions three distinct rituals that have more or less group character:<sup>50</sup>

The most universal prayer meeting happens in the Fall: it is dedicated to the Spirit-Master of the World (*Ak Altaidyn eezi*<sup>51</sup>), or to Uch Kurbustan. It is called *shuten*. It is connected with a request of prosperity and good life...

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<sup>45</sup> Sagalaev, *Altai v Zerkale*..., p.163

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 54

<sup>46</sup> Anokhin, Manuscript, part 3, pp. 12-13.

<sup>47</sup> Istoricheskie Korni Belogo Shamanstva, pp. 19-141, 257-270

<sup>48</sup> Usually – a White Old Man, but can also be a woman. Here an interesting parallel with a very obscure Altai deity, Ak-ene (White Mother) who was a co-creator (together with Kurbustan) of the world, can be seen (Verbitsky, 111).

<sup>49</sup> Danilin, p. 182.

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 55

<sup>50</sup> That is, they are not private, household rituals.

The second in importance is *Chok (Jajyk choktor)* – the prayer to *jajyks*, which belong to particular households...

Third in its importance is *Taky (Ot takyr)* – the prayer to the Spirit of Fire (*Ot ene*).

In addition to these rituals, which are always conducted in the Fall, there are common and simple rituals, which can be performed at any time: *Urus* – sprinkling of milk with a prayer, *kyira* – the prayer when the ribbons are tied<sup>52</sup> and, finally, the *archyn* prayer, related to the burning of juniper.

All of the key Ak Jang rituals, whether private or community ones, as well as the deities and spirits that have been addressed, have been explicitly inherited from the pre-Ak Jang Altai tradition – except one, the *shuten* (also called *murgul*) ceremony, the first one on Danilin’s list and the central ceremony of Ak Jang.<sup>53</sup>

Does this ritual have a prototype – and if it does, what is it? If the descriptions of Heaven Worship, presented by Potapov and *shuten* are compared, their near-identity becomes evident – both with respect to their structure and content. The cross-cultural study of the central ritual of “white Shamanism” and/or Heaven Worship, done by Dugarov, also clearly shows its unity with the *shuten*, on one hand, and its sharp distinction from the *manjaktu kam* session, on the other. In addition to the similarities of the rituals themselves, it is clear that the ritual “shape” of their respective performers is the same (and, as Danilin states, was borrowed by Ak Jang *yarlykchi* from the *ak kam*, the white shamans):

Kams, whose ancestors did not have a cult dress, “manjak,” also could not wear it; addressing the good deities, they put on a white coat, with white and red ribbons at the back and the feathers on the shoulders...<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> In this figure – “The White Master of Altai,” the phenomenon of merging of *Ak Burkhan* and *Altai eezi*, is evident.

<sup>52</sup> On the trees in holy places. Also, this type of prayer/ritual is a dedication to *oboo*. (see Appendix 3, Fig. 4 and 5)

<sup>53</sup> See the description of the ceremony in Appendix 1.

For the pictures of the *kure*, Ak Jang altars for the *shuten* ceremony, see Appendix 3, Fig. 2, 3 and 6.

<sup>54</sup> Danilin, p. 175.

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 56

For the picture of the *yarlykchi*’s dress, see Appendix 3, fig.1.

Compare to the dress of yarlykchi:

The robe was made out of white cloth, with the left side trimmed with yellow ribbon. The hat was similar to the headgear of kams: made from the white cloth and elongated, descending almost to the middle of the back, it is trimmed with a yellow ribbons instead of shells as kams had. To its top two ribbons, descending almost to the ground, are attached...<sup>55</sup>

The Worship of Heaven is not the only possible prototype for *shuten*. The description of the *ak kam*'s dress above is taken not from the material on it – it comes from materials, describing the propitiation of the *aru tos*, the “pure ancestors” – a *seok* ceremony.

Unfortunately, all of the published materials on Altai tradition tend to mix the two rituals, the *Tengri* and the *aru tos* ceremonies, and use their descriptions interchangeably without any comments. Even the earliest student of Altai tradition, Verbitsky, who gives a very short description of two elements of this ceremony (or ceremonies?), considers it (or them) to be the same:

Men and women, having washed their hands and faces, before beginning any business, mothers, before breast-feeding their children, stood facing East; men, kneeling and keeping their hands behind the back, bowed and pronounced “Puodimine burkhanym!” and women, kneeling on the left knee and holding the right braid with right hand, bowed, saying “Teedimine Kutaim!” Before the ceremony, they put juniper in the fire or in a copper incense- burner, put on a four-legged post three feet high... . . . The ritual was done only by the elders, and not in every yurt; nowadays, it is performed only among the southern Altaians and only once a year, at the gathering of a whole community, after the first spring thunderstorm, at some high mountain – they gather, sprinkle milk in all directions, and bow...<sup>56</sup>

And:

The sacrifices to Ul'gen' are rare, because he is good anyway. However, every man, before marriage, has to make a sacrifice (iik) – a horse of fair color. The sacrificial horse enjoys everybody's respect: a ribbon is tied to its mane, and the women cannot ride it. The time of the sacrifice is the spring, when moonshine is made. The place of the sacrifice is the birch grove. Only men can participate in

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<sup>55</sup> Danilin, p. 176.

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 57

<sup>56</sup> Verbitsky, 112

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 58

this celebration. A Shaman also has to be male. The sacrificial horse can be consumed by everyone, provided that women do not come to the place of sacrifice closer than 50 yards...<sup>57</sup>

Here, in the second description there is a clear reference to *Ul'gen'*, the *aru tos*, while in the first one, there is mentioning only of “*kudai*” and “*burkhan*” – the “god.” Whether reference in this case is made to *aru tos*, or to *Tengri*, is unclear.

There may be two explanations for this confusion and mixing of the ceremonies in the scholarly literature. The first one is the sloppiness of the research, when the students focused mainly on the activities of *manjaktu kam* and dealt with other religious phenomena in a very superficial manner. The quote from the work of Altai scholar Muitueva, referring to the gods, “underrepresented” in academic literature, points at this possibility:

Mythological pantheon of the deities and the view of the universe were different from the shamanic lore and its pantheon of spirits. The main figures [in the former] were the deities, who were acknowledged as universal by the general population. These were Uch Kurbustan, Kudai, Erlik and Teneri.<sup>58</sup>

Another possibility (which does not exclude the first one) is that the ceremony, addressed to *aru tos*, and the ceremony of the Tengri worship are, in fact, the same ceremony, or rather, its variations: at a seek level, only *aru tos* were addressed, but at a larger level, both *the aru tos and Tengri* were the aim of the worship. This view agrees with the cross-cultural material, presented by Dugarov, and also – with the view of contemporary Altai scholars.<sup>59</sup> If this is true, it means that the *aru tos* ceremony is the “missing link” between the “low” (shamanic) views and practices, and “high,” or “imperial” religion of *Tengri*,

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 62

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 59

<sup>58</sup> Muitueva, V.A. “*O Kosmogonicheskikh predstavleniiakh Altaitsev.*” (On Altaian views on Cosmogony). In: *Problemy Izucheniia Kul'turno-Istoricheskogo Naslediia Altaia*. Gorno-Altaiisk, 1994, pp. 90-91

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 60

<sup>59</sup> N.Ekeev and S Tioukhteneva, Seminar, August 2001, Gorno-Altaiisk

discussed by Roux. Indeed, the seek level and its specific form of religious practice, provides a link between the “sub-seok” level of *manjaktu kam* and the “super-seok,” or even supra-ethnic level, of the *Tengri* cult, following, or reflecting the fundamental three-level social organization among Turks and Mongols, discussed above. The possibility of complementary character of the *aru tos* and *Tengri* worship also creates a logical view of the “heavenly hierarchy,” reflecting the earthly, social one: thus, the *aru tos*, the heavenly seek deities and ancestors, are seen not as independent and isolated from the supreme heavenly deity, the *Tengri*, but as subordinated to him and united by him – just as the spirits of the Middle world are united in, or by *Jer-su* or *Altai eezi*, or its *Ak Jang* representation, *Ak Burkhan*, and the *kara tos*, the spirits of the Lower World, by *Erlik*. Again, the theology and cosmology of Altaians’ siblings – *Sakha* and *Buryats*, analyzed by *Dugarov*, clearly and explicitly follows this pattern, which suggests its applicability to *Altai* tradition as well. In any case, the *Ak Jang* central ceremony, *shuten*, accommodated both ceremonies, as evident from the character of deities addressed during *shuten*, the outfit and ritual behavior of the *yarlykchi*, and its general structure.

In addition, there are other commonalities between the pre-*Ak Jang* tradition and *Ak Jang*, which reflect the transmission of the ritual and its performers from the pre-*Ak Jang* tradition to *Ak Jang*. *Danilin* briefly mentions the origin of *yarlykchi*, the *Ak Jang* priests.<sup>60</sup> Prior to becoming *yarlykchi*, most of them were either shamans (not the *manjaktu*) or *pashtyks* – the elders.<sup>61</sup> Also, *Danilin* presents an interesting case of a shaman-turning-*yarlykchi* (a female *yarlykchi*) due to the seizures she experienced at the

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<sup>60</sup> In the manuscript of his book, a whole chapter was dedicated to this. Unfortunately, it is not available.

<sup>61</sup> *Danilin*, p. 113-125.

Ak Jang rituals – here, the connection between the seizures of a shaman attempting to attend the *Tengri* worship, and the Ak Jang *shuten*, is clear.<sup>62</sup>

### 5.3. The conclusions

Bringing together the description of Altai tradition and Ak Jang, it is possible to see that none of its significant elements is borrowed from Buddhism or Christianity. Thus, it is not syncretistic. On the other hand, it is evident that Ak Jang appropriated all of the offices, ritual functions, and sacred personae of the core Altai tradition, with the exception of *manjaktu kam* and the Lower World worship complex. The place and function of the “guardian spirits” (*kara tos*) of *manjaktu kam* was taken over by the “Hero Gods,” and the functions of *manjaktu kam*, altered to a degree, were distributed among the *neme biler kizhi* – the “minor” sacred offices, and the *yarlykchi* who performed exorcisms.

The ritual complex and the ritual specialists of Ak Jang, *yarlykchi*, have been either entirely appropriated from the pre-Ak Jang Altai tradition without any changes, e.g. the household rituals and the *Ot-ene* ceremonies, or based on the pre-Ak Jang ceremonial complexes, such as *Tengri* worship and *aru tos* (*seok*) ceremonies, which were slightly altered.

The deities introduced by Ak Jang were not new. The presence of all of them in an implicit form, namely in the Epics, has been documented in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>63</sup> Also, the specifically Ak Jang sacred personae have existed in cultures closely related to the Altaian in more explicit form, being addressed in the specific ceremonial context.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Danilin, p.170

<sup>63</sup> in Verbitsky: Oirok-khan p. 117, Shunu, Amyrsana, p. 120, Ak Khan (Ak Burkhan), Uch Kurbustan (“Kubustan”), p.111, etc.

<sup>64</sup> Heissig, pp.53 and 76-90

Summing up the description of Altai tradition and Ak Jang, as a part of it, it is possible to make the following conclusions:

Ak Jang is an indigenous, rather than imported or syncretistic, tradition. All of its significant elements – from deities to ritual specialists to the ceremonies, have their prototypes in the pre-Ak Jang Altai tradition, rather than being “new” or foreign. In addition, Ak Jang incorporated all of the Altai deities and practices related to them, with the exception of the *manjaktu kam* and the gods and spirits of the Lower World. Actually, even the latter have been recognized in Ak Jang, but not as objects of worship.

The pattern of Ak Jang as a part of Altai tradition shows close resemblance to the traditional religious and social hierarchy of Turkic-Mongolian culture. The ceremonies, gods, and narrative, “resurrected” in and by Ak Jang, existed as latencies in the pre-Ak Jang period and, as latencies, reflected and corresponded to the latent social structures, which re-emerged (at least, partially) with the emergence of Ak Jang.

### **Tengri and Uch Kurbustan: an obscure area**

There is one obvious problem remaining in the interpretation of Ak Jang as an integral part of Altai tradition. So far, the worship complex of Uch Kurbustan and other, specifically Ak Jang sacred personae, has been shown to be linked to the Tengri ceremonial of the pre-Ak Jang Altai tradition. The question is: If the emergence of Ak Jang has been the “resurrection” of the complete three-level religious complex of the pre-Modern Turks and Mongols, why then did Altaians replace Tengri with Uch Kurbustan?

This question is very difficult to answer. Uch Kurbustan and other Ak Jang deities have not been mentioned by either Roux or Klyahstorny as a part of Turkic-Mongolian tradition. However, it appears that in the late medieval period, the “Uch Kurbustan

complex” was introduced to Turks and Mongols<sup>65</sup> and soon began to merge with the “Tengri complex,” or the “imperial religion.” According to W.Heissig, the “hybridization” of the image of the Supreme Heavenly Deity of Mongols, Tengri, with the Khormusta (analogous to Uch Kurbustan) has begun in Mongolia as early as in times of Genghis Khan,<sup>66</sup> and the two deities, Khormusta and Tengri, either became “interchangeable,” or merged into one, Qormusta Tngri.<sup>67</sup> The religious narrative, dedicated to the heroes’ and *kagans*’ genetic relations with Khormusta<sup>68</sup> appears to have been appropriated from the similar narrative regarding Tengri and his relations to the kagans. In Altai, such an explicit hybridization between Uch Kurbustan and Tengri has not been documented.<sup>69</sup> Nonetheless, it is likely that the creation of the Ak Jang ceremonial from the Tengri ceremony as its prototype is an evidence of such a hybridization of the two deities and complexes in Altai tradition even prior to the emergence of Ak Jang. However, it cannot be stated as a fact.

In the following chapter, the trends in the post-Soviet re-emergence of Ak Jang will be considered.

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<sup>65</sup> Nobody can point exactly at its origin. Heissig speculates about its Manichean roots, while Sagalaev points at its Indian origin via Sogdiana. In any case, by the 13<sup>th</sup> century Khormusta was widely recognized as a deity in Inner Asia (Heissig, p.5).

<sup>66</sup> Heissig, pp. 5, 53-65

<sup>67</sup> Heissig, 53. Also, Neklyudov, S.Yu., Zhukovskaya, N.L. *Khormusta*. In: Mify Narodov Mira Moscow: Rossiyskaia Entsiklopediia, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1994 Vol.2, pp.595-596

<sup>68</sup> e.g., Geser (Heissig, 93) or Genghis Khan (Heissig, 65) being his sons.

<sup>69</sup> However, it is important to notice that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the study of Altai tradition began, many other important elements of Altai tradition have not been noticed.



## Chapter 6. Ak Jang in post-Soviet period.

The persecution of all forms of religious practice by the Communists, which began in 1930 and continued, in various degrees of severity, until the 1980s, was thorough. With regard to the aboriginal traditions, the Communist Party directives aimed at the “elimination of the religious superstitions without a trace.” This task was considered as accomplished in the late 1930s.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the anthropologists and ethnographers who worked in the field in and after the 1930s, could not admit any information on the current religious practices among the aboriginal peoples of the USSR. When they published works, dedicated to the analysis of these practices, they carefully referenced them by the materials, coming from the early researchers – those of the pre-Soviet period, and the early Soviet ones. Thus, there is practically no academic information on the religious practices among the aboriginal peoples of Siberia, including Altai, coming from the period between the 1930s and the late 1980s. Those few researchers who encountered presence of the religious practices among the Altaians, were not mentioning them in their publications to avoid the risk of persecution.<sup>2</sup> While some information on the religious practices of Altaians during the Soviet period has begun to be presented in recent publications, it is still very limited.<sup>3</sup> However, it is clear that the Altaians, just like other

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Potapov, *Altaiskii Shamanizm*, p.12

<sup>2</sup> The most distinguished and respected scholar of Altai whose views are “alternative” to Potapov’s, V.P.Diakonova and who did the field research among Altaians for more than 10 years, *never* published any material regarding the religious practices of the Altaians during the Soviet period. In personal conversation with the author, she explained in detail the risk involved in mentioning of the contemporary practices and beliefs (even their existence). However, she and other researchers, such as A.Sagalaev, began presenting their field data from the Soviet period in their new, post-Soviet, publications.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Chanchibaeva, L. “*O sovremennyh religioznyh perezhitkah u Altaitsev.*” (On the contemporary rudiments of religion among Altaians). In.: *Etnografiia Narodov Altaia i Zapadnoi Sibiri*. Novosibirsk: “Nauka,” 1978, pp.90-103

Native peoples of Siberia and other regions of USSR, practiced some form of religion during the sixty years of persecution – but very discreetly.

When the author of this thesis lived in Altai in 1988-89, he observed a number of rituals, performed at a household level (e.g., feeding the fire and smudging with juniper), or at weddings and other local community events. This meant that Altai tradition, despite the persecution, was still alive. However, all of the rituals I have seen did not bear any characteristic features of being, or not being, parts of Ak Jang. As both shamans and *yarlykchi* were seemingly entirely eliminated by the Communists in 1930s – 1950s, the rituals that are focal for both Ak Jang and shamanic practices, were most likely not performed: there were neither shamanic *tayilga* nor *kure*, or *murgul*<sup>4</sup> of Ak Jang anywhere in Altai. While the absence of the permanent ritual constructions in Altai in 1980s was, probably, due to the prudence of Altaians – then, religion was still persecuted, and nobody knew what tomorrow would bring, it is impossible to say, whether any distinct Ak Jang practices were taking place in the 1980s.

However, beginning in the mid-late 1980s, especially after 1988, the situation began to change very quickly. Communist ideology began to fade and soon disappeared altogether, leaving the people with freedom of expression, including the freedom of religious affiliations and practices, but also – creating an ideological vacuum. In many parts of Russia, various ethnic groups were now facing the exciting, but also challenging task of reconstructing and redefining their cultures, political identities, and among other things, their religious identity. Altai was not an exception from this tendency. Altaians

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<sup>4</sup> *tayilga* is a permanent location of shamanic ceremonies and sacrifice. *Murgul*, or *kuree* is an Ak Jang “altar,” also – a permanent construction. According to the information of N.Ekeev, V.Oinoshev and S.Tioukhteneva (members of staff of the Institute of Altaic Studies in Gorno-Altai), the first *tayilga*(s) were built in the late 1980s, and the first *kure* (see Appendix 3, fig. 3 and 6) – in the 1990s.

both wanted and needed to formulate, or to resurrect, their religious identity, and this creation of a religious identity vigorously began in the late 1980s and 1990s:

By the 1990s, the situation changed radically. Official atheism, together with the rest of the dominant ideology, quickly lost its position without state support. Ideological vacuum, only in a minor way filled with democratic pathos, has formed. The reality of our days is universal resurrection of the traditional ritualism and “new” myth-creation. So far, we can see only the process, and it is too early to speculate about its possible results. However, it is obvious that a new edition of the national ideology of Altai is being formed. What are its possible origins? To what extent is it real, and to what – mythological? Can we speak of a new stage in the history of the traditional beliefs of Altai Turks? <sup>5</sup>

The resurrected, or reformulated tradition of the Altaians, which emerged in the post-Soviet period, was called Ak Jang. However, it was not the same as the Ak Jang of the 1904-1930s. There is no data on the practice of Ak Jang – that is, of a set of religious activities termed “Ak Jang” by their practitioners in rural areas before mid-1990s. However, from the 1988 on, a variety of new formulations of Ak Jang, made by Altai intelligentsia, have emerged. The picture of the varieties of the “educated” Ak Jang, which is going to be considered below, looks like a sequence of “experiments” – the Altaians’ attempts to find the core of Altai religious identity. Some of these experiments failed very quickly, while others persisted. In this chapter, these attempts at the reformulation of Ak Jang are placed in the chronological order of their emergence. They are: the “Roerich” Ak Jang, Tengrianstvo, and the “Buddhist” Ak Jang. Following the descriptions of the Ak Jang “experiments” of Altai intelligentsia, two more phenomena will be considered – the internationalization of Ak Jang in Native Siberian academic

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<sup>5</sup> Sagalaev, A.M. “*Altaitsy: staraiia religiia i “novaia” ideologiia*” (Altaiian: the Old Religion and “New” Ideology). In: *Narody Sibiri: Prava i Vozmozhnosti*. Novosibirsk: Russian Academy of Sciences, 1997, pp. 61-70.

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 61

discourse, and, finally, the return of the practices of Ak Jang among the ordinary Altaians in rural areas.

### **N.Roerich, Altai intellectuals, and Ak Jang**

The earliest attempt to bring Ak Jang, as a concept and an ideology, back, done by Altai intelligentsia – artists, scholars, journalists and others, involved linking it to the legacy of the religious, national, and political attempt of the consolidation of Altaians and other Turkic-Mongolian peoples in the formation of the Karakorum Executive Committee in 1917.<sup>6</sup> The artists and intellectuals, such as G.I. Choros-Gurkin, who, in 1917, organized Karakorum Executive Committee held an “Oirot” view on Altaians and their neighbors that reflected the view of Ak Jang followers. Since 1990, the names of the founders of the Karakorum Executive Committee, all of whom were executed during Stalin’s purges, became celebrated. While their legacy has been strong ever since the 1980s – as soon as it was possible to talk about them without being persecuted, and created a basis for the Altai consolidation and self-empowerment, the religious element of it has been marginal, and, therefore, could not constitute the “new” Ak Jang ideology.

Thus, the second, more “religious,” trend, developed by Altai intelligentsia in the interpretation of Ak Jang, came from Nicholas Roerich – a famous Russian Occultist and artist, who promoted “Agni-Yoga” – a mixture of Buddhist (mostly invented), “esoteric” Christian and Spiritualistic elements, which resembled Theosophy.<sup>7</sup> The central point of this teaching was the “search for Shambhala.” He and his wife, Elena Roerich, who was a celebrated medium, produced a number of “Shambhala prophecies,” which became very

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>7</sup> Shishkin, O. *Bitva za Gimalaii* (The Battle for the Himalayas). Moscow: OLMA-PRESS, 1999

popular items of the Samizdat – underground Russian literature. Roerich was an extremely popular figure among Russian “mystic seekers” during the last decades of the Soviet regime. In the late 1920, Roerich and his wife traveled through Altai, which was reflected in Roerich book, The Heart of Asia.<sup>8</sup> While Roerich described Altaians with fastidiousness and contempt, as dirty, undeveloped, and primitive people, he was very impressed, or inspired by the “legend of Ak-Burkhan,” or Oiro, seeing it as a “message from Shambhala” and even dedicating a picture to the event that portrayed the “first event” in the history of Ak Jang – the appearance of the White Rider.

Russian “seekers” – the students of esoterica, mostly from the educated groups of society, inspired by Roerich’s writings, have been making numerous pilgrimages to the “holy Shambhala-Altai” since the 1960s. At this point, Altai intellectuals were exposed to Roerich’s doctrines, and tied them together with Ak Jang. In the late 1980s, when all of Russia was undergoing rapid and dramatic changes, the eschatological and universal message of Ak Jang, mixed with “Agni-yoga,” laid the foundation for the creation of a new, “quasi”-Ak Jang ideology. Several important Altai philosophers and ideologists<sup>9</sup> actively promoted this view. By the middle-late 1990s, most of the Altai intellectual elite understood that Roerich’s teachings are, in fact, too bizarre to be linked to Ak Jang and traditional Altai culture without embarrassment. However, several years of inspiration, initiated by the books of N.Roerich among Altai intellectuals, had consequences: they

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<sup>8</sup>Roerich, N. Serdse Azii. (The Heart of Asia) New York: “Alatas,” 1929

<sup>9</sup> One of the most active among them has been B.Bedyurov, who also wrote the comments and footnotes for the book of L.Sherstova.

served as a catalyst, or a trigger that initially empowered Altaians to consciously and actively search for their religious identity, and to articulate it.<sup>10</sup>

As mentioned above, Roerich's teaching is a mix of Spiritualism, quasi-Christian "esotericism," and, above all, Buddhist elements, thickly mixed with Theosophy. The teaching of Roerich has an ambition of being universal – but, at the same time, passionately Central-Asian. The initial momentum produced by its popularity created several "streams" within the post-Soviet interpretation of Ak Jang by Altaians.

### **"Tengrianstvo"**

The first of these branches is "*Tengrianstvo*" – a new "tradition," which has its followers both in Gorno-Altai and in larger rural centers. It owes its inspiration to the wife of Nicholas Roerich, Elena, whose mediumistic, or channeling abilities were well-known and resulted in the most spectacular part of the Agni-yoga narrative, "The Shambhala Prophecies." It links Ak Jang to the "Tengri religion," that is, to the non-shamanic and presumably "higher than shamanic" ancient and esoteric tradition of the Heaven worship. The "holders" of this tradition are a group of people (mostly Altaians, but also some Russians) whose vocation is *mediumism*. A richly edited book, Altai – Strana Voskhodyashaiia, which is a reflection of this tradition and its views, was published in Gorno-Altai in the 2000.<sup>11</sup> Its contents are, essentially, the mediumistic writings, produced by a prominent medium-Tengrianist, A. Tundinova. The texts of the writings are in Russian and Altaian. While the texts themselves are a typical example of

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<sup>10</sup> This process strikingly resembles the resurrection of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and India in the 19<sup>th</sup>- 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. There, the initial momentum for the Buddhist movement was provided by H.P. Blavatsky, whose Theosophical rendering of Buddhism was hardly authentic and was quickly discarded by the emerging Buddhist community. However, it served as a catalyst, without which the process of the Buddhist revival would have probably been impossible.

<sup>11</sup> Tundinova, A. Altai – Strana Voskhodyashaiia (Altai – the Rising Land). Gorno-Altai, 2000.

mediumistic writings, full of mystery, understatement and vagueness, the Altaian part of the texts consists of invocations of Ak Burkhan, improvised prayers and hymns, as well as prophecies concerning the “great changes.” The Russian part of the text is, interestingly enough, entirely linked to E.Roerich. It is implied that she is the source of the texts. It is necessary to admit that the “E.Roerich’s” texts greatly resemble in their style the discourse of their “original,” E.Roerich. Mostly, they are dedicated to vague eschatological prophecies and Shambhala.

While “Tengrianstvo” is thickly mixed with beliefs, which are alien to Altai culture, its promoters or sacred personae, the mediums, are recognized in it as “authentic” – they, in fact, fit into the matrix of the sacred personae of Altai tradition as *yrymchi*, or *rymchi*, the diviner-mediums. It enjoys popularity mostly among the urban, college-educated Altaians.<sup>12</sup> However, it also has a limited following, represented by several mediums, in the rural areas.

#### **“Ak Burkhan” – the “Buddhist” Ak Jang.**

Another trend in the re-interpretation of Ak Jang, which emerged a little later, than Tengrianstvo and has co-existed with it, is what can be called the “Buddhist” Ak Jang. It was arguably inspired by N.Roerich’ writings as well, but abandoned his ideology soon. While Roerich and his followers, Altaian and Russian alike, frequently referred to “Buddhism” as part of his teachings, in the post-Soviet period, when authentic Buddhist literature became available to everyone and the real Buddhist practices became accessible, soon enough it was clear that the alleged “Buddhism” of “Roerichism” was

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<sup>12</sup> The author had a chance to observe the prominence of Tengrianstvo among urban, college-educated Altaians during the visit of J.Arguelles, a well-known American “New Ager,” to Gorno-Altai. He was received in the Government Hall by the Minister of Culture of Altai Republic and other officials. The Hall was full of Tengrianstvo followers – they turned out to be the most receptive to Arguelles’ message. Among them, there were many important Altai performers and artists as well as a number of mediums.

mostly an invention. However, it served as a sort of a catalyst for the Altai - Ak Jang-related creativity – again, mostly among the urban Altai intellectuals.

Around 1996, an organization, “Ak Burkhan,” was registered in Gorno-Altaiisk. Its purpose was the promotion of the Buddhist values, which were equated with the beliefs of Ak Jang. The Head of this organization has been A. Sanashkin, a former journalist, who interpreted Ak Jang as a form of Buddhism. Four young Altaians went to study in the Buddhist monastery in St.Petersburg.<sup>13</sup> The “Buddhist” interpretation of Ak Jang gained a certain popularity among (mostly urban) Altaians due to the old tradition of respect towards Buddhism and Lamas. The climax of the development of the “Buddhist” version of Ak Jang took place in 1998, during and after the International Scientific Conference: “Altai and Central Asia – Cultural and Historical Continuity,” which took place in Gorno-Altaiisk and brought delegates from neighboring republics (Tuva, Khakassia) as well as from Mongolia and Kalmykia. All of the mentioned nations, except Khakassia, have Buddhist organizations. A stupa was consecrated just several miles from the Tereng valley, where Ak Jang was initiated in 1904.

By the 2001, the “Buddhist project” of “Ak Burkhan” has mostly faded. Why did it not succeed? In the Chapter 3, connections between Ak Jang and Buddhism have been discussed. Yarlykchi and Ak Jang followers in general were not indifferent to Buddhism. As it was mentioned in Chapter 3, even at the onset of Ak Jang, the yarlykchi used Buddhist paraphernalia. However, they were used outside Buddhist content, as foreign, and, therefore, efficacious, objects. This attitude of the Ak Jang followers towards the Buddhist sacred objects was also projected onto Buddhist clergy. They perceived it as respected, but very distinct from “our,” Altai faith. In this, alien form, Buddhism and its

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<sup>13</sup> To my knowledge, all of them returned to Altai by 2001 – *not* having become lamas.



representatives were respected and appreciated, but they were never “admitted” to be a part of Ak Jang.<sup>14</sup> The mistake of A. Sanashkin in his attempt to “steer” Ak Jang into a Buddhist direction lay in the fact that he mistook the presence of the Buddhist elements in Ak Jang, about which he arguably read in Danilin’s work, for its core content.<sup>15</sup>

A.Sagalaev, who analyzed the Buddhist influences on Ak Jang and its post-Soviet reconstruction by Altaians, says:

...The use by Burkhanists of certain Lamaist cult objects and terms (*sumer, sudur*, etc.) cannot be considered as an indication of the formation of the Altai national variety of the Northern Buddhism. The source of borrowing was not the monastic, “scholastic” Buddhism, but a large layer of the folk, syncretistic Buddhism of Mongolia, and especially – of historical folklore of Mongolian and Turkic peoples of the Central Asia.<sup>16</sup>

### **The “internationalization” of Ak Jang among the Turkic and Mongolian ethnic groups and its interpretations by the Native scholars.**

Throughout the 1990s, numerous scientific conferences, dedicated to various aspects of Siberian cultures, took place in many Siberian centers: Gorno-Altai, Abakan (Khakassia), Ulan-Ude (Buryatia), Kyzyl (Tuva), and others. These conferences, while being organized by various scientific institutions, carry a very important and obvious (if one looks at their Proceedings) function: they largely are *ideological* gatherings, aimed at deconstruction of the “Siberian aboriginal identity” formed in Soviet scholarship and ideology, and the creation of a positive, empowering alternative to it. The theme of White Faith is prominent among the presentations of the delegates to these conferences, and it is not limited to Altai: Tuvan, Khakassian, Buryat, Sakha and other Native scholars or key

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<sup>14</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 3, such an attitude resembles “cargo” cults where foreign, or alien objects or personae are respected and sometimes “sacred” *due to* their alien nature.

<sup>15</sup> In this statement, I practically quote A.Sanashkin, with whom I had many conversations regarding Ak Jang, Altai, and Buddhism. In 2001, he was not “in denial” of the fact that Buddhism turned out to be too alien in Altai culture.

<sup>16</sup> Sagalaev, Staraiia... p.65.

For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 62

ideological figures keep presenting accounts of Ak Jang in their cultures.<sup>17</sup> While these and other presentations by Native scholars may be looked at with skepticism, as attempts at “creation of the tradition” rather than the revealing of it,<sup>18</sup> there is no way one can judge the authenticity of these presentations – that is, whether they represent real traditions or a mere ideological “wishful thinking,” at the moment. The “White Faith” in the presentations of Native scholars is called by different names. In addition to “White Faith,” or “Burkhan Faith,” it may be called “Tengrianizm”<sup>19</sup> or “White Shamanism.”<sup>20</sup>

The “reconstruction” of this mysterious tradition by the Native scholars is done in a “mosaic” mode. Some of them investigate the role of the Epic (e.g., Geser), others – of the ritual, and so on. While different in minor details, which is not surprising because the tradition(s) in question developed separately in various Turkic-Mongolian cultural areas for the last 200 years, all the interpretations-reconstructions of the tradition make the following common statements:

1. There has been a tradition of “White Faith,” widely spread through the Turkic-Mongolian world at least since the middle ages.

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<sup>17</sup> E.g., Butanaev, V.Ya. “*Natsional’naiia religiiia Khakassov i formirovanie lichnosti.*” ALTAICA, 1994, #4, Abaev, N.V. “*Osnovy psihologicheskoi i bioenergeticheskoi samoreguliiatsii v natsional’noi religii Tuvintsev Ak Chaian (Belaiia Vera) ili Burgan Chaian.*” Dul’zonovskie chteniia-22.Tomsk, 2000. Angaraeva N. *Vetochka verby s bubentsami.* Ulan-Ude, 1997.

Irgit I. “*Burkhanizm – religiiia religiy?*” “Khakassia,” # 140, 27.07.2000

Urbanaeva, I.S. “*Lyudi znaniia v Buryat-Mongol’skom Tengrianstve.*” Materials of the Congress “Ethnological Studies of Shamanism and Other Indigenous beliefs and Practices, Vol.5, P.1, Moscow, 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Russian Ethnographers from Moscow and St.Petersburg, who follow with determination the concept of equating Siberian traditions with shamanism, frown upon these activities of the Native scholars and cultural representatives.

<sup>19</sup> E.g., by Urbanaeva.

<sup>20</sup> By Dugarov. However, in his works, Dugarov makes a point that the tradition in question is not, in fact, “shamanism”:

...Religious terms *tangara*, *aiyy* and others point at the remnant of once well-developed, ancient religious system, different from shamanism... ...so-called white shamanism is not shamanism proper, and the white shamans are not at all shamans (Istoricheskie korni, p.29)  
for the Russian original, see App.2, entry 63

2. This tradition has been distinct from “Shamanism” proper: its priesthood does not go into trance, it uses different paraphernalia, and the ritual was structurally very different from the shamanic sessions, especially in its public character.

3. Deities, different from those of “shamans proper,” are addressed. These deities may co-exist with the shamanistic ones (as in Buryatia, where the Tengri and other “heavenly gods,” addressed by the white priests, or white shamans, co-exist with Erklig and the guild of “shamans proper,” who address him), or come from a different source (as in Khakassia and Altai), which creates a dramatic split between two guilds and their respective pantheons.

4. The “white faith” is alleged to be a “higher,” or “imperial” form of tradition, associated with the sacred kingship (and hero-king) and transcending the clan structure, being a “supra-ethnic” tradition:

... Among the people of Southern Siberia and Mongolia, early on formed, originally from the common shamans, a distinct category, which stood higher on the social hierarchic scale and was closely connected with the ruling circles and influenced social and political life... This higher category of shamans emerged on a basis of the common view of the spirit world and humans...<sup>21</sup>

In all of the analyses and more “ideological” presentations of White Faith, the following markers can be seen: The supreme Heaven-deity and a ritual associated with it, a Master of the Middle world, the rejection (or, at least. “professional separation” of the clergy) of Erlik and Underworld, and the public, rather than private, as in shamanism “proper” nature of the ceremonies.

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<sup>21</sup> Diakonova, V.P. “*Ob odnoi kategorii sotsial’noi ierarkhii shamanov.*” (On one category of the social hierarchy of shamans) UZ TNIIYaLi, 1973, issue 16, p.227. Dugarov (also presenting this citation) does not agree with the hypothesis of the “common origin.” (Dugarov, p.25-27) For the Russian original, see App.2, entry 64

The Native scholars' opinions on the origin of this tradition are not uniform. Essentially, they can be categorized into two types. Some scholars link the White Faith to the (imaginary, or real) ancient tradition of the Turks and Mongols, described on the basis of the medieval materials – the Heaven (Tengri) cult, distinct from the clan-oriented, “parochial” shamanism. Such an opinion resonates with the views of J.-P.Roux and W.Heissig. Others, including Dugarov, trace it to a yet not described, vague origin among non-Turks, namely – Indo-Europeans. Truth to be said, every scholar who attempted a reconstruction of the Turkic-Mongolian religion, whether in its ancient (Klyahstorny, Gumilev), or modern (Dugarov, Ye.Yamaeva, W.Heissig, A.Sagalaev) forms, dedicated a paragraph or two to the Indo-European connections of it. First of all, the name of the supreme deity, Khormusta, Kurbustan, etc. comes from Ahura Mazda. Also, there are many<sup>22</sup> mythological, linguistic and ritual elements that can be fairly certainly linked to Indo-European mythology and ritualism.<sup>23</sup> However, from my point of view, this hypothesis, as fascinating as it is, cannot be seriously considered at this stage of research. The hope that it will ever be proved or disproved is slim – the amount of comparative research that would need to be done, and the scarcity of information available make it an incredibly difficult task. The activity of Native ideologists and scholars, whether it is the creation or reviving of the tradition, is consistent. Moreover, as it seems, it effectively

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<sup>22</sup> Thoroughly analysed by Dugarov in: Dugarov, D.S. *Istoricheskie Korni Belogo Shamanstva*. (The Historic Roots of White Shamanism). Moscow: “Nauka,” 1991, and Dugarov, D.S. “*O vzaimovliianii drevnei tibetskoj religii Bon i tyurko-mongol'skogo shamanizma.*” (On reciprocal influence between the ancient Tibetan Bon religion and the Turkic-Mongolian Shamanism). In: *Tsentrāl'no-aziatskii shamanizm: Filosofskie, Istoricheskie, Religioznye, Ekologicheskie Aspekty (Materialy Mezhdunarodnogo Baikal'skogo Simpoziuma, 20-26 iyunia 1996 g.)*, Ulan-Ude: 1996, pp.122-123

<sup>23</sup> One of the boldest attempts to create a “super-reconstruction” of the “original Central Asian religion,” linking it to the Bon-po tradition of Tibet, Central Asian beliefs, and Mazdeism, was attempted in: Kuznetsov, B.I. *Bon i Mazdaizm* (Bon and Mazdeism). St.Petersburg: “Evraziya,” 2001

and with ease forms a coherent “Central Asian religious discourse,” which, to surprise of the Russian academics, is immediately recognized as “one’s own” cross-culturally.

### **Ak Jang at the grass-roots level.**

So far, only the urban, “educated” discourse and its practice (in the form of Tengrianstvo and “Buddhist” attempts) of Ak Jang, have been discussed. Chronologically, the “urban” articulation of Ak Jang preceded any information on the possible resuming of its practices by rural Altaians. While Tengrianstvo enjoyed some limited popularity among the people, the “Buddhist” version of Ak Jang and the scholarly-ideological speculations have little to do with the common practices. Is Ak Jang actually being practiced in post-Soviet Altai? According to the observations of the author and the information from the seminars he attended – it is, and widely. Many of the rural Altaians in all of the Altai Republic identify themselves as Ak Jang. The number of *murguls*, or *kure*,<sup>24</sup> where the main ceremonies of Ak Jang are performed, is more than ten and growing (the first ones were built, to my knowledge, in 1992). This number of the *murguls*, assuming that each of them hosts the *shuten* ceremony for several hundred people<sup>25</sup> However, it came back in a form different from the one discussed in Chapter 2.

First of all, its narrative has lost nearly all of its eschatological character. This tendency was already strong in Ak Jang by the 1910s, so it can be assumed that Ak Jang returned in its “routinized” form – just as it was when its practices were terminated by the Communists. While Oirot, Shunu and other eschatological personae are still commonly mentioned by the Ak Jang followers, they firmly occupy the positions of divine culture

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<sup>24</sup> See Appendix 3, Fig. 3 and 6

<sup>25</sup> For example, the *kure* at the Fig . is a ceremonial site for the population of 4 villages that is – of about 1500 people. To the author’s knowledge, everybody in these villages attends the *shuten*, which became the main community gathering.

heroes, the “collective ancestors” of the Altaians and their cultural siblings – Tuvans and others.

The sharp differentiation with “Shamanism” and shamans has also faded away. One reason for this is the absence, or near-absence, of “shamans proper” in Altai. The institution of shamans, so prominent during the late 19<sup>th</sup>- early 20<sup>th</sup> century, diffused into a number of vocations with a generic name *neme biler kizhi*, “the people of knowledge,” which includes all the vocations from the list in Chapter 2 as well as many others. From the ranks of *neme biler kizhi*, people, who are authorized to perform the ceremonies, emerge.<sup>26</sup> Nowadays, they are *not* called *yarlykchi*<sup>27</sup> and perform a set of ceremonies consisting of addressing Uch Kurbustan as well as the Spirit of Altai (*Altai-eezi*) and *arutos*.<sup>28</sup>

According to V.A.Muitueva,<sup>29</sup> a strong tendency of the post-Soviet Altai tradition, which still carries the name of Ak Jang, is its “grounding”: in the post-Soviet beliefs and rituals, the heavenly deiti(es) such as Uch Kurbustan are fading into the background, and Ak Burkhan is seen and addressed, more and more, as the Master of Altai:

...Ak Burkhan is acknowledged. According to our data, it merges with Altai Kudai and Uch-Kurbustan, occasionally also being an autonomous deity. Ak Burkhan does not have well-defined appearance... due to the revival of Burkhanism, its popularity is on the rise. Uch-Kurbustan is addressed only by a few. It seems that it may be considered an almost extinct Burkhanist deity.

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<sup>26</sup> To my question, “Who authorizes a given biler kizhi to a ceremonial position?” Altai scholars (S.Tioukhteneva and N.Ekeev, Seminar, August 2001), said, “community as a whole.”

<sup>27</sup> With one (to my knowledge) notable exception in Kulada, where an elder-yarlykchi E.Yamaev, lives and performs the ceremonies at the large altar-*kure* (see Appendix 3, fig. 3).

<sup>28</sup> V.Oinoshev, Seminar, Gorno-Altaiisk, September 2001

<sup>29</sup> Muitueva, V.A. “*Glavnye Duhi Verhnego i srednego mira v sovremennom religioznom vozzrenii altaitsev (Altai-kizhi)*,” (The main spirits of the Upper and Middle Worlds in the contemporary religious views of Altaians (Altai-kizhi)) In: *Arheologicheskie i Folklornye Istochniki po Istorii Altaiia*, Gorno-Altaiisk, 1994, pp.129-132

The data, presented by Muitueva, has been collected since 1989.

The central place in the modern beliefs of Altai-kizhi is occupied by the cult of Altai, Altaidyng eezi... . Sometimes, he manifests as an old man in white dress. According to the beliefs, he can be often seen in a dream.<sup>30</sup>

Another important point, noted by V.A.Muitueva, is the “universalisation” of the Ak Jang and other traditional deities: now, less attention is given to particular aru tos, which, again, are being replaced by the Ak Burkhan, who is equated with the *Altai eezi* – the Master of Altai.<sup>31</sup>

A.M.Sagalaev states:

It seems that current beliefs of Altaians cannot be called “neoshamanism” or a new version of Burkhanism... . What is left is a “base”: those traditional beliefs that simply cannot be lost for as long as the people exist as a coherent entity. The key term in both new religion and new ideology is the word “Altai.”<sup>32</sup>

### **The “populist” religious organization: “Ak Jang”**

On a practical level, Sagalaev’s opinion is manifested by another religious organization of Altai – the association called “Ak Jang” and founded by S.Knyev in Gorno-Altai in 1997. S.Knyev is something of an Altai oligarch. Among his other activities, a very important one is “cultural philanthropy” - subsidizing various religious and cultural events that take place in Altai. He can be seen at all community anniversaries, mass ceremonies, and festivals. His view of the “new face” of Ak Jang keenly reflects the latter’s “soil-ethnos-based” developments of the last years: the fading of the borders between specific Ak Jang ceremonial and the “shamanic” one, and the neutral position (with respect to belonging or not to Ak Jang) of the majority of Altai sacred personae.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 129. The “mixing” of Ak Burkhan and the *Altai eezi* is discussed in Chapter 5. For the Russian original, see Appendix 2, entry 65

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>32</sup> Sagalaev, “*Staraiia Religiiia...*” p. 69

For the Russian original, see Appendix 2, entry 66

His projects include the support of an all-Altai (since 1993, international, with guests from Tuva, Khakassia, Kalmykia and Mongolia) bi-annual festival “Joloyn,” where all the seoks gather for huge celebration that include sporting events, religious rituals, and, very importantly, a very long *kaichi* Epic performance which serves as a focal point of the festival:

The very fact of the spontaneous revival of once prohibited national institutes is symptomatic. Clan festivals represent a *real* creativity of the people, reflecting its interest towards its origin, ancestors, and history. In July of 1993, all-Altai festival, Joloyn, took place in Ust-Kan region. It gathered thousand of participants from all Altai clans and regions and the guests from Tuva and Mongolia. The “clan theme” was not prominent at the festival, because its official organizers tried to make it as secular as possible... ..However, the choice of the place for the festival had a great meaning for its organizers: exactly here, in 1904, Altaians openly gathered for a Burkhanist ceremony...<sup>33</sup>

The Joloyn festivals began as early as the 1988. At this time, they were officially regarded as purely secular, “folklore” festivals. However, when the author attended a festival in the 1989 – at a very early stage of the (still Soviet) religious “thaw,” the author witnessed a ceremony which in all its features resembled a *shuten* of a modest size. According to one of the organizers of the festivals, *kaichi* Nogon Shumarov, the Joloyns are the most large-scale religious gathering of the followers of Ak Jang. Indeed, since 1995, every festival had at its center a *kure*, the place of Ak Jang ceremonies.

The central element of every Joloyn, *kai*, also has direct connection to Ak Jang: the Epic features Oiro, Amyrsana, Ak Burkhan and other Ak Jang sacred personae. However, in its Joloyn version, *kai* performance underwent significant changes. Now, it is accompanied by the staged re-enactment of an Epic, which takes place in a large open area and often involves hundreds of equestrian and pedestrian actors. While some

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 69

For the Russian original, see Appendix 2, entry 67



Altaians have doubts about the new style of an essentially sacred ritual, the organizers of the performance motivate the changes by the need for the “religious education” of the people, many of whom have never been exposed to the richness of Altai religious tradition – in this case, clearly seen as Ak Jang.

## **Conclusion**

From the description of the post-Soviet developments in Ak Jang presented above, one may get an impression that its resurrection was mostly in the form of epiphenomena – a variety of “inventions,” mostly made by the urban intelligentsia and having very little in common with the practice of Ak Jang in the period of the 1904-1930s. This impression cannot be avoided, because, unlike the urban interpretations of Ak Jang, which are very well publicized, its rural practice has not yet been studied, or described in the published sources. To estimate the scale of Ak Jang practice, and also to analyze its structure and content, extensive field research is required. Currently (in the 2002-2003), there are no Russian Anthropologists working in Altai. However, scholars from the Institute of Altaic Studies in Gorno-Altai, with whom the author consulted, are currently conducting this research. In their estimate, the number of people who actively practice Ak Jang, which means those who attend the massive prayer meetings and not only perform household rituals, is close to ten thousand.<sup>34</sup> Hopefully, in the following years, there will be publications on the post-Soviet Ak Jang practices, based on field data.

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<sup>34</sup> S. Tioukhteneva, seminar September 2001

## **Chapter 7. Conclusion**

### **Reconstruction of Ak Jang: a hypothesis.**

The material presented above has been derived from many diverse sources. It was arranged to present, or rather to reveal, the pattern that connects Ak Jang, the core Altai tradition, the pre-modern tradition of Turks and Mongols and, finally, the recent return of Ak Jang, as an integral whole. Below, this pattern is going to be described as a summary.

The scholars who studied Ak Jang in the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods and had a chance to both observe and study its comeback from the late 1980s on, L.Sherstova and A.Sagalaev, attempted to place Ak Jang into the context of Altaian tradition. Moving from different directions – the former, by meticulously analyzing the origins of various misinterpretations of Ak Jang, motivated by ideology and transferred into academic work, and the latter – by analyzing the narrative of Altai tradition and its religious and ritualistic content, succeeded in showing that the interpretations of Ak Jang as a syncretistic tradition were wrong – indeed, Ak Jang is an autochthonous Altai tradition. As for the “transient nature” of it – its vigorous revival shows that it has lasted for a hundred years, which indicates that it is not as transient as its early students stated. Both scholars interpreted the role and place of Ak Jang in a similar way. Their interpretations can be concentrated in the following statements:

1. Ak Jang has been an attempt to form an ethno-confessional unity among Altaians. The main pathos of this attempt was in “transcending” the clan-based religious identity, represented by the institution of shamans.
2. The “instruments” of asserting this identity, chosen by the Ak Jang founders and followers, were figures from the relatively recent past – the Dzungarian period of Altai

culture. The Dzungarian Empire and its heroes and leaders served as an “eschatological token,” or ideal, for the adherents of Ak Jang. While the author agrees with this interpretation as being essentially true, there are several important factors that point beyond it.

First, from the very beginning of Ak Jang to the present time, a “recurrent motif” in its message can be observed, namely its “international” pathos. From the “universal” claims of Chot Chelpanov, to the formation of the Karakorum Committee, to the reconstructions of “their” versions of Ak Jang by the scholars and ideologists throughout Siberia, to the emphasized international character of the Joloyn celebrations, it can be seen that its message is not limited to Altaians – it seeks (and readily finds) positive response and consolidation among its “cultural siblings” – Tuvans, Khakassians, Buryats, Mongols, Kalmyks and, to some extent, Sakha (Yakuts). If the “function” of Ak Jang was limited to the formation of ethno-confessional unity with the Altaians being the ethnos in question, these processes would not have taken place. Moreover, if one considers the “Ak Jang discourse” on the locally international level as a form of ideological wishful thinking, it cannot account for the readiness of non-Altaian response to it, not only in a sense of being quick, but also in the ready presentation of the cross-cultural matrices of varieties of Ak Jang by the cultural activists and academics alike.

Another very important factor is that, while Russian academics have been trying to fit Ak Jang into the format of description of Siberian traditions established in Soviet scholarship, the Native Siberian scholars have been independently evolving their own discourse interpreting their cultures and religious traditions. While not always dealing with Ak Jang explicitly, they developed a system of descriptive patterns of their

traditions,<sup>1</sup> which are very different from the Russian ones. Treating a religious tradition or its element - for example, Ak Jang, or White Shamanism, or Epic, they downplay, to the point of completely ignoring, its “ethnic” character that is its particularity for a single Siberian ethnic group. Instead, they make numerous cross-cultural comparisons to assert the essential identity of the mentioned phenomena among the different ethnic groups. This does not seem to be a deliberate, self-conscious manifestation of “pan-Turkism” or “pan-Mongolism.” It is a manifestation of the normal and typical Turkic-Mongolian perception that does not “notice” ethnicity, as perceived and imposed, in the form of Siberian “nation-states,” by a dominant “nation-state” culture.

Native scholars’ views resonate with the perception of the Siberian (and Central Asian in general) cultures by such scholars as G.Potanin and J.-P.Roux, who saw the uniformity of the shared beliefs and values throughout Central Asia, which was much more fundamental than almost random ethno-territorial divisions of it.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Ak Jang is a reflection of the trans-ethnic, rather than ethnic, tendencies in Altai culture.

Now, the “temporal” linking of Ak Jang to the “dream” of the Dzungarian period as its absolute and only referent, has also been criticized<sup>3</sup> by the Native Siberian scholars. Thus, T.Sadalova,<sup>4</sup> while acknowledging the Dzungarian period and its figures – Oiro, Shunu, and others, as the inspiration for Ak Jang, simply states that this particular template is only an element, or a manifestation in a much longer tradition of Turkic-Mongolian culture of “divine” kingship and ideology, related to this institution. The “parenthood” of Uch Kurbustan, shared between Geser, Genghis, Epic heroes of both

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<sup>1</sup> Dugarov is the best example, but not the only one.

<sup>2</sup> It would fit here to present a brief remark of Danilin - that some Tuvan yarlykchi served in Altai. (Danilin, pp.120, 140-143 )

<sup>3</sup> More often, it is simply ignored.

<sup>4</sup> Sadalova, “*Traditsiia Messianstva...*,” p.52

Altai and other cultures, and the Dzungarian “tri-une hero” demonstrates this common matrix, which overrides the manifestations of particular persons and/or eschatological situations attributed to them. How, then, can Ak Jang be placed in this larger, spatial and temporal context? As a guideline for this reconstruction, the following statement of J.-P.Roux will be used:

Turkic religions... ..yielded their own system of beliefs, their own personal representations. These are generally identified as “animism” or “shamanism,” even though the last term cannot even begin to cover the whole of the religious phenomena. Their “national” religion, largely shared by Mongols and certainly the Tunguz, is still practiced today... ..Its beliefs have never been solidly unified, and, as we are beginning to better understand, they are like two diverging branches of a common trunk: the popular one is centered on shamanism, totemism, and vigorous polytheism; the imperial one is antishamanist, antitotemist, and has monotheistic tendencies in its advocacy of Tengri, the sky god. Although they are separate, these two branches have not escaped interpenetration... ..Whether tribal or imperial, however, the prevailing political and social regime allowed a memory of the former to remain, and when the prevailing order was temporarily abolished, along with it was abolished a part of what it had imposed...<sup>5</sup>

As noted earlier, J.-P.Roux tends to overemphasize the polarity (and conflict) between the two strata of the Turkic religion. Also, it seems that the stratification of Turkic (or Mongolian, or Siberian) religions is somewhat more complex. As mentioned above, it “requires” the addition of a clan stratum to the “two-tier” scheme proposed by J.-P.Roux. However, in its essence, this statement of J.-P. Roux is correct and very valuable, because it clearly points at interdependence and “reciprocal reflection” of Turkic religion and the stratification of the nomadic society.

Most of the scholars who attempted to describe or reconstruct Turkic-Mongolian religion, whether in its ancient and medieval form,<sup>6</sup> or in its modern state,<sup>7</sup> without being

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<sup>5</sup> Roux, *Turkic religions*, p.87.

<sup>6</sup> e.g. Klyashtornyi and Sultanov and L.Gumilev. The latter dedicated the whole book to the discussion of the phenomenon of the alternating “cycles” in life of Turkic-Mongolian societies – periods in which

seduced by the “shaman-centered” approach to it, came to the same view: the religious “layers” and the strata of social organization parallel one another in Turkic-Mongolian cultures. Such a parallelism is not characteristic for the “Western” religions and nation-states, which are formed as “center-periphery” structures. Moreover, for a person (even a scholar) coming from a Western background, this parallelism is even difficult to fathom. I think that this difficulty is the reason for many compulsive scholarly attempts to find a single “center” in the Siberian religions in the form of “shaman,” or “shamanism” as well as for J.-P.Roux’s overemphasis on the conflict between the “imperial” and “popular” religions.

According to the reconstructions of the ancient and medieval Turkic-Mongolian religion(s) and cultures,<sup>8</sup> the existence of the following cultural-social and religious strata can be postulated:

1. Universal – “diffused.” This stratum refers to the general pattern of identity and belonging (“all Turks,” “all Mongols”), but on a diffused level – bypassing “higher” structures such as clans, ethnic groups, or “empires,” or states. The center of this stratum is the household, or even a particular individual. At this level, a number of deities are addressed: these are universal deities, but addressing them does not require any particular

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various groups existed in a “diffused” form, having their identity and affairs based on (and limited to) the interests of a particular clan, or group of clans, alternating with the extremely quick and ready consolidations into long- or short-lived “empires” under a rule of a kagan, or a dynasty of kagans (see Chapter ). He postulates a principle of “fluid identity” among Turkic-Mongolian nomads, based on clan *and* what he calls “super-ethnos” (what J.-P.Roux calls “empire”). As one of the most significant factors, instrumental for the quick consolidations of the Turks and Mongols into the empire-like entities, he sees in the “archetypal” figure of the divine (or rather, “elected by Heaven”) kagan and, more generally, in the Cult of Heaven itself.

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Dugarov and C.Humphrey and U.Onon, *Shamans and Elders*.... This is a pioneering work, based on Mongolian material and dedicated to the analysis of connections between the social structure, religious offices, and religious (“spiritual”) figures of Mongols. Its approach to a culture as a set of interconnected patterns is exemplary, and can serve as an ideal template for the analysis of other Turkic and Mongolian cultures.

<sup>8</sup> Done by Klyashtorny, Gumilev, Roux, and Heissig.

office – it is done individually, or at a household level. These deities are: Ot-ene (the Fire deity), Umai (Ymai) – the deity of fertility, childbirth, etc., Jer-su – the “deity” (or rather, a complex of spirits) of the Middle World, and some others. At this level also found a number of “religious offices,” whose practitioners are neither professionals nor clan-affiliated.

An exception to this pattern is the universal deity, Erlik. While he (and associated spirits) are recognized by everyone within Turkic-Mongolian realm, addressing him requires *professional* involvement, the *manjaktu kam*.

2. Clan - based. At this stratum, *aru tos* (J.-P.Roux calls them “totems”) are recognized and addressed. They include Heavenly deities (such as Ul’gen’) and the deities of the Middle World, associated with a Sacred Mountain or other locale. They are addressed by a representative of the clan with a special “mandate.”

3. Universal-consolidated stratum is linked to a divine, or “mandated” leader (kagan), the universal Heavenly deity (Tengri – sometimes, coupled with Umai), and a special order of priesthood.

This, as the hypothesis of this thesis goes, is the traditional socio-religious pattern of the Turkic-Mongolian culture. It is important to notice that it does not include the level of ethnicity or nationality. The reason for this is simple: the “format” of nationality is very new in the Turkic-Mongolian world. It began to form only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, together with colonization and the artificial division of Southern Siberia into regional nation-state-like entities.<sup>9</sup> According to the records collected and analyzed by J.-

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<sup>9</sup> And it does not work too well, as the paper, Ekeev, N.V. “*Ob Altaiskih etnoterritorial’nyh gruppah XIX – nachala XX v.v. (altai-kizhi, chuy-kizhi, baiat-kizhi)*.” (On Altai ethnic-territorial groups of the 19<sup>th</sup> – the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (altai-kizhi, chuya-kizhi, baiat-kizhi)). In: Altai i Tsentral’naia Azia: Kul’turno-Istoricheskaja preemstvennost.’ Gorno-Altai: 1999, pp.225-230, testifies.

P.Roux,<sup>10</sup> this pattern was stable and persisted throughout most of the history of Turkic groups of Siberia – to a degree, surviving even among the Islamicized Turks.

This pattern was the foundation of the society and culture of Dzungars-Oirot as well. However, the “top”- stratum of the Turkic-Mongolian religion was (as it seems, partially) replaced by Buddhism. Probably, if the Oirot Empire had not been completely destroyed in the 1750s, now the Altaian religious pattern would have existed in a form, very similar to the Buryat one, consisting of multi-layered indigenous substrate, but intermingled (at all levels) with Buddhist elements – still however, differentiating the former and the latter.<sup>11</sup> However, this development was aborted with the destruction of Oirot-Dzungarian Empire in the 1750s.

During the next hundred years, the inhabitants of Altai lived in a constant crisis: three-quarters of them were killed by the Qin-Manchu attack in the 1750s, and the rest lost their integrity even at the level of the clans-*seoks*<sup>12</sup>- until well into the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, they did not have *zaisans*.<sup>13</sup> The only remaining coherent “unit” in Altai society was a family unit – a form of the homestead, always ready to move and hide due to the harassment of both Chinese and Russians.<sup>14</sup> At this point,<sup>15</sup> the only remaining religious specialists catering to the needs of the population, were the “trouble shooters” – professional *manjaktu kam*.

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<sup>10</sup> Roux, *La religion...*

<sup>11</sup> Dugarov in “*O vzaimovliianii drevnei tibetskoii religii Bon ...*” argues that a structure, similar to Buryatian religious pattern, is very similar to Tibet, where “Shamanism” (local cults), Bon (an analogy to the “national” Heaven cult) and Buddhism coexist, interpenetrating and often imitating one another, but are still distinct. He considers this pattern as fundamental for the Inner-Central Asian cultures.

<sup>12</sup> This remark, made by S.Tioukhteneva, is very important, as we will see later.

<sup>13</sup> Chieftains of the *seoks*.

<sup>14</sup> The story of this crisis is presented in detail in L.Sherstova.

<sup>15</sup> As the early (1830s) records of the Mission show.



However, by the 1860s, Altaians began to recover – socially, demographically, and economically. Already Verbitsky, writing in the 1860s, notices both the *seok* consolidation and the non-shamanic, diverse religious offices, including the rudiments of the clan *aru tos* worship.<sup>16</sup> This tendency continued into the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the first Altai “oligarchs” who directly traded with European countries, emerged.

Thus, the emergence of Ak Jang was not a desperate reaction to a crisis, brought about by colonialism. From the author’s point of view, it was a reaction to another crisis – the crisis of self-empowerment. Two tendencies merged in Altai in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the crisis and weakening of Russian colonial policy and administration, and the structural re-establishment of Altai society that required a religious framework, different from the 19<sup>th</sup>-century near-monopoly of the *manjaktu kam*. Simply put, the tradition of Altaians needed to be de-fragmented – just as its society has done. *Manjaktu kam* were not able to address with their competence, namely only in dealing with Erlik and Underworld in the particular crisis situations - the more sophisticated and less crisis-bound new Altai society. Moreover, looking at the traditional Turkic-Mongolian stratification of the religious offices, etc., it may be said that they were not meant to do so.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the old, but re-formulated Turkic sacred offices and their divine objects came to the fore: the elements of Heaven worship, the “religious reference” to a leader with the Heavenly Mandate, codified in Epic and presented by the figures of Oirot-Shunu-Amyrsana, and, finally, the ritual cycle, addressed to the *aru tos*. These “new”

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<sup>16</sup> Verbitsky, pp.66-106.

<sup>17</sup> Humphrey, C. *Shamanic Practices and the State in Northern Asia: Views from the Center and Periphery*. In: Shamanism, History, and the State. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994, pp.191-229

referents constituted the core of Ak Jang as an antithesis to the practice and pantheon of *manjaktu kam* aimed at a diffused, disintegrated society in crisis.

Here, it is important to mention that the thrust of Ak Jang has not been simply “universal,” or aimed at a transcendence of the clan-limited religious identity of Altaians. The merging of the institute of Heaven worship, which by the 20<sup>th</sup> century had become rather vague, with the more concrete figure of an *elder*, or *ak kam*, a white shaman who addresses only the *aru tos* in the figure of *yarlykchi* was aimed both at transcending the clan-based beliefs and identity and at fortifying them. Is this pattern of re-establishment of the tradition typical for Turkic-Mongolian “consolidation mechanism”? It is likely that it is not – in its clan-fortifying aspect. The common pattern was “building from the clan level up,” because in the pre-modern Turkic-Mongolian society clans were the basic and virtually indestructible units of social identity, but in the case of Ak Jang, Altai society and tradition faced the challenge of re-establishing the clan consolidation as well. This is why Ak Jang emphasized the anti-shamanic attitude: the matter was not the conflict between “low” or “clan-based,” and “high” or “imperial” levels of the tradition, but between the inertia of the unstructured, “bottom” level of organization (or rather, disorganization) of Altai identity, to which *manjaktu kam* catered, and its more structured version, manifested in Ak Jang. Note that *manjaktu kam*, who were harassed by the followers of Ak Jang, were absolutely passive victims of this harassment – they were not the real adversaries, but the tokens of the situation Ak Jang set to change. Significant pacification of the anti-shamanic attitude as soon as the “religious strata,” implemented by Ak Jang, became powerful and stable by the mid-1910s, proves this point.

Thus, the figure of *yarlykchi* as well as the belief and ritual complex of Ak Jang, are a synthetic entity – a “hybrid” of the *aru tos* – clan-oriented complex, and of the “supra-ethnic” Heaven Cult, manifested by the Heaven worship and the motif of the “divinely elected” hero-leaders, presented in the epics and cultural memory in general. The new complex has to function in a situation which was entirely new for the Turkic-Mongolian nomadic tradition – a situation when a particular group is legally linked to a certain area. Also, it is made to accept the concept, or format of the nation-state, whether in “external,” colonial form, or in the succeeding self-government, where a nation in question is defined as homogenous ethnicity.

The persistent search for consolidation with cultural siblings, for which Ak Jang and its varieties serve as both academic and ideological motivation, have been successful: a new discourse is being readily built and/or recognized not only by Altaians, but among all other groups involved.<sup>18</sup> This indicates that the “supra-ethnic,” but not necessarily “imperial” in J.-P.Roux’s understanding, aspect of the Ak Jang synthesis is still present. Also, it shows the reasons for a certain unease among Altaians, Buryats, and others in keeping their respective “white faiths” within limits of particular, isolated ethnic groups.

Currently, the processes of deconstructing the imposed identity and reconstructing the traditional one are vigorous among Altaians and their cultural siblings and neighbors.<sup>19</sup> Ak Jang plays a prominent role in this reconstruction, but the shape of the

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<sup>18</sup> Russian scholars thoroughly avoid acknowledging this as an “authentic” cultural trend and prefer to see it as a form of “ideological wishful construct” among Siberians. While this consolidation cannot be “blamed” on the external forces (as it was in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), the “fear of the Turkic-Mongolian Empire, the Tatars” presented in Russian cultural memory by Genghis and Batu, persists. At this point, the most prudent thing, as Russians think, is to ridicule any sign of consolidation among the Siberians.

<sup>19</sup> Anderson, D. “*Living in a subterranean landscape: Identity politics in post-Soviet Khakassia.*” In: Bridger, S. and Pine, F. (Ed.) Surviving post-socialism: Local strategies and regional responses in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. London: Routledge, 1997, pp.52-65.

“new” tradition is still not clearly defined. Is it possible to speculate on what will happen in the development of Ak Jang in the future?

There seem to be several possible scenarios for the development of Ak Jang in Altai. If Ak Jang followers continue the cultural consolidation with such groups as Tuvans, Buryats, and Kalmyks, a picture similar to the one present in Buryatia and developing in Tuva may emerge: an essentially “three-level” religious complex, consisting of professional shamans and other “people of knowledge,” clan and “national” cult, linked to the institution of *yarlykchi* (near-identical to the “white shamans” in Buryatia, or, as Dugarov speculates, to Bon-po in Tibet), and Buddhism – with all these levels thoroughly interpenetrating one another (as in Buryatia).

If, on the other hand, a Khakass or Sakha trend, characterized by the “linkage to the territory” and stress on the Master of the Land (*Altai-kudai*, or *Altai-eezi* in Altai) will prevail, the “ethnicization” and grounding of the tradition, which is complementary with the development of the Siberian nation-states, may occur.

However, one has to be very modest with forecasts and predictions. While the “religious markers” of Ak Jang and Altaian tradition in general seem to have been clearly pinpointed, the whole complexity of patterns, associated with every spirit figure, or with a mythological theme, or with a sacred specialist, has essentially not been studied. The formation of Ak Jang and the momentary split, or “crack” within a quiet and introvert tradition of Altai, allowed the “outsiders,” the researchers to see a bewildering complexity of religious patterns of the Siberian cultures. New “active factors” of these traditions are being highlighted or, from the outsider’s point of view, discovered: for example, until very recently, the sacred role of *kaichi* and epic, as a significant source of

the narrative, specifically for Ak Jang, has not been acknowledged by non-Altaiian academics! How many of such patterns are there that the academic world does not know yet? Probably, many. Now, it is possible to observe the developments of Altai traditions, spotting new themes and accents and patterns that become manifest. From my point of view, the key role in the academic study and description of this intricate network belongs to the Native scholars. This does not mean that “outsiders” must avoid studying the Siberian traditions, but this study has to be always evaluated by those who really know the text of their tradition, which is the tradition itself. Hopefully, the materials presented here have succeeded in showing that Ak Jang is an organic part of Altai and Turkic-Mongolian tradition rather than a singular, superficial and transient element in Altai culture.

However, while Ak Jang is clearly linked to the traditional religion and social structure of Turks and Mongols, it still has some elements that distinguish it from its ancient and pre-modern form, described by J.-P.Roux and others. The leading factor responsible for these differences has been mentioned above – it emerged in a situation of the arguably forceful nation-state formation in Altai, which resulted in several specific and unique features of Ak Jang, compared with the pre-modern tradition: the worship of the hero-god-kings instead of sanctification of a real kagan’s power; the absence of the “high ceremonies” for the universal Turkic gods, except for the worship of Uch Kurbustan who merged with, or replaced *Tengri*; and, finally, its “ethnic,” rather than supra-ethnic, orientation.

While the existence among the Turks of the religious “hero-god-king” complex (in Epic and other sources), which deified the *kagan* and his power, has been well-

documented, in the case of Ak Jang it could not serve as the mechanism of the legitimization of a real kagan, as it repeatedly did throughout Turkic-Mongolian history. Thus, the *kagan*-related religious complex became an almost entirely religious aspiration, manifesting in messianic sentiment at the beginning of Ak Jang, and transforming into an almost purely “heavenly” complex later. However, the consolidation attempts among the Turkic-Mongolian groups of Siberia that use Ak Jang as its focal point, show that the historical religious mechanism of the divine election of a (virtual) *kagan* is still working.<sup>20</sup>

The absence of the hypothetical “high” forms of worship of the universal Turkic-Mongolian gods such as *Umai* and others from the Ak Jang ritual complex is only partial: *Tengri* (in the form of Uch-Kurbustan) and Jer-su (in the form of Altai eezi – Ak Burkhan) are, indeed, present in it, as well as *Ot-ene*. Probably, the absence of the rest of the gods is due to the necessity of the actual *kagan* (and his spouse, associated with *Umai*) to legitimize the corresponding ritual complex. Finally, the “soil-based,” rather than universal, orientation of Ak Jang in the post-Soviet period is simply dictated by the changed cultural conditions.

Thus, it is certain that Ak Jang is, first of all, an integral part of the Altai religious tradition, and secondly - the authentic heir to the Turkic-Mongolian tradition. With regard to its “social projection,” it is evident that it reflects the traditional organization of the Turkic-Mongolian society.

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<sup>20</sup> Such a situation is not unique for Ak Jang and is rather common in different cultures throughout history. The most famous example of a similar pattern is the Jewish tradition. We can (carefully) associate the ancient-medieval Turkic-Mongolian pattern and its narrative with the period of Kings, and the emergence of Ak Jang – with the pre-Maccabean period (Book of Daniel?) (with the candidate for the Hasmonean kings so far absent). The resuming of the Temple worship in Jewish tradition would be, consequently, associated with the resuming of the “imperial” Tengri worship in the form of Uch Kurbustan, in Ak Jang.

### **The future possibilities for the study of Ak Jang.**

This thesis is by no means a detailed and exhaustive description of Ak Jang. Such a description was impossible to produce both for the lack of space and due to the lack of materials related to its many aspects. Rather, it is a set of markers of the key (and diverse) themes-items that reveal the pattern of Ak Jang within the tradition of Turks and Mongols, which may be helpful in future research.

The study of Ak Jang as a unique phenomenon in the history of Siberian cultures is fascinating. However, even more interesting and potentially productive would be the study of White Faith and its varieties as parts of the general South Siberian religious complex. Ak Jang is not a separate tradition – not in a sense that it claims uniqueness and monopoly for being “Altai or any other Siberian religion.” It is connected with an intricate web of the core Siberian (and Mongolian, or even Central Asian) mythology, ritualism, and socio-cultural patterns.

Very little work has been done on connecting the folk, which means sacred, narrative to religious practices. Currently, Altai and other scholars are very active, making these connections – and one cannot help noticing that every statement they make, shakes the academic construction of the “shamanic-centered” view of Siberians, created by Soviet scholarship. The traditions of Siberia, Ak Jang together with the “rest,” approached as a complex, reveal a vast and ancient network of “cultural archetypes,” obvious to Siberians, but not noticed by outsiders.

Siberian scholars went as far as to link White Faith to the ancient, probably Indo-Iranian, roots. Whether they are correct, or are just “making it up,” as A.M.Sagalaev thinks, is impossible to say at this point. A more promising direction in the research of

White Faith-like tendencies would be investigating similar phenomena (if they can be found) *outside* of Russia. If they exist in China and Mongolia, it can be an indicator of the correctness of the reconstruction hypothesis, presented in the Chapter 5.

However, even the cross-cultural research within Russia can bring and already has brought interesting results: all “cultural siblings” of Altaians have one or another version of White Faith, built upon the same, or nearly same, set of “sacred markers.” Even the differences between the respective “White Faiths” are not random: they are intimately related and thus, can be traced to the relatively recent histories of their respective cultures.



## GLOSSARY

**Ak Burkhan** – the most important deity of Ak Jang. The movement began from the appearance (or vision) of A.B.

**Ak kam** – “white” shamans who did not address Erlik and the Underworld. In Altai tradition, their main function is propitiation of the aru tos.

**Algyshchi** – a “blesser” – one of the “minor sacred vocations among Altaians. In Ak Jang, plays an important role. Many algyshchi function as yarlykchi in contemporary Ak Jang ceremonies.

**Amyrsana** – one of the figures in the “tri-une” divine hero-messiah of Ak Jang. A historical figure (18<sup>th</sup> century), a Dzhungar who fought against the Ch’ing Empire.

**Altai eezi** – “The Master of Altai.” Major spirit figure of the Middle World. In Ak Jang, merges with Ak Burkhan and Jer-su.

**Aru tos** – “pure ancestor(s).” The heavenly patrons of particular seeks.

**Ashina** – the “universal” legendary ancestor of the Turks, born from a wolf . One of the Ak Jang’s “tri-une” heroes, Shunu, has close affinity with Ashina.

**Burkhan** – a generic name for the deities, accepted by Ak Jang.

**Burkhanism** – the name for Ak Jang in academic literature.

**Erlik (Erklig)** – the universal Turkic-Mongolian god of the Underworld

**Geser (Gesar)** – the archetypal Central Asian hero. Possibly – one of the prototypes for the heroes of Ak Jang.

**Jajachi** – a “source,” the Creator deity. In Ak Jang it is Uch Kurbustan.

**Jajyk (Ak Jajyk or Sary Jajyk)** – a shapeless deity that serves as a messenger between the believer and the high heavenly god(s). Under different names, it is found everywhere in Central Asia.

**Joloy** – cultural festivals, organized in Altai from the 1988 on. In their structure, they closely follow the religious community gatherings and involve *shuten* and the performance of *kai* (Epic).

**Jelbichi** – a “fanner.” A sacred office in Turkic Mongolian and Altai traditions. J. are the main prototype for Ak Jang priesthood (yarlykchi).

**Kagan** – a “king,” traditional leader among Turks and Mongols. While this position is occasionally hereditary, kagans are usually elected.

**Kai** – 1) a performance of an Epic; 2) a general name for the “overtone singing.”

**Kaichi** – a performer of epic. An important sacred office among Altaians and other South Siberian groups. The religious character of this office has been acknowledged in academic literature only very recently.

**Kalmyk** – a name, used by Russians to designate Altaians in the 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Actual Kalmyks (Mongolian-speaking group and a former constituent of the Dzhungarian Empire) live in Kalmykia near Volga, in European part of Russia.

**Kara tos** – “black (impure) ancestors.” This category of spirits includes Erlik and a variety of Underworld spirits as well as the “ghosts” of the deceased shamans.

**Kormos, kormozhok** – same as kara tos.

**Kospokchi** – a “clairvoyant” – a minor, but very important sacred office in Altai tradition.

**Kudai** – in Altaian, a generic title of any high and heavenly deity (from Pers. *Khuda* – “god”).

**Kure (murgul)** – an altar (or, more generally, the place of worship) in Ak Jang.

**Manjaktu kam** – a shaman who has a manjak (a special, very sophisticated costume) and a drum and who addresses the spirits of the Underworld.

**Neme biler kizhi (biler kizhi)** – “people of knowledge”: a title, applied in contemporary Altai culture to all sacred vocations and offices.

**Oboo** – a pile of stones (herma), built to mark the place for the ceremonies, directed at the Masters of the Place (*genii loci*). Widely spread in Central Asia.

**Oirot (oirat)** – “allies”: a title, used for the groups-members of the Dzhungarian Federation.

**Oirot-khan** – a legendary hero, one of the heroes-messiahs of Ak Jang.

**Ot-ene** – “Mother of Fire”: a very important Central Asian deity. The main deity of the household ceremonies. Ot-ene was appropriated by Ak Jang.

**Ot takyr** – Ak Jang ceremony, dedicated to Ot-ene.

**Pura (bura)** – the “soul” of the sacrificed animal. During the ceremonies of manjaktu kam, plays the same role as jayyk in other situations.

**Seok** – partilineal, exogamous clan. Such clans are the fundamental unit of Turkic-Mongolian cultures.

**Shaby** – in Ak Jang, the helpers of yarlykchi.

**Shunu** – one of the figures in Ak Jang “tri-une” hero complex. Unlike Amyrsana, Shunu is not a historical figure. His name and the legends, related to him, strongly suggest the link between Shunu and Ashina (the legendary ancestor of the Turks).

**Shuten (murgul)** – the main ceremony of Ak Jang. Usually, it is performed twice a year – in the Spring and in the Fall.

**Taika eezi** – the Master of the Mountain. An important spirit of the Middle World. Every seok has its own T.e. who plays the same role in the Middle world as an aru tos – in the Upper World.

**Taiylga** – a permanent site of manjaktu kam ceremonies. Its main elements include the fire pit, the place for the m.k.’s performance and a number of poles on which the skins of the sacrificed horses are hanged.

**Tengri (tangra, teneri, tngri)** – supreme heavenly god of Turks and Mongols.

**Tengrianstvo** – a form of the post-Soviet developments within Ak Jang.

**Tereng** – a valley in central Gorny Altai where the first large ceremonies of Ak Jang were performed in 1904. Currently, T. is a sacred place for most Altaians.

**Tsagan Ebugen** – a deity (“White Old Man”), most popular in Mongolia. His functions as the Lord of the Middle World are identical to Altai eezi and Ak Burkhan.

**Uch Kurbustan** – a supreme Heavenly deity in Ak Jang.

**Ul’gen’** – a generic name for aru tos.

**Umai (Ymai)** – one of the “universal” deities of Turks and Mongols. In ancient and medieval period, U. was associated with Tengri. Currently, U. is seen as the patron of childbirth and children.

**Yadachi (yadadji)** – one of the “minor” sacred offices in Turkic-Mongolian and Altai traditions: the owner of the “weather-stone.”

**Yarlykchi (yarlyk)** – (literally: “messenger”) a “priest” in Ak Jang.

**Yduk Jer-Sub ( Jer-sub, Yer-su, Jer-su)** – the main deity of the Middle World. Seen either as a person, or as a “collective figure” – a sum total of all the spirits of the Middle World. In many cultures, it “competes” or is being replaced by such figures as Altai eezi or Tsagan Ebugen.

**Yrymchi** – “medium,” one of the minor sacred offices in Central Asian traditions. This vocation has been creatively appropriated by the followers of Tengrianstvo in the post-Soviet Altai.

**Zaisan** – an official, elected chieftain of a seek. In many respects, zaisan can be seen as a figure, analogous to a kagan on the “small scale”: for example, zaisans are responsible for the performance of certain religious duties for their respective seeks.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

#### **The ceremony of Tengri worship**

...[T]he sacrifice ended, just like among the ancient Turks, with the ritual feast.

The ceremony was set on a top of a mountain, always the same one. It had to take place by the sacred birch (*bay kaiyng*). If there was no naturally growing birch, a birch, dug out with the roots, was brought to the place and planted. If it did not take, another one was brought in the following year.

Representatives of different *seoks* gathered for the [ceremony]. However, the organization of the ceremony was the responsibility of one *seok*, upon the agreement, made in a previous year. Neither married women nor girls were allowed to attend. Even the female animals were strictly banned from the premises.

The sacrificial lambs were usually male, white, but with black head or black cheeks. They were sacrificed in different number (from three to fifteen), depending on the number of the householders and leaders who wanted to contribute their animal as a sacrifice to Heaven. Men, heading to the ceremony, attached to their hats two ribbons, a white and a blue one (according to a different version – a red and white ones). Upon the arrival on the mountain, the ribbons were taken off and smudged with *erben od* (thyme), after which they were attached to the branches of the sacred birch. During the prayer, it was prohibited to wear a hat and smoke.

The ceremony was conducted without the participation of the shaman. It was conducted by a specially elected elder, who knew *algys*, i.e. the words of the prayers to Heaven, who was called *algyschan kizi*. He wore a special felt dress and a woman's hat. Behind the sacred birch (to the West), at some distance, a sacred fire was built. Between the fire and the birch, a makeshift birch table was built. On a table, sacred implements were placed: cups, plates and spoons, all made of birch bark. The prayer began without any shamanizing, but with the supplication, addressed to the sacred birch and with feeding it. The birch was circumambulated, clockwise, three times, people going in the following order: first went *algyschan kizi*; following him – two others (one with a cup of wine, another – with a cup of mare milk); behind them, followed the donors of the lambs with their lambs, holding birch branches in their hands; finally, in a crowd, the rest of the people. *Algyschan kizi* recited blessings and supplications to the sacred birch, those following him sprinkled towards it top milk and wine, with spoons. The rest of the people repeatedly bowed to it. After the third circumambulation, they stopped, drank the leftover wine and milk from the cups, and proceeded to butcher the sacrificial lambs. This was done in an ancient manner: the animal was fallen, its skin was cut under the rib cage, and its aorta was broken. It was prohibited to spill the blood on the ground.

The meat was boiled, and the broth with pieces of meat was placed on the table; also, wine, milk and cheese were placed there. After that, the sacred birch was circumambulated three more times. After each round, *algyschan kizi* threw over the top of the birch little pieces of meat and cheese, and sprinkled with milk and wine, addressing *Tengri* and asking it for blessings. Simultaneously, all people raised their

hands, bowed and exclaimed, *Ter, ' Ter'*! (Heaven, Heaven!). The following are some phrases from the *algys*, recited by the elder:

With nine leaves – the sacred birch, *Tengri*!

Five lambs we've sacrificed, Heaven!

We ask for the rain, Heaven!

We ask for the crops, Heaven!

Let our life be prosperous, Heaven!

With the last circumambulation of the sacred birch the ceremony was over, and the ritual feast began. After it, all leftovers – wine, milk, meat and bones and skin of the sacrificial animals (with head and legs), were burnt on the sacred fire. However, in the last years, when the ceremony of *Tengri* was still performed, the hides of the sacrificial animals were given to the elder. There were no games after the ceremony. Before parting, the participants appointed the *seok* and the elder for the organization of the next year's ceremony. After the descent from the mountain, games and entertainment, sometimes lasting for several days, began...

In the sacrifice to Heaven... ... I would like to mention an ancient ritual pattern, characteristic for many ceremonial settings – the waving, or fanning with a bundle of birch branches, done by the leader of the ceremony and his assistants, and also *chilpag*, the large fan, which was made from the bundled together individual fans, belonging to every participant of the ceremony.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Potapov, *Altaiskii Shamanizm*, pp. 265-269.

## **Shuten, the central ceremony of Ak Jang**

### **The dress of yarlykchi:**

... The ceremonial dress of *yarlyks* is borrowed from *kam*.<sup>2</sup> *Kam*, whose ancestors did not have the ceremonial attire “*manjak*,” could not wear it either: during their performances to a Good Deity they wore a white robe, with white and red ribbons on its back and with the bundles of feathers on the shoulders... .. the [*yarlyk*'s] robe was made from white cloth, and it was trimmed with a yellow ribbon. Their hat was similar to *kam*'s: made from the white cloth, its back descending almost to the waist, it was also trimmed by a yellow ribbon. To its top, two ribbons, almost reaching the ground, are attached.<sup>3</sup>

### **The place of worship**

If for the areas with the *manjaktu kam*, the *taiylga*, the place of shaman's ceremonies and sacrifice, constitutes a characteristic part of the landscape, for the burkhanist regions, a typical element of the landscape is *murgul* (the place of prayer). The generic name for the ceremonies is *murgul* as well.

The central part of these worship complexes, the sacrificial altars, *kure*, are made of the stone slabs, in a shape of cubes of various sizes.<sup>4</sup>

On this altar, [they] burn juniper, and in front of it, the ritual sprinkling of milk takes place. Together with *kure*, wooden altars, *tagyl*, are constructed. They are placed around, as an open circle.

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<sup>2</sup> Here and further, Danilin refers to ak kam.

<sup>3</sup> Danilin, 175-176.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 3, Fig. 2, 3 and 6.

At the center of the *murgul* there are always birch trees, placed at the corners of *kure*, as well as long poles (*sume*) with different carved figures on top of them. Right under the top of each *sume*, pieces of cloth, often – blue ribbons, are tied. Here [we] also [can find] an *ak kalbak*, a ritual spoon for the sprinkling of milk.<sup>5</sup>

**The ceremony:**

On a slope of a mountain, facing East, a *kure* is built... at its eastern side, two *tagyls* are placed, and the birches are attached to them.

1.5 meters to the East, a fire is made, and to the West, at a same distance, a white square felt, *shirdek*, 4x6 meters, is placed. On the *shirdek*, in a row, are cups, spoons and wooden buckets with milk.

At some distance from the *kure*, 6 little birches are planted in semicircle. To the birches, young (unbroken) horses are tied: first horse is dark gray, second – yellow-red, third – brown, fourth – red with fair mane and tail, fifth – whitish-yellow and sixth – white and gray. They all are tied facing East. Each has in its mane two ribbons, corresponding with the horse's color.

In addition to the main *yarlyk*, three more *yarlyks* participate in the ceremony, they are called *uruschi*. They function as assistants. The first one checks the supply of ritual milk, etc., the second one hands the necessary ritual implements, and the third one brings them to the main *yarlyk* and pours the [ritual] milk.

*Shaby* stand to the right of *yarlyk*.

The people, gathered for the prayer, stand in several rows, in semicircle, around the felt.

Afte the preparations, in the morning, when sun has already risen, *yarlyk* begins the ceremony. He goes to the *kure* and there rotates four times clockwise, then places a

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<sup>5</sup> Danilin, pp.178-179.



branch of juniper on the *kure*; then, he goes, circling *kure* clockwise, to the fire, puts juniper in the fire and returns to his place.

After that, together with other *yarlyks*, the main *yarlyk* approaches *kure*, repeats, together with other *yarlyks*, the rotation (whirling), and everybody returns to the initial position.

After that, the sanctification of the horses begins, beginning with the first one.

*Yarlyk* and the owner of the horse (male owner) go to the birch, where the horse is tied. The main *yarlyk* reads *alkysh*, the second – takes the cup with milk, handed by another *uruschi*, and pours the milk over the horse's head. The second cup of milk is poured on its shoulders. Everybody circumambulates the birch clockwise, making four prostrations (lay attendants also make prostrations), and move to the next horse.

...The same is done to a sheep, after which, upon the directions of *yarlyk*, it is butchered in an ancient manner: its nostrils are plugged with grass, in its belly a hole is made, after which it is killed by hand rupturing of its aorta. After being skinned, the whole sheep is boiled (for the feast). When the meat is ready, it is carefully separated from the bones without breaking them, or rupturing the tendons. The bones are placed in one plate, the meat – in another. *Yarlyk* does the ceremony of the sacrifice. The heart is slightly broken on top, and some butter is poured into it. A branch of juniper is also stuck in the heart.<sup>6</sup>

After finishing the sanctification of the horses, *yarlyks* stand between the *shirdek* and *kure*..

The main *yarlyk* is given a cup, full of milk, which he holds in his right hand. Spinning it clockwise, he, at the same time, forcefully throws it up, between the birches, over the

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<sup>6</sup> Danilin, 187.

*kure*. The fourth *yarlyk* runs to pick it up, and returns it to the main *yarlyk* with a bow. He also looks at the way the cup landed: if it landed bottom-down, it is a good sign, if – bottom-up, a bad one.

After that, the lay audience begins to move (until this moment, lay people stood in one place, repeating the bows of *yarlyks*): they, one by one, go to *kure*, bow twice, place branches of juniper on *kure*, circumambulate *kure*, bow twice to the fire, burn juniper and return to their places. When they proceed, they stop by the *yarlyks*: the main *yarlyk* reads them *alkysh*, and the second one blesses them by toughing their foreheads with a special parcel, containing pieces of skin of the gelded sheep, ears with the marks [*tamga*], etc.

The prayer assembly approaches *shirdek* and [they] drink some of the leftover milk. The remaining juniper braches are broken and thrown in the boiling water (in a cauldron), and also leftover milk is poured in it. Later, people wash their hands and faces in this water, and the feast, consisting of cheese, moonshine, and meat, begins.

The sanctified horses are released. Now they are sacred, and nobody can ride them without a special permission from *yarlyk*.

These are the prayers, recited at the *shuten*:

Praise to Altai:

On a blue-gray stallion

We'll ride to blue Altai

If the Blue Burkhan blesses us

We'll reach the blue flower.

On a brown-gray stallion

We'll go to White Altai

If the White Burkhan blesses us

We'll reach the white flower!

The prayer for the well being of herds and community:

To have our herds stand strong and quiet

For us, ourselves, to live well!

To the Spirit of Altai we call – pray!

For us, our people, to live happily!

The *shuten* prayer meetings are also organized in summer, in the same manner. Since *shuten* prayers may be addressed not only to the gods, or a universal spirit-master (*Altaidyn eezi*), but also to a number of particular spirits, the texts of *alkysh* address those as well.

For the assembly, a sheep and a red horse are butchered, their meat is eaten, and the fat is thrown into the fire as a sacrifice. The same is done to the bones: around the fire, four little posts (60-70cm high) and four birches are placed. On these posts, a light wooden deck is built. Bones are placed on the deck, and burn together with it. *Yarlyk* sprinkles towards the sun and tops of the surrounding mountains and read a number of prayers – the requests for the prosperity, healthy progeny, and protection from the diseases.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Danilin, 184-185

Every participant of the prayer brought with him milk, of a mare or a sheep. The milk is prepared very carefully: one cannot drink it after milking, it cannot be touched or even approached by a dog and it cannot be stepped over.

When everybody is gathered in the morning, the milk is placed on *tagyls*, and *yarlyks* stand beside it. The prayer assembly stands behind and to the left, but not to the right, as the right side is sacred. [They] begin to pray, addressing Sun, Moon, the Spirit of Altai and other spirits. *Yarlyks* sprinkle the milk towards the sun.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Danilin, 186.

## Appendix 2

1. Термин «ойрот» и «джунгар» были более политическими, нежели этническими... Алтайские зайсаны участвовали наравне с представителями высшей знати других этнических групп Ойротии в работе Эке Жарга – высшего законодательного и исполнительного органа Ойротии.
2. После коммунистической революции, Буржуазно-националистическая интеллигенция алтайцев, баи, зайсаны и прочие контрреволюционеры продолжали контрреволюционную деятельность, направленную на отрыв Алтая от Советского государства. Они организовали в феврале 1918 г. В с. Улале Горно-Алтайский учредительный съезд для провозглашения своего собственного буржуазного «государства». На нём было представлено 133 депутата. Состав депутатов был подобран таким образом, чтобы обеспечить контрреволюционные решения съезда... Съезд открыл художник Гуркин. ...22 февраля (ст.ст.) съезд принял постановление о выделении Горного Алтая в самостоятельный округ. Съезд сопровождался религиозными церемониями (служением молебна, освящением знамени). В тот же вечер В.И. Анучин на заседании съезда сделал доклад о необходимости объединения земель бывшего «государства Ойрот» в самостоятельную республику. Анучин утверждал: «Осуществить это не трудно, и вот почему. Население Русского Алтая, Монгольского Алтая, потом хакасы, урянхайцы, сойоты (т.е. тувинцы – Л.П.) и жители Джунгарии составляют одно племя, один род; язык, нравы и обычаи у них одни, все они «кижи». Когда-то составляли все вместе великий народ Ойрот. Соединить их опять в одну семью, в одно государство тем более необходимо, что эти племена всеми заброшены и жаждут объединения. Из них образуется великая азиатская республика. ...Он возвеличивал древнее государство «Ойрот», т.е. феодальную Джунгарию, где... царили жестокая эксплуатация подвластных джунгарским феодалам народов. ...по этому докладу Анучина съезд принял решение организовать республику Ойрот. Для учреждения республики был намечен Курултай (съезд депутатов) в Клш-Агаче, пограничном с Монголией пункте. Было признано необходимым: «Для организации созыва и открытия учредительного Курултая народов, входящих в состав государства Ойрот, а также для всех переговоров, могущих возникнуть по делам республики Ойрот, учреждается специальная комиссия в составе трёх лиц: особоуполномоченный (каган) и два уполномоченных»
3. «Однажды весной, недалеко от юрты Чет Челпанова, когда я пасла овец, ко мне подъехал какой-то старый калмык в белой одежде на белом коне и сказал: явился бог и царь (Кудей-хан), иди молиться в юрту, где вывешен белый флаг. Если не послушаешься, будешь наказана». Я немедленно пошла в юрту Чета. Там было много народа. При всех бывших у чета я рассказала всё, что видела и слышала. Чет мне ничего не сказал. После этого калмыки стали собираться к юрте Чета. Упомянутого старика в белой одежде я ни раньше, ни позже не видела, откуда он пришёл – не знаю».

4. « Я сам бога не видел. Чугул-Сарок, по её словам, видела весной белого старика на белом коне. Этот старик запретил калмыкам почитать кермеса, приказал кланяться русскому богу, солнцу и белому царю (Ак-кан), велел мне, Чету носить на голове четыре шёлковых кисти. Слух этот разнёсся среди калмыков и они стали собираться на молитву к моей юрте. Девочка Чугул сама говорила калмыкам, живущим около моей юрты, что бог велел им всем молиться, бросить старую веру, не колоть скот старым богам, что он обещает счастье тем, которые будут его слушаться. Я не учил калмыков молиться по новой вере, а им указывала девочка».
5. ...Челпанов, с некоторого времени носивший белую шубу и ездивший на белом коне, говорил им, что бог, явившись лично ему на белом коне и в белой шубе, под угрозой быть убитым небесным огнём, приказал калмыкам сжечь бубны и «чалу», собираться в логу Терем и молиться 15 дней. Для молитвы следовало выйти на гору, постелить белую кошму, взять чашку с кобыльим молоком и ложку, повернуться к солнцу, юрызгать молоко вверх, кланяться и говорить: «Бог, солнце, месяц, Алтай, белый царь, помощи дайте».

6. In July 1904, Chot Chelpan announced that a vision had appeared to him. A rider dressed in white and riding a white horse appeared; behind this rider appeared two others. The first rider spoke in a language unknown to Chot; the two behind interpreted his words. “ I was and will be forever and ever. I am the chief of the Oirots, which I proclaim to you, for the time is near. Thou, Chot, art a sinful man, but thy daughter is innocent. Through her I shall announce to all Altaians my commandments.”

The commandments of the new religion were the following:

1. Do not smoke tobacco, but if you cannot control this habit, then let the tobacco to be mixed with two parts of birch bark
2. Kill all cats and henceforth never permit them in your yurts.
3. Do not chop living trees.
4. Do not swallow the blood of the animals.
5. Upon meeting, each man is to say yakshi (good) to the other as is not to ask what's new, as you have done heretofore.
6. Each morning and each evening sprinkle milk upwards and in all four directions.
7. Set up within your yurts, at the doors and in the front parts of your yurts, for birch censers and four small birches.
8. Burn heather (juniper?) in the censers.
9. Do not offer one another a pipe of tobacco on meeting, but offer a spring of heather (juniper) and say at that time, yakshi.
10. Burn the drums of the shamans because they are not from god, but from Erlik.
11. Do not eat from the same pot with a Christian, or with converted Altaian.
12. Do not become friends with a Russian and do not call them *Orus* (Russian), but call them *chichke put* (thin legs).
13. The high northern white mountain; you must incline your heads toward it. But the time is come when the white mountain is no longer your Lord.

14. Once we were all under Oirots. Now we will be at one with them. We will look on the Russians as our enemies. Soon their end will come, and the land will not accept them, the earth will open and they will be cast under the earth.
15. If anyone has Russian money, spend it quickly on powder, shot, even on Russian wares, and what remains of money after the purchases, bring it to me.
16. We will regard the sun and the moon as our brothers.
17. Hang on small birch trees ribbons of five different colors as sign of the presence on earth of the five chief peoples and five chief religions.
18. Do not hide from me even a kopeck. Those who will hide it will sink into the earth as the Russians.

7. «Я не поверил своей дочери (Чугул), но мне ми самому пришлось увидеть этого человека. Я был в это время в Тулайте (приток р. Чарыша) и оттуда поехал домой. На самой седловине горы встретился с ним (всадником). И сказал он мне... надо оставить старую веру и рассказать об этом всему Алтаю, чтобы все жгли. Он сказал ещё, чтобы все молились солнцу и луне – Ай-Бурхан, Кун-Бурхан, От-Бурхан, Уч-Курбустан Бурхан... Потом начал молиться по новому. Есть в горах дерево арчил, я клал его в огонь и молился. Этот арчил и раньше клали в огонь... Сам я родился в Ябогане... переехал в Теренг... Никого из заграничных людей я не видел. После видения через три месяца стали приезжать в Теренг алтайцы... Установили берёзки, развели огонь, клали в него арчил, доили кобыл и молоко брызгали на березки и на огонь, к березкам привязывали ленточки. Березки и арчил, и ленточки взяты от старой веры, когда молились доброму богу. Так молились у моей юрты и ездили на гору недалеко от юрты и молились там. Кроме этой молитвы, никаких других не было. Эти слова говорят или громко, или шёпотом, или в уме, а в это время думают о здоровье на весь Алтай. Молились стоя... Ножи в землю не зарывали, когда молились. Это напрасно говорили, что мы зарывали ножи. Впрочем, может быть, кто и делал так. Слово Бурхан значит бог. Он живет на небе. На кого он похож - не знаю. Его зовут Ак (белый). Он добрый. Не знаю, наказывает ли он когда, или нет. На суде меня обвинили за моления по-новому. Протокол был, что мы о японцах поминали. Это неверно. Я про японцев не слыхал и не знал, а только когда сидел в тюрьме – узнал. На молениях перебивало 2-3 тысячи народу, может быть, кто и придумал... Я не знаю, откуда ярлыкчы явились... По новой вере лучше: лошадей не колем, каму не платим».

8. Галдан-Ойрот (если) придёт -  
Черные (шаманисты) исчезнут!  
Черные в землю уйдут!  
Черногрудые к заходу солнца пойдут.  
Золотой Ойрот наш царь придёт -  
Черногрудые к закату луны пойдут -  
Мы на Ак-Чечек и Кок-Чечек Алтай пойдём!  
Черногрудые – к закату луны пойдут жить!

9. The Oirot of Old has come –  
 Let's turn twice, prayng,  
 On the gray stallion, shaking reins, we'll ride!  
 The Ancient Oirot has come –  
 We'll turn six times and bow.  
 On the stallion with fur, like of an elk,  
 Joyfully we'll trot!  
 Lets' play joyfully – play,  
 Since Oirot-tsar has come.  
 We'll sing in clear voices,  
 Since the tsar of Old has come!  
 Carved and pretty shoes  
 Let's put on, put on,  
 To *Bulun-Tokoi* ( the name of the late Dzungar capital, traditionally a part of the  
 “larger” Altai, now in Sinkiang, China – A.V.) Altai  
 Let's go, let's go!  
 For the golden rein,  
 Burkhan created horse.  
 To live under the moonlight,  
 Burkhan created us.  
 For the silver rein,  
 Burkhan created a brown horse.  
 To live under the rays of sun –  
 Burkhan created us!  
 With the sign on its wings,  
 The king of birds will come,  
 Having the same buttons as Kairakhan (an epithet of God. Buttons are the tamgas  
 – the traditional signs of identity among Turks and Mongols – A.V.),  
 Our tsar will come!  
 With the *tobo* sign on the top of the head  
 The king of birds will come,  
 With four rows of buttons  
 Our tsar will come!  
 Correctly put Mongolian hat  
 One cannot move as one wants,  
 Our most subtle law –  
 One cannot break...  
 ... The beaten path  
 When will it smoothen over?  
 Long gone Oirot-khan  
 When will he come back?  
 A beaten black road  
 When will it smoothen over?  
 Gone before Galdan-tsar  
 When will he return?  
 When the six bows will be stretched



Russia will burn  
When a [great] bow shoots with 30 arrows –  
Russian occupation will be no more.  
When the bow with a golden arrow stretches,  
Amyr-sana will come to us.  
Russia that harasses us  
Will fade from fear and perish.

Прежний Ойрот пришёл –  
Дважды повернёмся, молясь,  
На коне серой масти (подобно козлу)  
Поводом качая, поедем!  
Старинный Ойрот пришё –  
Шесть раз повернувшись, поклонимся.  
На коне с шерстью, подобной маралу,  
Спиной потряхивая, рысью поедем!  
Будемте весело играть – играть,  
Раз Ойрот-царь пришёл.  
Голос будет литься весело,  
Раз прежний царь пришёл!  
Вырезанную-украшенную обувь  
Наденемте, наденем,  
На Булун-Токой Алтай  
Поедемте, поедем!  
Чтобы золотую узду надевать,  
Коня Бурхан создал.  
Чтобы под светом луны жили,  
Нас Бурхан создал.  
Чтобы серебряную узду надевать,  
Бурого (коня) Бурхан создал.  
Под лучами солнца жить –  
Нас Бурхан создал!  
Со знаком на крыльях  
Царь птиц прилетит,  
С Кайраканом имеющий одинаковые пуговицы  
Наш царь придёт!  
Поперёк надвинутую монгольскую шапку  
Нельзя сдвинуть набекрень,  
Тончайший наш закон –  
Нельзя нарушить.  
Разглаженную надетую шапку  
Пошевелить нельзя:  
Самый тонкий закон придёт –  
Нельзя его нарушить!  
Глубокая тропинка  
Когда снова разгладится?

Давно ушедший Ойрот-хан  
Когда обратно придёт?  
Вытопанная чёрная дорога  
Когда она изгладится?  
Прежде ушедший Галдан-царь  
Когда обратно вернётся?  
Шесть луков когда натянутся,  
Россия огнём воспламенится.  
В 30 стрел когда натянется лук –  
Русского жительство не будет.  
Когда лук с золотой стрелой натянется,  
Тогда придёт к нам Амыр-Сана.  
На нас идущая Россия,  
Смутившись от страха, погибнет.

10. В первое время моления были несложны. Группами собирались около юрт, зажигали пучки вереска и брызгали молоком по направлению к горам, окружающим лог Терем. При этом пели старинные песни, восхваляющие Алтай; распевали также песни, зло высмеивающие русских, призывающие на них проклятия, и т.п. Установленных каноников не было; тексты песен и молитв были разнообразны. Только впоследствии ритуал начал отстаиваться; Стали выделять уже готовые фразы молений по разным поводам.
11. Собиравшиеся дали Чету новое имя – Абая, его жене – Гудеим, приёмной дочери – Акы Шуленги... ..разослали гонцов, собирать белые кошмы для постройки Чету юрты.... ..Назвали эту юрту торжественно орго (дворец)... Чет молился в окружении избранных, а остальные алтайцы расположились по логовам и склонам горы, здесь жили день за днем и устраивали моления группами. Для пропитания этой массы паломников ежедневно кололи 30-40 лошадей; всюду дымились костры... Скоро, говорил Чет, должен родиться мальчик без пуповины, по Каан-Мерген... ..Моления в долине продолжались с апреля до середины июня. Приезжающие к Чету с подарками и на моления терпеливо ожидали появления знамения на солнце – знак близкого прихода Ойрота.
12. Думается, что миссионеры первыми поняли суть происходившего и осознали возникшую для их дела опасность. Ведь молиться в Теренг ездили не только язычники, но и крещёные, которые отказывались от христианства и принимали «свою» веру.
13. «на месте (в Теренге – Л.Ш.) застали 400 человек, совершавших богомоление. Никаких неизвестных или посторонних лиц при этом не было. Сбор происходил на религиозной почве, вообразивших, что Чет Челпан, Чугул и Кул получили от Бога солнца указание совершать богомоления.»

14. Челпанов, стоявший в центре толпы, подняв руки кверху, повторял: «О царь Бурхан-Ойрот-Япон и на вопросы исправника не отвечал... По этой вере некогда молились калмыки при своём царе Ойроте, который ушёл за море, где ныне повелевает царь Японии, сделался Бурханом и скоро вернётся на Алтай.
15. ...суд над бурханистами неожиданно для властей превратился фактически в демонстрацию против колониального гнёта над алтайцами. Это особенно стимулировало продолжение движения – на новом уже его этапе (втором)... Этот вердикт царского суда вожаки бурханистов использовали как своего рода легализацию «белой веры».
16. Заходящее солнце, золотой керел  
Вседержатель, хранитель жилища.  
С радугой четыре хранителя  
От злого духа да сохраняют.  
От помыслов злого аза берегут,  
Передний угол охраняет  
Вседержитель Белый Бурхан.
17. Д.Клеменц умышленно затушёвывает поитическую сторону дела и в своих статьях, и в речи на суде: старый народник-сибиряк, известный как борец за права «инородцев», естественно, старался содействовать смягчению приговора суда.
18. « в книге «Ойротия» мною допущен целый ряд ошибок антиленинского характера, которые объективно служат к обоснованию как великодержавного шовинизма, так и местного национализма и делают книгу вредной... Я считаю своей первоочередной задачей борьбу с собственными ошибками и их развенчание...»
19. Считать бурханизм национально-освободительным движением, рассматривать его как прогрессивное явление в истории алтайцев нельзя. Бурханизм вовсе не является движением за национальную свободу и за национальную независимость алтайцев, направленным будто бы против царского колониального режима. Напротив, бурханизм был реакционным националистическим движением, сфабрикованным японскими империалистами... Ориентация на отрыв Алтая от России, на переход алтайцев под протекторат Японии, в чём были заинтересованы японские империалистические круги, была выгодна также буржуазно-националистической байской верхушке, стремившейся к монопольной эксплуатации соплеменников, к положению монополистов на Алтае.
20. Итак, вряд ли есть основания считать бурханизм алтайским вариантом

буддизма. Из буддизма алтайцы заимствовали лишь некоторые предметы культа, зачастую не имея представления об их истинном назначении. Кое-что было скопировано из внешних форм буддийской обрядности, но непоследовательно, «на глазок». Бурхан алтайских гимнов вовсе не Будда, а всего лишь удобное – в силу своей неопределённости – обозначение некоей высшей силы. Бурханизм, начавшийся с отрицания шаманизма, ограничился гонениями на шаманов. Бурханисты оставили в неприкосновенности многие детали обрядовых действий. Исчезли олицетворявшие доброе и злое начала Ульгень и Эрлик, но место первого занял универсальный «Бурхан», ничем не отличавшийся от Ульгёня, а упразднение Эрлика стало одной из главных задач бурханизма. Строго говоря, ничего «нового» учение не создало. Произошло «оживление» персонажей исторического фольклора, и их имена зазвучали по-новому в изменившемся историческом контексте. Вечные для Алтая образы и темы: молоко, гора, береза, родная земля, добрый хан – обрели в бурханизме новую жизнь. Главным мифологическим источником оказалась в конце-концов местная духовная культура.

21. Поводом для задержки сдачи рукописи в производство были разногласия между автором и ответственным редактором Л.П. Потаповым. Ответственный редактор считал, что в монографии слишком кратко и суммарно охарактеризованы социально-экономические причины возникновения бурханизма. Данилину А.Г. ставился упрёк в том, что он не акцентировал внимание на политические причины возникновения бурханизма в 1904-1905 гг.

Ответственный редактор считал, что А.Г. Данилин не заметил японофильскую сущность бурханизма. ... А.Г. Данилин развёрнуто и обоснованно ответил на это замечание ответственного редактора. Он считал, что факторов, подтверждающих японофильскую сущность бурханизма документально подтвердить невозможно. В своём отчёте он писал: «Эти смутные идеи раздували чиновники и миссионеры. Они ... говорили об общей «старинной (дошаманской) вере, белой вере, которая была при Ойрот-Шуну – Амыр-Сане. Говорили о необходимости объединения на «старой» территории (опять Булан-Токой). Так что в этом вопросе нет возможности, оставаясь на почве фактов, категорически утверждать, что баи проводили японофильскую программу.»

22. В начале 30-х годов обстановка становилась всё сложнее, и Данилин не мог не видеть, как это сказывается на жизни населения Горного Алтая. Он собрал огромное количество материалов по бурханизму. Но прямо и честно высказать свою позицию по этому явлению он уже не мог. И он, как ему казалось, пришёл к компромиссу: в своей статье он не отступает от точки зрения учёных 20-х годов и пишет, что бурханизм – это национально-освободительное движение, но, в угоду конъюнктуре, имеющее контрреволюционный характер. Нелепость подобного сочетания понятна каждому. И, думается, что Данилин прекрасно понимал несовместимость этих оценок. Видимо, он сознательно не рассматривал развитие бурханизма

с 1904 г. И его изменений под влиянием менявшейся в стране обстановки. Но это был единственный шанс хоть что-то рассказать об этом уникальном явлении.

В наши дни, после того, как бурханизм нещадно уничтожился, а его последователи преследовались, материалы, собранные А.Г. Данилиным – единственные относительно полные сведения об этом феномене.

23. Сейчас требуется глубокий, всесторонний анализ и оценка не столько внешней, ритуальной стороны бурханизма, сколько его религиозной догматики и культов, необходим дальнейший поиск и изучение молитв и песен бурханистов. ...Думается, что история «белой веры» должна стать предметом самостоятельного исследования.
24. ...Запомнился рассказ одного человека, может быть, единственного, кто открыл свою боль. Рассказ, из которого ясно, что не забыл Алтай ни Теренга, ни того, что было уже в слсетское время.  
Его арестовали и дали восемь лет Колымы. Он не знал русского языка и не понял – за что... Через три года, уже в лагере, освоив язык, Он обратился к начальнику с просьбой: сказать, за что он сидит. Тот рассмеялся: «Ты же японский шпион!» Вот так.  
... Пока же история и прошлое существуют как бы в параллельных мирах и трудно им пробраться друг к другу через море лжи и фальсификаций....
25. ...А Бурханизм? «Ак дьян» жив. Только будь осторожен и внимателен, а главное – тактичен. Знаки и приметы этой веры рассыпаны по всему Алтаю. Вот и на перевале ветер играет белыми лентами на ветках лиственниц, а у аршана лежит маленький букетик цветов... В аиле немного дурманящий запах можжевельника, а бабушка рассказывает своим внукам легенду о «временах Ойрот-хана».
26. Бруннов честно признался Макарию, что ему «не удалось добиться прямых положительных доказательств», что «источником учения Чета были буддийские ламы из соседней Монголии...» Возможно, именно тогда в голове Макария рождался новый план, но для его осуществления нужен был... лама. И тут случай шёл ему навстречу: в бийской тюрьме уже сидел монгольский лама.... Ламу арестовали на территории Российской империи. Куда он мог ехать? Ответ готов: конечно же, к мятежникам! Для чего? А чтобы своими проповедями прельстить их «хорошей жизнью» монголов под покровительством Сына Неба. И, разумеется, настроить калмыков против власти Российского императора. Такой поворот не давал бы Чету шансов для оправдания. Но вышла неувязка. Лама был арестован за сотни километров от Теренга, на Чуе. Возмущённый, он сразу заявил Макарию, что не понимает, за что задержан. Он плохо видит, и русские купцы посоветовали ему съездить в Бийск за очками.... ... незадачливого близорукого ламу вскоре отпустили. ...Однако эпизод с ламой получил неожиданное продолжение. Пройдёт несколько десятков лет, и уже

советские историки напишут, что в Теренге был арестован монгольский лама, и что именно он подготовил моление.

27. В торжественном молчании сидели кругом якшилары – почётные люди. Курдан брал завернутую в шёлк книгу (судур), развёртывал её и прикладывал её к темени, ко лбу и к груди. Через некоторое время, быстро перелистывая несколько страниц, снова делал то же движение... затем он заворачивал книгу и прятал её за пазуху, к сердцу, и опускал передний занавес своего «шире». После долгой паузы он начинал излагать то, что «написано» в этой книге и что Бурхан ему «передал в мыслях». ... алтайцы удивлялись, как быстро он перелистывает книгу и всё-таки «усваивает» её содержание: не иначе, что мысли и слова ему внушает сам Курбустан. Громко «читая» по книге, Курдан излагал в новых вариантах обычные верования ярлыков и приметы о скором пришествии Ойрота.

Сзади яика иногда подвешивается отрез шелковой ткани, называемой алтайцами как «иконки» - бурхан, размером 50x70 см, на лицевой части которой наштампованы изображения Арьябола (Авалокитешвара) в четырёхугольниках...

Совершенно новым предметом, незнакомым в ритуале шаманистов, является мандал. Это небольшое 12,5 см в диаметре, металлическое блюдо или, вернее, диск с невысокими краями, 2,75 см с выпуклыми изображениями горы Сумеру в середине и символов стихий всего мира по окружности... Характерно изменение функции этого предмета, попавшего в иную среду: нам рассказывали, что один ярлык брал мандал на моления, где время от времени ударял в него медным очиром, также попавшим к нему от какого-нибудь ламы.

28. ...Современными учёными используется «вербитский текст» мифов без критического анализа, не учитывается, что в религиозной мифологии самих жителей Горного Алтая не фигурируют буддийские персонажи.
29. Время, когда небо давило сверху, земля снизу разверзлась... Вверху была тьма, внизу была пыль... звери, люди и птицы сбились с пути... это состояние длилось три года и прекратилось по милости неба.
30. Явное выделение Тенгри и универсализм его функций побуждают некоторых исследователей к оценке древнетюркской религии как особой, близкой к монотеизму веры, которую можно обозначить термином «тенгриизм», оговаривая, впрочем, наличие в ней более ранних напластований.

31. Тенгри дарует каганам мудрость и власть, дарует каганов народу, наказывает согрешивших против каганов и даже, «приказывая» кагану, решает государственные и военные дела.
32. Доказательством существования в древнетюркской мифологии полной трёхчленной модели Вселенной стало недавнее выявление в рунических текстах Енисея и Восточного Туркестана наиболее важного и яркого персонажа Нижнего мира – его владыки Эркиг-хана, «разлучающего» людей и посылающего к ним «вестников смерти».
33. Орхонские надписи постоянно декларируют небесное происхождение каганского рода. Вместе с представлениями о Тенгри и Умай как божественной чете – покровительнице династии, этот поздний мифологический цикл носил явственный отпечаток его рождения в классовом обществе и являлся несомненной частью государственного культа Тюркского каганата.
34. С самого начала этнографического изучения Сибири внимание исследователей и сторонних наблюдателей прежде всего приковывалось к «экзотическим» явлениям культуры. В Северной Азии таковым был шаманизм и неудивительно, что фигура шамана часто заслоняла собой все остальные. Порой этот подход сохраняется и поныне, хотя стоит признать, что «одиноким лидер» плохо согласуется с самим строем традиционного мироощущения, ориентированного на **типичное**. С накоплением информации встает проблема соотношения шамана и других сакральных лиц, далёкая, впрочем, от разрешения.
35. Ульгень не бог или божество, а тёсь (духовный предок) группы Алтайских сеоков. Они обращались к нему... Прочие Алтайские сеоки не обращались к Ульгению – у них были свои предки-тёсь сеоков того же класса... Возникает вопрос: почему тёсь-предок нескольких сеоков становится «верховным богом-творцом» в академической литературе? Скорее всего, по причине небрежного сбора и последующей публикации данных одними учёными, и некритического подхода к этой информации другими...
36. Когда жертвенное мясо готово, «уважаемый всеми старик, знающий обычаи старины и слова жертвенной молитвы, вооружается тут же берестяной ложкой (*тос самлак*) и, черпая ею из берестяного, тоже сделанного на месте плоского блюда, вроде противня, по очереди кумыс с творогом, молоко, айран, суп с жировыми частями плещет сначала небу, потом берёзе и при этом ходит сл всеми присутствующими посолонь кругом берёз с чтением особой молитвы... Торжество заканчивается обильной трапезой из мяса заколотых барашков и араки. Всё несъеденное и невыпитое бросается в огонь так же, как и кости. Это моление «небу и солнышку» считается находящимся **вне сферы злых духов**, а потому шамана для совершения

- тигр таиха совершенно не требуется; по уверению инородцев, шаман, очутившийся в этот день на таихе, а тем более взявшийся за совершение моления, безумеет и падает в корчах».
37. Ульгань у бурханистов является персоной старой, оставшейся от старого шаманства. Но к этой божественной персоне бурханисты относятся совершенно по-другому: Ульганю не приносят уже кровавых жертвоприношений, следовательно не совершают и продолжительных мистерий. Они чествуют его только брызганием молока и посвящают ему лошадей светлой масти. Лошадь эта, называемая кыйра-мал, после молений, отпускается в табун. На ней не могут ездить женщины, потому что от прикосновения женщины лошадь оскверняется и через это наносится оскорбление и самому Ульганю. Ульгань у бурханистов считается родовым божеством, как и у шаманистов. Каждый род чтит своего родового Ульганя. В описываемом районе у бурханистов насчитывается 3 (5?) Ульганя: Бай Ульгань, Бай Каршыт, Бактыган, Кёк Монгкко, совершенно равные между собой, независимые друг от друга и самодовлеющие.
38. Переходя к новой вере, бурханисты не утратили принцип родового почитания районных духов, духов гор и горных высот. Поэтому в настоящее время у каждого рода бурханистов есть своя почитаемая гора (тайга), где живёт дух. В голове бурханита, таким образом, уживаются одновременно два духа Алтая, из них один общий Кёбё Алтай, а другой личный – Алу Алтай... Последнему посвящаются короткие молитвы... Дух Алтая даёт бурханиту кут или сус...
39. В героическом эпосе алтайцев, в их сказках фигурируют необыкновенные герои, наделённые сверхчеловеческими качествами, силой, хитростью, олицетворяющие собой вождей-освободителей. Таковы сказания об Амыр-Сане, Шуну или Ойрот-хане... В фольклоре алтайцев и телеутов, принявших «белую веру», бытовали многочисленные обоготворяемые герои. В общей, например, молитве, обращённой ко всем «духам-богатырям», встречаются следующие имена: Шуну, Алтын-Тунтер, Гэсэр-Хан, Хан-Толпытте, Бакши-Бурхан, Алтын-керел, Алтын-топчы, Ак-Анчилай и др. Но особенно выделяются из всех три героя – Ойрот-Хан или Калдан-Ойрот, Шуну и Амыр-Сана (Амурсана). Причём они так сближены, что часто заменяются один другим или идут в одном и том же сказании рядом.
40. Историчность личности Амыр-Саны (Амурзан, Амурсана) не вызывает сомнений в исторической литературе. Этот Джунгарский (ойротский) князь – глава племён хойт в Тарбагатае – поднял восстание против маньчжуро-китайского владычества в 1755 г. с целью основать самостоятельное государство. Восстание было жестоко подавлено, и Амыр-сана в 1756 г. Скрылся в Россию, где и умер (в г. Тобольске) от оспы...



... Галдан-Ойрот – личность тоже историческая. Это Галдан Церен из поколения Чжорос, объявивший себя в 1677 г. Джунгарским ханом...

41. Наряду с религиозным пониманием мессианства, когда бог в человеческом облике нисходит на бренную землю, ещё большую популярность имеет явление божественной предначертанности отдельной личности на верховную власть. У тюрко-монгольских народов сложилась традиция мессианства именно в этом направлении, которая оказала колоссальное влияние на идеологическое и политическое, этно-психологическое сознание кочевого общества.
42. Родословные тюрко-монгольских «первоплемён» были сплавлены в единое целое в родословные более «поздних» племён генеалогией Чингисхана...  
...на наш взгляд, чингизизм – это не новая, а перерождённая религия в условиях другой эпохи, уже знакомая идеолого-религиозная система, известная у тех же древних тюрков... В культе предводителя центрально-азиатских народов есть два отличия. Во-первых, у кочевых народов фигура хана – при всём её обожествлении – это тот же земной человек... Во-вторых, у тюрко-монголов не менее важную роль играла вера в перерождение царственного первопредка в конкретной исторической личности.  
... Не исключено, что великие потрясения евразийских степей всегда или почти всегда сопровождались идеологическими переворотами, подобными возникновению чингизизма... Как ни странно, но чингизизм как исторический феномен не изжил себя вплоть до нашего времени.
43. Третий цикл песен о Шуну составляют песни, в которых реалистическая, земная картина переплетается с глубоко идеалистической, где он называется племянником Курбустана – верховного божества.
44. Хормуста-тенгри фигурирует как отец (или создатель) Чингисхана, Х. – небесный отец Гесера... Согласно бурятской версии эпоса о Гесере, Х. Имеет трёх сыновей, имена которых восходят либо к книжной версии Гесериады, либо заимствованы из исторических преданий и принадлежать Чингисхану и его братьям... В бурятском эпосе Х. Борется с Ата Улан-тенгри, главой злых восточных тенгри... он посылает на землю своего сына (в земном перерождении – Абай Гесер Богдо), который сражается со злыми силами, возникшими из тела низвергнутого на землю Ата Улана.
45. Откровенный, честный хан Шунуту  
Имеет на небе дворец  
Опоясан (он) белой радугой  
Белым градом омытый.

46.

### Герои Боги

К этой категории божественных особ принадлежат: а) мифический царь Ойрот- Каан, а также исторические лица Дзюнгарского царства б) Амыр-Сана, в) Тамир-Сана, г) Шуну и д) Калдан Чару.

В религиозном мировоззрении указанные персоны получили санкцию божественных персон после возникновения бурханизма, вернее за последние годы. Им присвоена богатырская сила, которой они отражают злых духов. Роль их в бурханизме среди других духов незначительна. Когда совершается у бурханистов обряд изгнания злых духов, называемый «сойлоду», в это время представитель бурханского культа «ярлыкчы» призывает их как добавочную силу ко всем остальным богам. Ярлыкчы просит последних вооружиться луком, стрелами, надеть шлем, кольчугу и в таком боевом виде итти на борьбу с изгоняемым злым духом.

Бурханисты думают, что упоминаемые богатыри-боги своим выступлением имеют решающее значение при изгнании злых духов.

47. ХОРМУСТА, Хормуста-тенгри, Хурмаст, Курбусту (тув.). Уч Курбустан (алт.), Хормузда (маньч.), в мифологии монгольских народов верховное небесное божество. Восходит к согдийскому Хурмазта... В средневековье Х., очевидно, быстро контаминируется с центральным ураническим божеством государственного шаманистского культа – Вечным небом, Тенгри, вплоть до полного отождествления (Хормуста-тенгри иногда осмысливается как «небо»)

48. Все духи зависят от Курбустана и по словам Алтайцев, «отделяются» или «вырезаются» от него.

Кубустан – бог, дающий последователям Ак дьян «кут» или «сус».

49. На Белый Алтай мы поедем

Если благословит нас Белый Бурхан

До белого цветка дойдём!

50. Благослови, Белый Бурхан,

Шестигранный белый вереск

Белое благословение дающий!

Семигранный белый вереск

Синее благословение дающий

Белый Бурхан помощь даёт!

51. Мой Бурхан с солнцем и луной

Белым молоком встречаю.

Злой дух (узут) меня от Солнца не отделит

Моя белая судьба

Создана Белым Бурханом.

52. Должность ярлыкчи, как правило, была выборной. Тем самым был сделан ещё один шаг к формированию профессиональной жреческой прослойки. Одежда ярлыкчи подчёркивала отличие «белой веры» от «чёрного» шаманизма. Поверх повседневного одеяния ярлыкчи надевал «молочно-белую шубу» - халат из белой ткани с широким откидным воротником. Вдоль спины и рукавов халата спускались широкие жёлтые и белые ленты. Ярлыкчи обязательно носил косу в знак приверженности старине. Акцентируется в песнях ярлыкчи и такая деталь, как ленты на шапке ярлыкчи. Они сравниваются «косами» божества:
- Вы, сущие за белыми облаками,  
За синими небесами,  
Три Курбустана!  
Ты, носящий три косы,  
Белый Бурхан!
- Таким образом, белизна одеяния и ленты на его шапке делают ярлыкчи **подобным белому божеству**. Более того, на общественные моления ярлыкчи часто приезжали на белой лошади, являя собравшимся облик Белого Всадника.
53. Цагаан Эбуген – Старик, облачённый в белые одежды. Он ездит верхом на белой оленухе или белой лошади. Он является соединяющим звеном между божествами Верхнего мира и Средним миром. Он – проявление и воплощение Среднего Мира и, таким образом, является хозяином Земли и покровителем семьи, долголетия и счастья.
54. Холодная вода на Алтае –  
Подобен радуге Бурхан,  
Тёплые ключи есть на Алтае –  
Подобен белому памени Бурхан!  
О, мой Алтай с холодной водой!  
О, мой Бурхан – с радугой!  
О, мой Алтай – с целебными источниками!  
О, мой Бурхан – с белым пламенем!
55. Наиболее общее моление бывает осенью: оно посвящено духу-хозяину мира (Ак Алтайдын ээзи), или Уч Курбустану. Называется это моление шутен. Оно связано с просьбой всяческого изобилия, особенно на скот. Второе по значимости моление – это Чок (дьяик чокчор) – моление яикам, находящимся в аиле... Третий по степени важности вид молений – это Такы (От такыр) – моение духу огня (от эне или оттын ээзи). Кроме этих молений, совершаемых всегда осенью, бывают в любое время более простые моления: Урус – брызгание молоком с чтением молитв, моление кыйра – при навешивании ленточки, наконец, моление арчын – связанное с возжиганием вереска.

56. Культовая одежда ярлыков заимствована от камов.  
Камы, предки которых не имели культовой одежды «маньяк», также не имели права её носить; при камланиях доброму божеству они надевали белый халат, с белой и красной лентой сзади и пучками перьев на плечах.
57. Халат шили из белой ткани, с левой полой, отороченной желтой лентой.  
Шапка же по форме напоминала шапку камов: сшитая также из белой ткани в форме длинного колпака, опускающегося почти до половины спины, она оторочена на лбу... ..желтой ленточкой к верхушке прикреплены две ленты, опускающиеся почти до земли.
58. Мужчины и женщины, умыв лицо и руки, прежде начатия дела, а матери, не кормя детей грудью, вставали лицом к востоку; мужчины, преклонив оба колена и держа обе руки назад, поклонялись до земли и произносили: «Пуодоминэ бурханым», а женщины, став на левое колено и держась правой рукою за правую косу, поклонялись также до земли и произносили: «Теэдыминэ Кутаим!»  
Пред молением клали аржан на огонь и медную кадьницу, утверждённую на четырёхножник, вышиною в пояс... ..это исполняли только старшие, да и то не в каждой юрте; ныне-же исполняется это только один раз в году, в общем собрании, после весеннего грома, на высокой какой-нибудь горе, брызгают вл все стороны коровьим молоком и кланяются.
59. Ульгеню приносят жертву редко, потому что он и без того добр. Впрочем, каждый взрослый человек, по вступлении в супружество, обязан принести жертву (иик) – коня светлой масти, а особенно он любит каурых.  
Отсуленная в жертву Ульгеню лошадь пользуется особенным уважением: к гриве её привязывается красная лента, и женщинам садиться на неё не дозволено. Время приношения жертвы преимущественно весна, когда можно приготовить абыртку. Место приношения жертвы – березовый лес. Участие в этом празднике могут иметь одни мужчины, равно и шаман должен быть мужчина. Есть-же пить идоложертвенное могут и женщины, но в таком порядке: девицы на самом месте, где была принесена жертва, женщины не ближе 50 саж.
60. Божества и взгляд на вселенную, представленные в мифах, отличались от шаманских взглядов и духов.  
Главными персонажами были божества, признаваемые универсальными всем населением. Это были Уч Курбустан, Кудай, Эрлик и Тенери.
61. На рубеже 90-х годов нашего века ситуация изменилась качественно.  
Официальный атеизм, как и вся господствовавшая доктрина, лишившись поддержки, быстро утратил свои позиции. Образовался идеологический вакуум, который лишь в малой степени был заполнен демократическими настроениями. Реалиями наших дней являются повсеместное оживление традиционных форм обрядовой деятельности и «новое» мифотворчество.

- Пока мы видим лишь сам процесс и трудно говорить о его возможных результатах. Тем не менее, достаточно очевидно, что сейчас формируется новая редакция национальной идеологии Алтая. Каковы её вероятные истоки, насколько она реальна и мифологична? Можно ли говорить о новом этапе истории традиционных верований тюркльв Алтая?
62. Использование бурханистами некоторых ламаистских культовых предметов и терминов (сумер, бурхан и др.) нельзя считать свидетельством того, что на Алтае формировался национальный вариант северного буддизма. Источником заимствований был не монастырский, «книжный» буддизм, а обширный пласт народного, синкретического буддизма Монголии и, главным образом, исторический фольклор монгольских и тюркских народов Центральной Азии.
  63. Культовые термины *тангара*, *айыы* и др. Обозначают сохранившиеся остатки некогда довольно развитого, глубоко древнего религиозного верования, отличного от шаманизма... так называемое белое шаманство не есть собственно шаманство и белые шаманы вовсе не шаманы.
  64. У народов Сибири и Монголии из обычных шаманов выделилась особая, высшая по своему социальному признаку категория. Именно она была тесно связана с правящей верхушкой кочевников и оказывала влияние на общественно-политические события... Высшая категория шаманов возникла на основе общих шаманских представлений о вселенной, природе и человеке...
  65. ...Признают Ак Бурхана. По данным опроса, он иногда сливается с Алтай Кудай и Уч-Курбустан, в то же время выступая как самостоятельное божество. Ак бурхан не имеет чётких характерных черт... в связи с возрождением бурханизма его популярность растёт. Уч-Курбустана почитают очень мало людей. По-видимому, его можно считать почти исчезнувшим божеством алтайцев-бурханистов. В современных религиозных представлениях алтай-кижи одно из центральных мест занимает культ Алтая. Иногда Алтадынг ээзи показывается в образе старика в белой одежде... его можно увидеть во сне. Если он приснится, то это предвещает удачу.
  66. Думается, что нынешние верования алтайцев нельзя считать «неошаманизмом» или новой редакцией бурханизма. С Алтая ушли православие, буддизм, старый бурханизм. Остался «фундамент»: те самые традиционные верования, утратить которые народ просто не может. Ключевым понятием и новой религии, и новой идеологии остается слово «Алтай».
  67. Но самый факт возрождения явочным порядком отменённых когда-то национальных институтов весьма симптоматичен. Родовые праздники – это

реальная самодеятельность народа, отражающая его интерес к своему происхождению, предкам, истории. В июле 1993 года в Усть-Канском районе был проведён общеалтайский праздник «Эл Ойын», собравший тысячи участников. На праздник съехались делегации от всех сеоков, гости из Тувы и Монголии... ..»Родовая тема» на празднике не звучала, организаторы постарались сделать праздник максимально «светским»... .. И тем не менее, выбор места проведения праздника о многом говорил его участникам: именно в этих межгорных долинах летом 1904 г. Впервые открыто собрались на бурханистские моления алтайцы.