

Visions of Community: Literary Culture and Social Change among the Northern
Kyrgyz, 1856-1924

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the transformations in the northern Kyrgyz society and culture between the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. I explore how a deeply-held and territorially-oriented sense of collective belonging among the Kyrgyz developed within the Russian imperial context through the efforts of the Kyrgyz poets and intellectuals during the late tsarist period. I search for this sense of collective belonging in the literary culture of the northern Kyrgyz. In the absence of written culture, oral tradition served as the primary depository of the northern Kyrgyz collective memory. Oral poets were the ones who shaped group identities and created various versions of Kyrgyzness based on culture, lifestyle, religious belief, social practices, and moral values. By the late imperial period, these existing conceptions of Kyrgyzness served as a fertile ground for the first generation of Kyrgyz intellectuals to develop their own visions of Kyrgyz community. They started collecting and writing what they believed to be the history of their people, thus contributing to the creation of the nationalistic narrative and participating in a broader discourse on the nation in the intellectual circles of the Central Asian elites.

Breaking with existing scholarship, my analysis of social upheaval and cultural development among the Kyrgyz under the Russian rule reveals that the idea of the Kyrgyz nation, promoted by the Kyrgyz cultural and political elite during the creation of the Kara Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast in 1924, was a direct product of the historical experiences and socio-cultural transformations of the late-imperial period. Poems, historical narratives, genealogies, administrative reports, newspaper articles, memoirs, and travel accounts serve as a source base of this dissertation. Using methods of literary and historical analysis, my dissertation examines how discourses on Kyrgyz identity and community developed, where those discourses took place and in what form, and how they shaped the way the Kyrgyz imagined themselves within the broader Central Asian and Russian imperial settings.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Note on Transliteration.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Northern Kyrgyz Tribes Before the Russian Conquest	
Introduction	22
Northern Kyrgyz of the Nineteenth Century: Social Roles and Responsibilities.....	23
Tribal Community.....	35
The Qing Empire, Kokand, and the Kyrgyz.....	38
Feuds between Kyrgyz and Kazakhs.....	41
Tribal Wars: the Bughu and Sarybaghysh.....	45
The Russian Advance.....	55
Conclusion.....	64
Chapter Two: Northern Kyrgyz under Russian Rule	
Introduction.....	66
Administrative Division of the Northern Kyrgyz Territories.....	68
The <i>Manap</i> Phenomenon among the Northern Kyrgyz.....	74
Peasant Resettlement and the Northern Kyrgyz.....	79
Development of Urban Centers.....	87
Imperial Confessional Politics and the Kyrgyz Nomads.....	92
Conclusion.....	104
Chapter Three: Laying the Groundwork: the Northern Kyrgyz <i>Aqyns</i> and their Literary Milieu	
Introduction.....	106
Sources of Kyrgyz Identity: <i>Zhomoqchus</i> , <i>Aqyns</i> , and Kyrgyzness.....	108
<i>Zar Zaman</i> Poetry and the Kyrgyz <i>Aqyns</i> ’ Reflection on Social Change.....	117

From Oral to Written Literature: Moldo Qylych Shamyrgan uulu.....	124
Conclusion.....	133
Chapter Four: The Northern Kyrgyz Intellectuals: First Attempts at Defining the Nation	
Introduction.....	135
Ishenaaly Arabaev and His Intellectual Pursuits.....	137
Writing a “Kyrgyz” History: Osmonaaly Sydykov and His <i>Tārikhs</i>	155
A “New” Kyrgyz History: Belek Soltonoev and <i>Qyzyl Qyrghyz Tarykhy</i>	172
Conclusion.....	183
Chapter Five: The Revolt of 1916 in History and Collective Memory	
Introduction.....	186
The Northern Kyrgyz and the Revolt.....	190
Memorializing the Revolt: Kyrgyz Intellectuals Respond.....	199
Memorializing the Revolt: Kyrgyz <i>Aqyns</i> Respond.....	203
Conclusion.....	220
Chapter Six: From Culture to Politics: Creating the Nation	
Introduction.....	222
In the Service of Empire and Nation: Abdykerim Sydykov.....	224
The Alash Party: Exercise in Future Kyrgyz Autonomy.....	228
From Alash Orda to the Kyrgyz Mountain Oblast.....	235
“The Kara Kyrgyz must Develop Separately”: the Second Attempt at Kyrgyz Autonomy.....	246
Conclusion.....	255
Conclusion.....	259
Bibliography.....	263

Note on Transliteration

I used the Library of Congress system of transliteration for Russian language materials. I omitted the use of the Russian “soft” sign in frequently used words (*volost*, *oblast*, etc.). I used *j* instead of *dzh* in some non-Russian words (*jigit*, Andijan). For Kyrgyz publications in Cyrillic script, I used the Library of Congress system of transliteration with a few changes. I differentiated between *q* and *gh* before back and *k* and *g* before front vowels in the main text. I used *y* for commonly used words such as, *bay* and *biy*. Turkic people of Central Asia used Arabic script till the late 1920s. Currently, there is no standard to transcribe Turkic language texts written in Arabic script into Latin script. I transcribed Turkic language publications (Kyrgyz and Kazakh) in Arabic script into Latin as close to their modern pronunciation as possible. I used *q* for *ق* and *gh* for *غ*. For terms from Arabic, I used *ā* and *ū* to designate long vowels. I used *ï* for *y* or *ы* sound in Turkic language words written in Arabic script. All translations in the text are mine unless indicated otherwise.

The Russian empire used the Julian calendar until February 1918, which was twelve days behind the Gregorian calendar in the nineteenth century and thirteen days behind in the twentieth century. I did not alter the dates from the Julian calendar, in Russian documents written prior to 1918. Dates after 1918 correspond to those in the Gregorian calendar.

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To my family

Introduction

Today, the Kyrgyz people, with an unknown future, who have neither big cities, nor widespread fields, who have been roaming around in the mountains away from politics and culture, and kept in the dark away from enlightenment, have been separated from their Kazakh and Uzbek brothers, and have become an independent separate *oblast*, directly accountable to Moscow.¹

Ishenaaly Arabaev, member of the Revolutionary
Committee of the Kara Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast, 1924.

The creation of the Kara Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast in 1924 was contingent upon the existence of a “historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture.”² The task of creating this community fell on the shoulders of the Muslim cultural and political elite of southern Semirech’e during the national delimitation of Central Asia in the 1920s, and demanded that they be able to demonstrate convincingly the existence of a “Kyrgyz” nation. Back in the middle of the nineteenth century, the people who were to become the titular nation of the Kara Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast had been a community of tribes scattered across the foothills of the Tian Shan and Pamir-Alay mountain ranges and the Ferghana valley. Their main occupation was war; they were a mobile community with no attachment to a particular territory, and no specific allegiance to any political entity. By 1917, this group came to be divided between the Semirech’e, Syr-Dar’ia, and Ferghana *oblasts* of Russian Turkestan. Its members identified themselves as Kyrgyz, traced their origins to common ancestry, spoke various dialects of the “Kyrgyz” language, led a nomadic-pastoral lifestyle, and were subjects of the Russian tsar. The

¹ I. Arabaev, “Bizdin kyrgyzdar kandai orun alat,” *Ak jol*, no. 477, 1924.

² I. V. Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question* (New York: International Publishers, 1942), 12.

transformations in the society, culture, and economic life of the northern Kyrgyz, set in motion by the Russian colonization of the region, brought forth various visions of the Kyrgyz community. My dissertation examines these visions as expressed by the educated members of this group, poets and intellectuals of the late-imperial period. It explores how these visions evolved over the course of the nineteenth century and it investigates the historical circumstances in which the ideas of what it was to be a Kyrgyz were formed, prior to the Soviet initiative on national delimitation. It examines how discourses on Kyrgyz identity developed, where those discourses took place and in what form, and how they shaped the way the Kyrgyz imagined themselves within the broader Central Asian and Russian imperial settings.

This dissertation examines the works of Kyrgyz intellectuals through a historical lens. It analyzes these intellectuals' discussions of their language, literature, and history; their views of their people; and what they imagined their community to be prior to the official delimitation of the region. It traces the ways these intellectuals' views on their community changed after the establishment of the Soviet rule. Most of the intellectuals in the present study came of age before the 1920s, and their views were formed by the realities of the imperial period: they operated within the empire and they used the opportunities it provided. This dissertation examines the ways these intellectuals drew upon their imperial experiences during the Soviet period, and carved out a space for themselves which could be reconciled to the demands of the state. Owing to Soviet nationality policy of indiginization, most of these intellectuals became major actors in the nation-building process in what would eventually become known as the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast. Although they learned to speak the language of the Soviet state, their work was shaped by their pre-revolutionary activities which involved teaching, publishing, and writing. The study delineates continuities and changes in the lives and works of these

intellectuals during the transitional period from empire to national republic. It examines the changes in these intellectuals' understandings of self, their perception of the social order, and their visions for their newly created national entity.

I look for the visions of the Kyrgyz community in the literary culture and social transformations in the region throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. By the literary culture, I consider the oral traditions, and written and print literary sources that circulated among the nomadic northern Kyrgyz; the social and cultural spheres in which these sources were disseminated; and the intellectual agency that produced these sources. I combine this analysis of literary culture with an investigation of the broader socio-political and economic transformations in Central Asia at the turn of the century, examining how they affected the worldview and social order of the northern Kyrgyz nomads. The narrative of my dissertation thus begins with the Russian Empire's advance into Central Asia, and its subjugation of the northern Kyrgyz tribes in the 1860s. As the narrative progresses, particular attention is paid to the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, a period of drastic changes in Central Asia, which also witnessed the emergence of a nationalist-minded Kyrgyz intellectual elite. I look at the historical conditions that facilitated the emergence of these elites in the southern Semirech'e *oblast* of Russian Turkestan, and explore their lives and works in relation to the developments in the region throughout the late-imperial period. Although small in numbers, compared to their Muslim counterparts in other parts of European Russia, the Kazakh steppe, and the Central Asian oasis states of Bukhara and Khiva, this group of people was still able to advance their political interests during the national delimitation of Central Asia in the 1920s, carving out a space for the future Kyrgyz state.

I use the term “intellectuals” to designate this group. They are defined by their social standing against the rest of the population and their relationship to them.³ These are poets, educators, writers, scholars, and cultural and political activists, who participated in the process of “disciplining, repressing, educating, and training the people.”⁴ Ishenaaly Arabaev (1882-1933), Osmonaaly Sydykov (1876-1942), and Belek Soltonoev (1878-1938), whose life and works I discuss extensively in this dissertation, saw it, first and foremost, as their mission to educate and enlighten their people. Abdykerim Sydykov (1889-1928), a translator in the service of the imperial administration, was in the “disciplining” end of this mission. They all became embroiled in politics only in light of the changing historical circumstances in the late-imperial period, and all of them contributed to the creation of the Kyrgyz cultural homogeneity in the 1920s and 30s.

Scholars on nationalism have argued that nations are constructed, “imagined,” and “artificial” entities that are created through the process of invention.⁵ They see nations as a modern phenomenon which emerged with industrialization and capitalism, and stress the role of the state and elites in this process of “invention.”⁶ Nationalism as it emerged among the Kyrgyz does fit into the framework of this constructivist view. Kyrgyz, and other Central Asian, intellectuals did shape the “old traditions” to mobilize the population around the idea of nationhood at the beginning of the twentieth century. And yet, as Anthony Smith rightfully noted in his critique of the modernist theory, one has to ask why the elites selected this path, and why

³ Ronald Grigor Suny and Michael D. Kennedy, eds. *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 25.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 1983), 133-134; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1986).

⁶ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

the re-working of old traditions resonated with the rest of the population.⁷ For Smith, there has to be a connection between the old and new traditions. In other words, for the elites to be successful, and for “invented traditions” to take root and have effect, common “social and cultural networks” must already exist between elites and population at large.⁸

I argue that in the Kyrgyz case, the literary culture became that network that brought the elite and ordinary people together. Kyrgyz intellectuals drew their ideas from the works created by their predecessors, oral poets and bards; they used the same genres and themes in order to spread their ideas. The majority of the northern Kyrgyz intellectuals emerged from the cultural milieu of the oral poets and bards and operated on the literary foundations laid out by poets like Qalyghul (1785-1855), Arstanbek (1824-1878), and Moldo Qylych (1866-1917), all the while being a part of a larger cultural network of Muslim scholars and enlighteners of Russia, the Kazakh steppe, and Turkestan. In the last decade of the tsarist rule, they were the ones to define, shape, and articulate various ideas of their community, one of which came to be realized in the form of the Kyrgyz autonomous oblast in 1924.

Literature on early Soviet nationality policy has stressed the role of state officials and ethnographers in Moscow during the process of constructing nations in Central Asia and other parts of the Soviet Union.⁹ Terry Martin and Francine Hirsch offered some useful insights on the Soviet nationality policy and the tools and methods used to justify the creation of a multi-national state.¹⁰ Unlike the earlier scholars, who viewed national delimitation as a

⁷ Anthony Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London, New York: Routledge, 1998), 129;

⁸ Idem., 130.

⁹ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Some of the earlier and most influential studies of the Soviet nationality policy include Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53(1994): 414-

straightforward imposition of the center's will, these scholars have examined the negotiation of the Soviet nationality policy and its implementation.¹¹ While it is important to acknowledge the role of the center in the creation of national republics, it is equally important to note the role of national elites in shaping the politics on the ground. In recent years, scholars including Adrienne Edgar, Ali Igmen, and Marianne Kamp have successfully demonstrated how the local elites interpreted Soviet nationality policy and shaped it to fit their own ideas of the nation.¹²

Arno Haugen's analysis of the process of national delimitation itself and his particular attention to the voices of the Central Asian elites during the meetings on delimitation led him to question the "divide and rule" theory of the Soviet nationality policy.¹³ Diminishing the role of ideology in delimitation process, Haugen asserts that the Bolsheviks approached the project pragmatically, with the goal of more easily administering the region.¹⁴ And although Haugen devotes much space to the discussion of the speeches of these elites at meetings of the Central Asian Bureau, he provides insufficient personal and historical contextualization of these elites, so

452; Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993).

¹¹ Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917-1923* (New York: Atheneum, 1968); Edward Allworth, *Central Asia: A Century of Russian Rule* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967); H. Carrere d'Encasse, *The Great Challenge: Nationalities and the Bolshevik State, 1917-1930* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1992). Gregory Massel's *Surrogate Proletariat* is an exception among these studies: Gregory J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

¹² Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: the Making of the Soviet Turkmenistan*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Marianne Kemp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); Ali Igmen, *Speaking Soviet with an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012). Other works that directly deal with various aspects of the process of nation-building in Central Asia in early-Soviet period include Paula Michaels, *Curative Powers: Medicine and Empire in Stalin's Central Asia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003); Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); Marco Buttino, *Revoliutsiia naoborot: Srediaia Aziia mezdu padeniem tsarskoi imperii i obrazovaniem SSSR*, N. Okhotin trans. (Moscow: Zven'ia, 2007); Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010).

¹³ Arno Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia*, (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

¹⁴ Idem., 106.

that their speeches, particularly those of Kyrgyz leaders, leave the impression of mere political opportunism. This kind of approach can be discerned from Benjamin Loring's work.¹⁵ Loring has discussed some of the key political figures and intellectual elites of the time including Abdykerim Sydykov, Ishenaaly Arabaev, Zhusup Abdrakhmanov, but he mentioned their lives and activities only in relation to their role in the creation of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast but did not pay much attention to their political views and cultural activities before the 1920s.

My dissertation builds on these works, but in contrast to them, I search for the evolving visions of the Kyrgyz community in the cultural and political environment of the late-imperial period. As we have seen, participation of both the state and the official Moscow-based party elite in the process of delimitation is undeniable and supported by solid evidence from many studies. National delimitation was also discussed at the local level, at meetings of the Central Asian Bureau in Tashkent. Current scholarship, however, sheds little light on the ways in which social and cultural networks developed between elites and commoners during the imperial period that preceded the Soviet era delimitation project. As a result of this void, this scholarship tends to depict the activities of local elites during the delimitation process as essentially driven by selfish motivations; they are described as having merely appropriated the language of nationality from the Bolsheviks, in order to advance their own personal and political interests. While I agree that personal interests did play a role in the process of delimitation, I also suggest that we consider the impact of the imperial experiences on the local elites' self-identification. By discussing the debates on the community and the nation among Central Asians of the imperial period, my dissertation shows that the nationalist tendencies displayed during the process of national

¹⁵ Benjamin Loring, "Building Socialism in Kyrgyzstan: Nation-Making, Rural Development, and Social Change, 1921-1932" (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2008).

delimitation had roots that stretched back into the imperial period.¹⁶ Central Asians were shaped by their imperial encounters and experiences, with enduring results. I argue that the idea of the Kyrgyz nation, as it was promoted by the Kyrgyz nationalist elite in the 1920s, was a product of socio-cultural interactions and historical transformations in the region during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries; and that in order to understand the motives of Central Asian intellectuals during the national delimitation project, we have to examine how their views of their community as a nation formed and evolved under particular historical and cultural circumstances.

I look for the development of notions of Kyrgyzness, or being Kyrgyz, in the literary culture of the region. In case of the northern Kyrgyz, in the absence of written culture, oral tradition served as the primary depository of their collective memory.¹⁷ Oral poets and bards saw it as their duty to preserve the memory of past and present experiences alive for the generation to come. They were the ones who decided on what was worth remembering and why, and determined how a particular experience was to be remembered. They gave a meaning and importance to the past experiences, creating group identities which enforced social cohesion and kept the community together. They transmitted this knowledge in oral form developing a rich repertoire of oral sources. For the nomadic Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, oral tradition was an integral part of their lives, and oral sources offer an important entry point to their ideas about individual

¹⁶ Sergei Abashin explores this aspect through the formation of the Tajik and Uzbek identities. He argues that most studies from the Soviet and post-Soviet eras have continued to assume the existence of nations on the territory of Central Asia from time immemorial, and to take any particular nationality as a given, without further interrogating the historical circumstances under which that nation came into being. Sergei Abashin, *Natsionalizmy v Srednei Azii, v poiskakh identichnosti* (Sankt Peterburg: Aleteiia, 2007).

¹⁷ My understanding of the notion of collective memory is informed by works of Maurice Halbwach, Pierre Nora, and Peter Burke. See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*," *Representations* 26, 6 (1989): 7-24; Peter Burke, "History as Social Memory," in *Memory: History, Culture, and the Mind*, ed. Thomas Butler (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1989), 97-113.

and group identities.¹⁸ Their sense of identity was based on genealogy, tracing various lineages, clans, and tribes to a single common ancestry.¹⁹ Besides genealogies Kyrgyz collective memory was preserved in the works of oral poets, bards, performers of the *Manas* and other heroic epics, and eloquent people. By the late imperial period, existing conceptions of identity in these works served as a fertile ground for the Kyrgyz intellectuals to start creating their own versions of memory. They started collecting and writing what they believed to be the history of their people, thus contributing to the creation of the nationalistic narrative and participating in a broader discourse on the nation in the intellectual circles of the Central Asian elites.

Recent scholarship has paid particular attention to these discourses, but it has concentrated on the Muslim intellectual elites, who came from the Central Asian Islamic centers of Bukhara and Samarqand, and whose activities were deeply rooted in Islam and its traditions of learning.²⁰ Adeeb Khalid has questioned the well-established notion that the national identification among the native peoples of Central Asia arose only with the establishment of the Soviet rule in the 1920s.²¹ He showed that the native elite of Central Asia fashioned their view of

¹⁸ Jan Vansina's proposal to consider oral texts as historical sources in studying the memory of cultures that preserved their collective memory in oral form guides my research. I keep in mind that as any other source, they must be assessed critically, and especially so, in light of their oral nature. Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

¹⁹ Paul Geiss, for example, examines the distinct ways in which various tribal nomadic peoples, such as the Kazakhs, the Kyrgyz, and the Turkmen, formed ethnic and national identities. Paul G. Geiss, *Pre-Tsarist and Tsarist Central Asia: Communal Commitment and Political Order in Change* (London-New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003).

²⁰ Edward Allworth, *Evading Reality: the Devices of Abdalrauf Fitrat, Modern Central Asian Reformist* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Hisao Komatsu, "Bukhara and Istanbul: A Consideration about the Background of the *Munazara*," in *Islam in Politics in Russia and Central Asia (Early Eighteenth to Late Twentieth Centuries)*, ed. Stephane A. Dudoignon and Hisao Komatsu (London: Kegan Paul International, 2001), 167-180; *ibid.*, "The Evolution of Group Identity among Bukharan Intellectuals in 1911-1928: An Overview," in *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 45 (1987):115-155; Ingeborg Baldauf, *XX asr Uzbek adabietiga chizgilar* (Toshkent: Ma'naviyat, 2001); *idem.*, "Jadidism in Central Asia within Reformism and Modernism in Muslim World, *Welt des Islams* 41, 1 (2001): 72-88.

²¹ Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1998).

the nation (*millat*) well before 1917, influenced by the ideas circulating among the Muslims of the Ottoman and Russian empires.²² By shifting the focus from urban settled cultures to the nomadic society and its oral poets and intellectuals, my dissertation brings into the discussion an alternative view of Central Asians' understandings of the self and their community, deeply rooted in a rich oral culture and developed and disseminated within a nomadic setting.²³ Daniel Prior has emphasized the oral dimension in the development of Kyrgyz nationalism in his recent works on the cultural history of the northern Kyrgyz.²⁴ He has looked at the traces of nationalist

²² Khalid's work also created a reaction to the one-sidedness of his approach. See Stephane A. Dudoignon, "Qadimiya as a Historiographical Category. The Question of Social and Ideological Cleavages Between "Reformists" and "Traditionalists" Among the Muslims of Russia and Central Asia in the Early 20th Century," in *Reform Movements and Revolutions in Turkestan: 1900-1924, Studies in Honor of Osman Khoja*, ed. Timur Kocaoglu (Haarlem: SOTA, 2001), 159-177. Studies of the traditionalist elite, the *qadimists*, include Jo-Ann Gross's study of 'Abd al-Aziz Sami, the Bukharan intellectual, and his work *Tarikh-i Salatin-i Manghitiya*. Gross reacts to existing studies that reduce all responses to the Russian conquest by native elites to fit two categories: first, opposition in the form of popular revolt, and second, the *jadid* movement. In her view, Sami's work reveals a third type of response deeply rooted in traditional training within Islamic institutions. See Jo-Ann Gross, "Historical Memory, Cultural Identity, and Change: Mirza 'Abd al-'Aziz Sami's Representation of the Russian Conquest of Bukhara," in *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and peoples, 1700-1917*, ed. Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 203-226. Franz Wenneberg explores Bukharan *qadimism* by focusing on the figure of Mirza Salim-bik, a servant in the fiscal administration of the Emirate of Bukhara. Wenneberg examines the political struggle between the two administrative divisions of the emirate, *'umara* and *'ulama* and looks at Mirza Salim-bik's writings within the context of this struggle. See Franz Wenneberg, *An Inquiry into Bukharan Qadimism: Mirza Salim Bik* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2003). Drawing on the example of Muhammad Taib from *Tuhfa-yi Taib* and Ishaqkhan 'Ibrat's *Mizan al-Zaman*, Hisao Komatsu argues that Muslim intellectuals acknowledged Russian technological and military superiority, condemned "pointless" fights against them and encouraged Muslim rulers to come to agreement with Russians. See Hisao Komatsu, "Dar al-Islam Under Russian Rule as Understood by Turkestani Muslim Intellectuals," in *Empire, Islam, and Politics in Central Eurasia*, ed. Uyama Tomohiko (Sapporo: Hokkaido University, Slavic Research Center, 2007), 3-22.

²³ Works by Anatoly Khazanov, Thomas Barfield, and Laura Newby were instrumental to my understanding of the nomadic societies and their interactions with the outside world. See Anatoly Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Thomas Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: B. Blackwell, 1989); Laura J. Newby, *The Empire and the Khanate: a Political History of Qing Relations with Khoqand c. 1760-1860* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005). For a recent thought-provoking, revisionist study of the kinship relations among the nomads of Inner Asia, see David Sneath, *The Headless State: Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, and Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

²⁴ D. Prior, "The Twilight Age of the Kirghiz Epic Tradition" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2002); idem., *Patron, Party, Patrimony: Notes on the Cultural History of the Kirghiz Epic Tradition* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2000); idem., ed. and trans. *The Semetey of Kenje Kara: A Kirghiz Epic Performance on Phonograph with a Musical Score and a Compact Disc of the Phonogram* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006); idem., *The Sabdan Baatir Codex: Epic and the Writing of Northern Kirghiz History* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013). His recent work examines the use of the term *manap* among the northern Kyrgyz. Idem., "High Rank and Power Among the Northern Kirghiz: Terms and Their Problems, 1845-1864," in *Explorations in the Social History of Modern Central Asia (19th-Early 20th Century)*, ed. Paolo Sartori (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013), 137-179.

discourse in the heroic poems of oral poets, and their expressions of anti-Kazakh nationalist sentiments. In his recent works, he has argued that in the northern Kyrgyz society oral poets were the ones who began to frame the conversation on national identity due to the absence of a modern intelligentsia.

My dissertation builds on Prior's work in several ways. I draw on Prior's "folkloric and literary" approach to examine the origins of nationalist thinking among the Kyrgyz, and like him, I, too, use sources from Kyrgyz oral tradition to build my argument. But unlike Prior, I stress the crucial role of the Kyrgyz intellectual elite in the formation of Kyrgyz national consciousness in the early-twentieth century, and therefore, examine their activities in greater detail in my dissertation.²⁵ I explore their lives and works in relation to the developments in the region throughout the late-imperial and early-Soviet periods and emphasize the continuities in the literary tradition of the Kyrgyz oral poets and intellectuals. I investigate the historical and social settings in which these intellectuals produced their works, and examine cultural exchanges between Kyrgyz intellectuals and their Turkic/Muslim counterparts in other parts of the Russian empire, thus connecting my dissertation to the studies on Russian imperial borderlands, works on the construction of imperial identities, and the question of nationalities.

Historians of imperial Russia have explored the formation of imperial identities through the categories of confession, language, ethnicity, and geographic space.²⁶ At the heart of these

²⁵ Although, Prior acknowledges the role of Kyrgyz intellectuals in the formation of Kyrgyz national consciousness, and does mention contributions of O. Sydykov, I. Arabaev, and B. Soltonoev to the formation of Kyrgyz national consciousness, he looks at their achievements as "circumscribed and modest," and therefore turns to the literary culture of the tribal chieftains as an alternate source of nationalist discourse. See Prior, "Heroes and Chieftains," 73.

²⁶ Marc Raeff, "Patterns of Russian Imperial Policy Toward Nationalities," in *Soviet Nationality Problems*, ed. Edward Alworth (Columbia University Press, 1971); Stephen Velychenko, "Identities, Loyalties, and Service in Imperial Russia: Who Administered the Borderlands?" *Russian Review* 54, 2 (1995): 188-208; Yuri Slezkine, "Naturalists versus Nations: Eighteenth-Century Russian Scholars Confront Ethnic Diversity," in *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917*, ed. Daniel Brower and Edward Lazzerini (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 27-57; John W. Slocum, "Who, and When, were the *Inorodtsy*? The evolution of the

studies is the question of how the Russian empire governed its population in the face of its growing ethnic and cultural diversity, and how the population responded to changing imperial policies at the end of the nineteenth century.²⁷ Scholars have examined the imperial challenges that came with the conquest of Central Asia with its mixture of nomadic and sedentary populations whose lifestyles were governed by two different laws, *adat* and *shari'a*.²⁸ They have looked into the interplay between *shari'a* and *adat* in various settings, and at local reactions to the overlay of the imperial legal system on these existing legal frameworks. Scholars have also found rich opportunities to study social and cultural interactions within the imperial setting, in the intricate web of socio-cultural and economic relations existing between various groups in

Category of 'Aliens' in Imperial Russia," *Russian Review* 57, 2 (1998): 173-191; Eugene Avrutin, "Racial Categories and the Politics of (Jewish) Difference in Late Imperial Russia," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8, 1 (2007):13-40; Robert Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky eds., *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

²⁷ Edward Thaden, *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Theodore Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1914* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996); Elena Campbell, "The Muslim Question in Imperial Russia," in *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930*, Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, and Anatolyi Remnev, eds. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 320-347; Aleksei Miller, 'Ukrainskii vopros' v politike vlastei i russkom obshchestvennom mnenii (vtoraia polovina XIX v.) (Sankt-Peterburg: Aleteia, 2000); Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: the Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Nicholas Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Anatolii Remnev, *Rossia Dal'nego Vostoka: imperskaia geografiia vlasti XIX- nachala XX vekov* (Omsk: Izdanie OmGU, 2004); Paul Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance, and Confessional Politics in Russia's Volga-Kama Region, 1827-1905* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Robert Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); James Meyer, *Turks Across Empire: Marketing Muslim Identity in the Russian-Ottoman Borderlands (1856-1914)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Charles Steinwedel, "Invisible Threads of Empire: State, Religion, and Ethnicity in Tsarist Bashkiria, 1773-1917" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1999); Mustafa Tuna, "Imperial Russia's Muslims: Inroads to Modernity" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2009).

²⁸ Robert Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Virginia Martin, "Barimta: Nomadic Custom, Imperial Crime," in *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and peoples, 1700-1917*, Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini eds. (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 249-270; idem., *Law and Custom in the Steppe: the Kazakhs of the Middle Horde and Russian Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Curzon Press, 2001); Thomas Welsford, "Fathers and Sons: Re-readings in a Samarqandi Private Archive," in *Explorations in the Social History of Modern Central Asia (19th-Early 20th Century)*, ed. Paolo Sartori (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 299-323; Paolo Sartori, "Murder in Mangishlaq: Notes on an Instance of Application of Qazaq Customary Law in Khiva (1895) in *Der Islam* 88, 2 (2012):217-257.

Central Asia, and further complicated by the increasing levels of Russian peasant settlement at the end of the nineteenth century.²⁹

And yet, the literature of the “imperial turn” shows the dearth of studies on the history of integration of the nomadic Kyrgyz tribes into the Russian empire, the dynamics of the nomadic-sedentary interactions, and the nomadic responses to the imperial governance.³⁰ My dissertation breaks new ground in this regard. I analyze the particularities of incorporation of the northern Kyrgyz tribes into the Russian empire in the 1860s, the challenges of imperial governance of the nomads, especially in light of the growing number of Slavic peasant settlers in the last decade of the tsarist regime, and the responses of the Kyrgyz tribal elites and the population at large to

²⁹ Jeff Sahadeo, “Epidemic and Empire: Ethnicity, Class, and ‘Civilization’ in the 1892 Tashkent Cholera Riot,” *Slavic Review* 64, 1 (2005): 117-139; *ibid.*, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent, 1865-1923* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Alexander Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarkand, 1868-1910: A Comparison with British India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); *ibid.*, “Peasant Settlers and the ‘Civilising Mission’ in Russian Turkestan, 1865-1917,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 2014. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2014.941166>; Robert Crews, “Civilization in the City: Architecture, Urbanism, and the Colonization of Tashkent,” in *Architectures of Russian Identity: 1500 to the present*, eds. James Cracraft and Daniel Rowland (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 117-132.

³⁰ Within the Kyrgyz context these questions have been explored by social anthropologists. In a series of studies, Svetlana Jacquesson approaches the nomadic Kyrgyz society from the perspective of communal relations and land distribution and use, from the nineteenth through the twenty-first centuries. She questions the colonial administration’s reliance on the concepts of nomadism, clan, and custom for the northern Kyrgyz nomads, despite a growing complexity in their socio-economic and political relations at the turn of the century which rendered such concepts inadequate. See Svetlana Jacquesson, “Reforming Pastoral Land Use in Kyrgyzstan: from Clan and Custom to Self-Government and Tradition,” *Central Asian Survey* 29, 1 (2010), 103-118; *idem.*, “Performance and Poetics in Kyrgyz Memorial Feasts: the Discursive Construction of Identity Categories,” in *Explorations in the Social History of Modern Central Asia (19th-Early 20th Century)*, ed. Paolo Sartori (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013), 181-206; *idem.*, “The Time of Dishonor: Land and Murder under Colonial Rule in Tian Shan,” *Journal of the Economic and the Social History of the Orient* 55(2012): 664-687; *idem.*, “Un barde Kirghiz mal connu Chamirkan uulu Kilich (1886-1917),” *Cahiers d’Asie Centrale* 5-6 (1998): 221-257; *idem.*, *Pastoralismes: anthropologie historique des processus d’intégration chez les Kirghiz du Tian Shan interior* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2010). See also Jeanne Faux De La Croix’s review of Jacquesson’s monograph in *Social Anthropology* 20, 1 (2012), 104-106. Tetsu Akiyama examines the authority of the Kyrgyz *manap* Shabdan through his funeral ceremony. See Tetsu Akiyama, “On the Authority of a Kyrgyz Tribal Chieftain: The Funeral Ceremonies of Shabdan Jantai.” Electronic source: http://www.orientphil.uni-halle.de/sais/pdf/2009-12-11/On_the_Authority_of_a_Kyrgyz_Tribal_Chieftain.pdf, 12 November, 2014.

Russian rule, which, in 1916, took a form of the revolt and had devastating results for the Kyrgyz nomads.

This work also benefits from the studies on Kazakh intellectuals and their conceptualization of the nation. Western historiography of the Soviet period tended to overlook the differences between Kazakh and Kyrgyz nomads, and the intricacies of their social structure and integration into the Russian Empire, instead lumping them together into broad studies characterized by sweeping generalizations.³¹ The emergence of nationalist thinking among the Kazakhs, who have close cultural, historical, linguistic ties to Kyrgyz, and their Russian-educated elites have recently been a focus of several studies.³² Kyrgyz nationalism on the other hand, is often either neglected, or viewed as a side-product of Kazakh nationalism and the Kazakh nationalist elite. There are legitimate bases for this perception. The Kazakhs were integrated into the Russian Empire much earlier than the Kyrgyz, and as a result their intellectuals were exposed to the ideas of modernity through Russian-language education, and cultural contacts with reformist Tatar intellectuals. By the end of the nineteenth century, intellectual elites already represented a distinct and visible stratum in Kazakh society. They were

³¹ Edward Allworth, *Central Asia: A Century of Russian Rule* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967); H. Carrere d'Encasse, *The Great Challenge: Nationalities and the Bolshevik State, 1917- 1930* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1992); Alexandre Benningsen, "Islamic or Local Consciousness Among Soviet Nationalities?" in *Soviet Nationality Problems*, ed. Edward Allworth (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 168-182; Elizabeth E. Bacon, *Central Asians Under Russian Rule: A Study in Culture Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966).

³² Through biographies of Kazakh intellectuals, Steven Sabol examines how Kazakh national identity was conceptualized at the turn of the century. He argues that Russian colonization of the Kazakh steppe, and the economic and social hardships that resulted, were behind Kazakh intellectuals' efforts to mobilize their nation. Like Khalid, Sabol stresses these intellectuals' use of modern technologies, particularly newspapers, to deliver their message. See Steven Sabol, *Russian Colonization and the Genesis of Kazak National Consciousness* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). On Kazakh intellectuals conceptualization of the Kazakh nation, see Pete Rottier, "Creating the Kazakh Nation: The Intelligentsia's Quest for Acceptance in the Russian Empire, 1905-1920" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 2005); Tomohiko Uyama, "The Geography of Civilizations: A Spatial Analysis of the Kazakh Intelligentsia's Activities, from the Mid-nineteenth to the Early Twentieth Century," in *Regions: A Prism to View the Slavic-Eurasian World; Towards a Discipline of "Regionology,"* ed. Kimitaka Matsuzato (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2000), 70-99.

active in the spheres of literature, education, print and publishing, and politics; and capable of mobilizing their efforts for the good of their people. Up until 1920, Kyrgyz intellectuals saw themselves as an integral part of this Kazakh intellectual movement, frequently contributing to the Kazakh language newspapers and collaborating with their Kazakh counterparts in the sphere of education and culture. Thus, one of the questions I ask in my dissertation is the following: why did the Kyrgyz intellectuals decide to break away from the Kazakh nationalist movement in the 1920s?

After the demise of the Soviet Union, historians began to revise the histories of their constituent nations, bringing to light events and personalities that had previously been forbidden or marginalized. Kyrgyz historians took part in this process, and started their own re-evaluation of key events in Kyrgyz history. Heated debates took place in the mid-1990s over the origins of the Kyrgyz nation, the nature of Russian colonialism, and the history of Kyrgyz statehood.³³ This post-Soviet Kyrgyz historiography exchanged Soviet ideology for Kyrgyz nationalist ideology. A series of studies, which appeared in print from the 1990s on, emphasized the role of these intellectuals in Kyrgyz nation-building highlighting their part in creating the Kyrgyz alphabet, shaping Kyrgyz national ideology, preserving Kyrgyz oral traditions, and developing Kyrgyz written literature.³⁴ Such works can be critiqued not only for their overt glorification of these

³³ T. Ömürbekov, *Kyrgyzdardyn jana Kyrgyzstandyn jangy doordogu tarykhy: XVII-XX k. bashy* (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan, 1995); Turar Koichuev, et al., *U istokov kyrgyzskoi natsional'noi gosudarstvennosti* (Bishkek: Ilim, 1996); Ömürkul Karaev, I. Moldobaev, *Voprosy etnicheskoi istorii kirgizskogo naroda: sbornik statei* (Frunze: Ilim, 1989); Zh. Malabaev, *Istoriia gosudarstvennosti Kyrgyzstana* (Bishkek: Ilim, 1997).

³⁴ Zainidin Kurmanov, et al. *Abdykerim Sydykov-natsional'nyi lider* (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan, 1992); *ibid.*, *Abdykerim Sydykov: lichnost' i istoriia* (Bishkek: Sham, 2002); DZh. DZhunushaliev, I. Semenov, "Vernyi syn naroda" in Jusup Abdрахамнов, *1916. Dnevnik. Pis'ma Stalinu* (Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1991), 6-94; Chabal dai Zhanybekov, *Kasym Tynystan uulu* (Bishkek, 2006); Kachkynbai Artykbaev, "Tarykhchy, fol'klorist, akyn" in *Talant syry: adabii izildöölör, adabii portretter*, ed. Kachkynbai Artykbaev (Bishkek: Kyrgyz entsiklopediiasy, 1994), 92-121; Symbat Maksütova, *Kasym Tynystanov kyrgyz ilimindegi zhyldyz* (Bishkek: Biiktik, 2008); S. V. Ploskikh, *Repressirovannaiia kul'tura Kyrgyzstana, maloizuchennnye stranitsy istorii* (Bishkek: Ilim, 2002); K. Sartbaev, A. Muratalieva, *Ishenaaly Arabaevdin agartuu maidanyndagy asyl murastary zhana anyn ishin ulantkan shakirter* (Bishkek: Aiat, 2011); Abdumazhit Murzaev and Aimkan Musaeva, *K. Tynystanov: kylymdar kyrynda* (Bishkek:

intellectuals and their contributions to the process of nation-building, but also for their tendency to view these intellectuals in isolation from the broader context of Central Asian literary culture, and to assume an ethno-centric position.³⁵ Ironically, Kyrgyz political and cultural elite of the 1990s used the same tools to legitimize the creation of the independent Kyrgyz state by writing and re-writing histories as their predecessors had done in the 1920s, with the only difference that their efforts this time were backed by the nation-state, whose legitimacy was in doubt a bit less than seventy years ago in 1924.

This dissertation is built at the intersection of two disciplines, history and literature. It relies on the method of historical analysis and interpretation of the published and unpublished sources, which I use for narrating the story of the Kyrgyz conceptions of themselves. In addition, it examines literary works in form of oral poems, essays, and historical narratives in order to expand our understanding of the beginnings of Kyrgyz nationalistic thinking. The analysis of discourses on history, language and literature, both oral and written, sheds some light on how ideas about the Kyrgyz as a united community evolved over time. This analysis is aided by close attention to the changing usages and meanings these texts assigned to specific concepts, such as *uruk* (clan), *uruu* (tribe), *el* (people) and *millat* (nation), along with other ethnic, religious, and social categories. Methodologically, my dissertation approaches this subject from two directions:

Turar, 2011); T. Abdyrakhmanov, et al. *Eki door insany E. Arabaev* (Bishkek: Maxprint, 2013); K. Daniyarova, *Bazarkul Daniyarov – pervyi pedagog* (Bishkek: Uchkun, 2007).

³⁵ Although studies exist on literary connections between Central Asian people, they usually are concentrated on the connections in folklore and literary works of the Soviet period. See Batma Kebekova, *Kyrgyz-Kazak fol'klorduk bailyshy* (Frunze: Ilim, 1982); idem., *Kyrgyz-Kazak akyndarynyn chygarmachylyk bailyshy* (Frunze: Ilim, 1985); Khalil Bapaev, *Kyrgyz-Kazak, Kyrgyz-Özbek adabii bailyshy* (Frunze: Ilim, 1975). S. Mamytov's work is an exception to this. In his work on Kyrgyz-Tatar literary relations, Mamytov gives an excellent analysis of mutual influences between two literatures, historically contextualizes the lives of Kyrgyz and Tatar intellectuals, and provides a thorough analysis of their works. His work is also useful in tapping into the sources that were not explored before in Kyrgyz literary scholarship, such as newspapers and magazines published in Ufa and Kazan'. See S. Mamytov, *Kyrgyzsko-tatarskie literaturnye svyazi vtoroi poloviny XIX- nachala XX vekov* (Bishkek: Muras, 1999).

discourse analysis and collective biography. My use of the sources of oral tradition draws from Devin DeWeese's approach.³⁶ Like him, I interrogate the oral sources to find out how communal identities were constructed in the late imperial period among the northern Kyrgyz to deconstruct Kyrgyz intellectuals' conceptions of identity of the early-Soviet period.

I have limited my discussion to the study of the literary culture of the northern Kyrgyz. This choice is determined by a number of factors. Southern Kyrgyz of the Ferghana valley came under the rule of the Khanate of Kokand at the end of the eighteenth century and were directly ruled by Kokandian governors until 1876, for almost close to a century. As for the northern Kyrgyz tribes, who dwelled in the basin of the Lake Isyk Kul, Talas, Chu, and Naryn river valleys, they were under the nominal Kokandian rule and were predominantly governed by their own tribal chiefs, the *manaps*, until they came under the Russian rule in 1867. Two types of political dominance left a distinct social and cultural mark on the development of these two groups. In this case, northern Kyrgyz visions of their community developed in response to the Russian rule and administration.³⁷ Moreover, all of the Kyrgyz modernizing intellectuals of the early twentieth century, which I discuss in my study, came from the northern Kyrgyz tribes.³⁸

This work draws on the variety of published and unpublished sources from the archives in Almaty, Bishkek, Kazan, Moscow, and Ufa. The vast majority of the sources for my dissertation consist of the works of oral poets. These are poems, epics, tribal genealogies, and historical narratives, the material collected by Kyrgyz, Tatar, and Bashkir intellectuals during the

³⁶ Devin DeWeese, *Islamization and the Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1994).

³⁷ In contrast to it, a poem on the *zamana* genre (Chapter 3) composed during the same time period by Tuiaq yrchy, a poet from the "south," never mentioned a word about Russians. See Omor Sooronov, *Kol zhazmalar zhöniündö söz* (Bishkek: Turar, 2009), 217.

³⁸ This kind of separation of the Kyrgyz into two distinct groups might serve to further deepen the divide between the northern and southern Kyrgyz and Kyrgyzstan. A more inclusive approach, which takes into consideration regional and cultural differences among the Kyrgyz, still needs to be developed.

Soviet nation-building in the 1920s and 1930s.³⁹ Next, I use works produced by Kyrgyz intellectuals themselves including memoirs, essays, historical narratives, genealogies, and poems, written in the Chagatay language with Tatar, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz characteristics. After the Revolution of 1905, the Muslim press came to play a significant role in shaping and directing public opinion, and articulating the national question. I use Muslim periodicals published in Kazan, Troitsk, and Orenburg, reflecting different political views, as another source of my work. Kyrgyz intellectuals were a part of a larger Muslim community of Russia, Bukhara, and the Kazakh steppe. I examine literary works and memoirs of Tatar, Kazakh, and other Muslim intellectuals to delineate literary and cultural connections between these individuals and Kyrgyz intellectuals.

These Turkic-language sources are supplemented by Russian-language documentation produced by the central and local state institutions of the imperial and early-Soviet periods. For the imperial period, important documentation includes files pertaining to Pishpek and Przheval'sk *uezds* of the Semirech'e Regional Administration (*Semirechenskoe oblastnoe pravlenie*), as well as various administrative documents, correspondence between different state and local agencies, court papers, reports, and witness testimonies in the aftermath of the revolt of 1916.

For the early-Soviet period I use files of the People's Commissariat of Education under the Council of the People's Commissariat (*Sovnarkom*), along with the personal files of Kyrgyz

³⁹ I am aware of the limits of these sources. They have been collected with a nationalist goal in mind during a mad rush of the Kyrgyz Soviet elite to create national narratives of and for their people first in the 1920s, and then published later in 1991, after the dismantlement of the Soviet Union. These collections are more important not for what they contain, but for what is not there, what is left out, or "forgotten," which often is, unfortunately, difficult to detect. Although my dissertation deals with the question of national delimitation and traces the evolution of the notion of Kyrgyzness, it does not attempt to find the "roots" of the nation. I examine these sources for the evolving visions of community at a certain time in the history of the northern Kyrgyz.

intellectual and bureaucratic elites. The materials on national delimitation, used to discuss Kyrgyz intellectuals' arguments for the creation of the Kyrgyz autonomy, are from the collection of the Central Asian Bureau.

My dissertation is organized into an introduction, six chapters, and a conclusion. It is arranged both chronologically (Chapters 1, 2, 5, 6) and thematically (Chapters 3, 4). Using this kind of hybrid approach, I am able to document the account of the integration of the northern Kyrgyz into the Russian empire as a chronological narrative, while also pausing to analyze important concepts and episodes which arose during the process of integration. Chapter 1 examines the socio-political landscape of Central Asia in the nineteenth century, with particular attention paid to the social structure of northern Kyrgyz society. The chapter begins with the debates surrounding the origin and development of the modern Kyrgyz people. It introduces the main political actors in the region - Qing China, the Khanate of Kokand, and the Russian Empire - while also paying close attention to the inter-tribal dynamics between the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs. Chapter 2 discusses the politics of imperial governance over the northern Kyrgyz nomads. It examines the social and cultural transformations which occurred in the region after it was incorporated into the Russian Empire in 1867.

Chapters 3 and 4 analyze works of the Kyrgyz poets and intellectuals. Chapter 3 looks at the oral traditions of nineteenth-century Kyrgyz literary culture, paying attention to oral poets' views of their community. It examines the concept of *Kyrgyzchylyk*, Kyrgyzness or being a Kyrgyz, as understood by the Kyrgyz oral poets, and traces the changes in its use over time. Chapter 4 explores the social and cultural pre-conditions for the emergence of the Kyrgyz intellectual elite. It highlights the continuities in the northern Kyrgyz literary tradition, emphasizing the literary and social connections between the Kyrgyz oral poets and Kyrgyz

intellectuals. This chapter concentrates on the lives and works of Ishenaaly Arabaev, Osmonaaly Sydykov, and Belek Soltonoev, and argues that in their modernizing efforts, the Kyrgyz intellectuals of the early-twentieth century did not make a complete break from the tradition of their predecessors, the Kyrgyz oral poets; they had many more commonalities than differences in how they both conceptualized their nation.

The revolt of 1916 is the topic of Chapter 5. This chapter views the revolt as a turning point in the history of Central Asia and discusses how it impacted the lives of the northern Kyrgyz. It argues that the revolt added another dimension to the existing concept of Kyrgyzness by uniting the Kyrgyz in their grief and allowing them to imagine themselves as single community.

The concluding chapter discusses the Kyrgyz national-territorial autonomy and the role of the Kyrgyz cultural and political elite in its creation in the 1920s. Through the close examination of the debates between various central and regional institutions and people, this chapter illustrates how the collaboration between the Kyrgyz cultural and political elite transformed the cultural concept of Kyrgyzness into the political concept of the Kyrgyz nation, which resulted in the creation of the Kara Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast in 1924.

Note on Terminology

Prior to 1925, terms such as Kara-Kirghiz and Wild Mountain (*dikokamennye*) Kirghiz were used to designate present-day Kyrgyz.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, terms such as Kirghiz and Kaisak-

⁴⁰ *Dikokamennye kirgizy* was used extensively by Kazakh-born Russian imperial scholar Chokan Valikhanov in his works.

Kirghiz/Kirghiz-Kaisak were used for present-day Kazakhs.⁴¹ It is difficult to speculate what the reason was for this kind of confusion in the use of these terms, but it is important to note that Kyrgyz and Kazakhs have always called themselves only Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, respectively.⁴² In April of 1925, the *Sredazbiuro* (Central Asian Bureau) TsK RKP (b) decided to discard the term Kara Kirghiz and to use the term “Kirghiz” to designate Kyrgyz and the term “Kazakh” to designate Kazakhs.⁴³ Until 1991, Kirghiz/Kyrgyz was spelled КИРГИЗ in Russian and КЫРГЫЗ in Kyrgyz. In 1991, the Kyrgyz government decided to use the spelling КЫРГЫЗ in both Russian and Kyrgyz languages, and since then, it is spelled “Kyrgyz” in English. To avoid confusion, I use the term Kyrgyz throughout my dissertation. I use the spelling “Qırghız” only when I am discussing Turkic-language sources published prior to 1917. I use these terms in Chapter 6 as they are used by the contemporary political activists and intellectuals themselves and clarify their use in the footnotes whenever it is necessary.

⁴¹ These terms were mainly used in Russian-language sources by the Russian bureaucratic and intellectual elites.

⁴² They are always called Kazakhs and Kyrgyz in contemporary sources and Qırghız and Qāzāq in Arabic script.

⁴³ RGASPI, f. 62, op. 2, d. 183, l. 35-36 ob.

Chapter One

Northern Kyrgyz Tribes before the Russian Conquest

Let us come down to the Lake,⁴⁴ ...we are a household of nine thousand; no land other than the Lake will become our land and will not fit us altogether. We are like this [at war] with Sarybaghysh⁴⁵; we will not become one with the Qalmaqs; *Sarts* from Aqsu and Turpan, or Qoqandians, they are not able to do anything; Qazaqs are not that bad with us. For the past two to three years our households became scattered. We have had a relationship with Russians for a long time. Russians are great people with roots; let us come under their rule. Let our people rest and go on with their daily lives.⁴⁶

Borombay, Chief of the Bughu Kyrgyz tribe, [d. 1857].

Introduction

The chief of the Bughu Kyrgyz tribe, Borombay, spoke the words above as his tribe gathered to plan their migration for the upcoming winter season. They were recorded by Belek Soltonoev, the first Kyrgyz historian, and were included in his manuscript on the history of the Kyrgyz, which he worked on from 1895 until 1934. Although the accuracy and historicity of Borombay's words have yet to be proven, they reflect the dire situation of the Bughu Kyrgyz during the mid-nineteenth century and suggest, by extension, that other Kyrgyz tribes of the same era endured similar conditions. During the mid-nineteenth century the Kyrgyz suffered inter-tribal warfare and found themselves caught between the political games of the Qing

⁴⁴ Lake Isyk Kul.

⁴⁵ Another northern Kyrgyz tribe.

⁴⁶ Belek Soltonoev, *Kyrgyz tarykhy* (Bishkek: "Arkhi" Innovatsiialyk borboru, 2003), 362-363.

imperial officials to the south and the Kokand Khanate to the west. Their relationship with their neighbors to the north, the Kazakhs of the Great and the Middle Hordes, was beginning to improve after a prolonged war a decade earlier. In light of all these events, the Kyrgyz were looking for a protection from a strong power and they saw it in Russia.

This chapter discusses the socio-political scene in Central Asia and introduces the main political actors in the region before the Russian military advance of the 1860s. After a short review of the debates around the question of the origin and formation of the modern Kyrgyz people and the discussion of the division and organization of the Kyrgyz tribes, it proceeds to address the following questions: what was socio-economic and political life like in Central Asia before the Russian military advance in the region? Who were the major political actors in Central Asia? And, finally, what kind of relations did they have with each other? All of these questions will be discussed in relation to the socio-political, economic, and (when possible) cultural life of the Kyrgyz tribes that were scattered across the territory of Central Asia.

Northern Kyrgyz of the Nineteenth Century: Social Roles and Responsibilities⁴⁷

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the northern Kyrgyz were split across several tribes, which shared the ethnonym “Kyrgyz.” Each tribe derived from a common ancestor, either legendary or historic. Together, a tribe’s members migrated between summer and winter pastures, grazed their livestock, and fought against their common enemies. Lifecycle rituals and

⁴⁷ I will use Kyrgyz language source material whenever possible, but due to the scarcity of the sources in Kyrgyz, much of this part is based on Russian language material. B. Soltonoev made the first attempt to divide the Kyrgyz society into estates (*türküm/soslovie*) in his work *Kyrgyz tarykhy*. See B. Soltonoev, “Kyrgyzdyn türkümgö (soslovie) bölüngönü” (“Division of the Kyrgyz into Estates”) in *Kyrgyz tarykhy*, 291-301. I will discuss his work in Chapter 4.

celebrations such as birth, death, and memorial feasts were also observed by the tribe as a single community. The tribes, in turn, divided into subgroups, each of which traced their origins to a small family unit.⁴⁸

The northern Kyrgyz began to engage more extensively in agriculture as the nineteenth century progressed, but throughout the century, when they were not engaged in wars and *barymta* raids, their primary occupation remained animal husbandry.⁴⁹ Therefore, good pasture lands were essential for their survival. By the middle of the nineteenth century, each tribe had its own distinct territory for winter and summer migrations.⁵⁰ Winter pastures, *kyshtoo*, were usually located in valleys surrounded by mountains, which protected the settlements from strong winds; while the summer pastures, *jailoo*, were usually located on high altitude mountain ranges. The migration from winter to summer pastures was a long and costly process, and only wealthier tribes were able to afford the move. Horses were the most esteemed and cherished livestock and possession of a large quantity of horses was the surest sign of wealth. Horses had the advantage that they did not require much care: they grazed freely during the spring, summer and fall and in winter they could dig some of their fodder from under the snow. Horses also served used as a commodity; they were specifically bred and raised to be traded outside the Kyrgyz community

⁴⁸ Ch. R. Israilova-Khar'ekhuzen, *Traditsionnoe obshchestvo kyrgyzov v period russkoi kolonizatsii vo vtoroi polovine XIX-nachale XX v. i sistema ikh rodstva* (Bishkek: Ilim, 1999), 130. She gives it as *bir atanyn baldary, uruk, uruu*, and then *el*, that is the "children of one father, clan, tribe, and people."

⁴⁹ Valikhanov reports that agriculture was wide-spread among the Kyrgyz and that the Kyrgyz of the Bughu tribe sowed 15,000 sacks of wheat, barley, and millet every year. One has to approach his statement with some caution, considering that he was intimately acquainted only with the Kyrgyz who inhabited the area surrounding Lake Isyk Kul. These were mostly Kyrgyz of the Bughu tribe led by chief Borombay, who lamented the destruction of his crops and fruit orchards near Isyk Kul during his tribe's feuds with Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz. Valikhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, v. 1, 327.

⁵⁰ Abramzon, *Kirgizy*, 72.

for food and household items.⁵¹ Although horses were the most important to the Kyrgyz, they also kept sheep, cattle, and sometimes yaks in higher altitudes.⁵²

Kyrgyz tribes were divided into settlements, *ayils*, which were united by kinship ties, and usually migrated together.⁵³ *Ayils* were named after the founder of the tribe or its current chieftain. The *ayil* was not a permanent unit; some *ayils* would disintegrate to be replaced by new ones. An *ayil* was made up of anywhere from one to three hundred *yurts*.⁵⁴ Being a part of *ayil* community gave one a sense of greater security from both natural and man-made calamities.

Scholarship on the social structure of the northern Kyrgyz society has identified two major groups: the ruling elite, who from the middle of the nineteenth century came to be known as *manaps*, and the common people, or *buqara*.⁵⁵ The term *manap* itself has been the subject of scholarly debates.⁵⁶ Sources derived from the Kyrgyz oral tradition trace the origin of the term to the name of a *biy* from the Sarybaghysh tribe, who was known for his cruelty and ruthlessness.⁵⁷ His descendants later assumed his name as a title for themselves, laying the foundation of the

⁵¹ Scott C. Levi, "The Ferghana Valley at the Crossroads of World History: the Rise of Khoqand, 1709-1822," *Journal of Global History*, 2, no. 2(2007): 213-232; K. Usenbaev, *Obshchestvenno-ekonomicheskie otnosheniia kirgizov v period gospodstva Kokandskogo khanstva (IX vek – do prisoedineniia Kirgizii k Rossii)* (Frunze: Izdatel'stvo AN Kirgizskoi SSR, 1961), 54.

⁵² Abramzon argues that different types of livestock were preferred during different historical periods. Thus, during the period of conflict (the early- to mid-nineteenth century), the Kyrgyz preferred horses, but after the Russian conquest and the semi-sedentarization of the Kyrgyz, sheep became more popular. Abramzon, *Kirgizy*, 72.

⁵³ Abramzon, *Kirgizy*, 115; Usenbaev, *Obshchestvenno-ekonomicheskie otnosheniia*, 116. V. V. Radlov, however, states that the Kyrgyz did not live as separate *ayils*, but rather as whole tribes. V. V. Radlov, *Iz Sibiri: strannitsy dnevnik* (Moscow: Glavnaia redaktsiia vostochnoi literatury, 1989), 348.

⁵⁴ Usenbaev, *Obshchestvenno-ekonomicheskie otnosheniia*, 116.

⁵⁵ This division would later form the basis of Soviet-era studies, which interpreted pre-Soviet Kyrgyz society according to Marxist and Leninist teachings.

⁵⁶ S. Abramzon, "Sovremennoe manapstvo v Kirgizii," *Sovetskaia etnografiia*, 3-4 (1931): 43-59; A. Dzhumagulov, "O termine 'manap,'" *Izvestiia Akademii nauk Respubliki Kirgizstan*, ser. Obshchestvennye nauki, 4 (1991): 61-68; D. Prior, "High Rank and Power Among the Northern Kirghiz: Terms and Their Problems, 1845-1864." In P. Sartori, ed. *Explorations in the Social History of Modern Central Asia (19th – Early 20th Century)* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 139-179; Tamara Ölcekci, "Manaplar ve Kirgiz Tarihindeki Rölleri" ("Manaps and Their Role in Kyrgyz History"), *Bilig*, 67 (2013): 111-128; T. Akiyama, "On the Authority of the Kyrgyz Tribal Chieftain: The Funeral Ceremonies of Shabdan Jantai," http://www.orientphil.uni-halle.de/sais/pdf/2009-12-11/On_the_Authority_of_a_Kyrgyz_Tribal_Chieftain.pdf, 5 January 2015.

⁵⁷ The title *manap* was used only among the northern Sarybaghysh, Sayaq, Bughu, and Solto tribes.

manap ruling class.⁵⁸ Some scholars disagree, arguing that *manap* was a title invented by Russian colonial officials, in order to distinguish the ruling group among the Kyrgyz, who lacked a term of social differentiation for their elite similar to that of the Kazakh *sultans*.⁵⁹ And still other scholars maintain that the institution of *manaps* emerged from the institution of *biy* who preceded *manaps* historically, and combined the function of judge with other leadership responsibilities.⁶⁰

Whatever the origin of the term, by the middle of the nineteenth century, *manaps* were firmly settled into their role as the ruling aristocracy of the northern Kyrgyz tribes. At least in principle, they exercised unlimited power and control over the tribes whose livelihood they governed.⁶¹ *Manaps* drew their legitimacy from a combination of aristocratic origin, wealth, political alliances within and outside their tribe, personal charisma, and strategic intermarriages. They constituted the wealthiest stratum of the Kyrgyz society in the nineteenth century.⁶² Wealth

⁵⁸ On the discussion of the institution of *manap* (or *manapstvo* as it was known in Russian) see Valikhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, v. 1, 333; Abramzon traces the origin of the term to the seventeenth century when the descendants of the Sarybaghysh tribe began to be called *manaps* by their common ancestor's name, see: Abramzon, *Kirgizy*, 158. Interestingly, the term *manap* is only used among the northern Kyrgyz tribes. Among the Kyrgyz of the south, the term *biy* continued to be used for the ruling elite.

⁵⁹ Daniel Prior convincingly argues that the title *manap* entered the lexicon of the northern Kyrgyz after their first contacts with Russians in 1850s. The earliest source that uses the term *manap* is a letter sent to the Russian assessor of the Aiaguz military district by Borombay, tribal leader of the Bughu Kyrgyz, in which he expresses the willingness of the Bughu Kyrgyz to submit to the White Tsar in 1845. Interestingly, the term is virtually non-existent in Kyrgyz-language documents, and correspondence between the Khanate of Kokand and northern Kyrgyz tribal chieftains. See D. Prior, "High Rank and Power among the Northern Kirghiz," in P. Sartori, ed. *Explorations*, 137-179.

⁶⁰ According to Valikhanov, *manaps* were previously called *biys*. Valikhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, v. 1, 333. Ploskikh thinks that the institution of *manap* emerged from a combination of the functions of the *biy* and *baatyr*. Later on, he states, the notion of *baatyr* became symbolic and the *manap* only performed the functions of a *biy*. See Ploskikh, *Kirgizy i Kokandskoe khanstvo*, 246.

⁶¹ According to Valikhanov, "they could kill or sell their people at their own will." Valikhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, v. 1, 333; Abramzon, *Kirgizy*, 161;

⁶² Wealth, however, did not automatically guarantee the title of *manap*: one could be rich but not be a *manap* and vice versa. Those who were rich but did not have any influence within their tribe were called *bay*, i.e. "rich." During the Soviet period, the terms *bay* and *manap* were always used together as *bay-manap*, but sources indicate that these two were not interchangeable and that the possession of wealth did not guarantee one's assumption of the title of *manap*. (Note also that Ploskikh draws a tighter connection between wealth and status. According to him, if a *manap* lost his wealth, he lost his title as well. In Ploskikh, *Kirgizy i Kokandskoe*, 247. For more information on *bays* see Abramzon, *Kirgizy*, 160; Israilova-Khar'ekhuzen, *Traditsionnoe obshchestvo*, 94-95.

among the nomads was measured by the number of households and livestock in one's possession and usually the ruling elite were the ones who owned the most of both.⁶³ In fact, the most prosperous *manaps* could own up to three thousand horses and rule over several hundred households.⁶⁴ But wealth was not the only source of the *manap*'s influence; they were also expected to demonstrate great leadership skills, sober judgment, and their ability to negotiate with leaders of other tribes and political entities. Although the hereditary nature of the title is still debatable, the historical evidence suggests that after the death of a *manap*, his sons and brothers, were able to retain the title within the family. For instance, after the death of Ormon, the most influential *manap* of the Sarybaghysh tribe, his son Ûmötaaly became a leader and *manap* of the Esengul branch of the Sarybaghysh, and waged a war against the Bughu Kyrgyz. Another *manap*, Shabdan, who became known for his cooperation with Russian imperial officials and received many honors from them for his assistance, also inherited the title from his father Jantay, the most influential *manap* of the Tynai branch of the Sarybaghysh tribe.⁶⁵

Writing about the northern Kyrgyz during his travels in the middle of the nineteenth century, Chokan Valikhanov noted that *manaps* did not have a regular income from the people, other than collections for fodder (*kormovoi sbor*).⁶⁶ He observed that the respect of the commoners for the *manaps* was unlimited, although based on fear, and that no one dared to ride on horseback in front of a *manap*'s house or curse in front of him.⁶⁷ One of the *manaps* whose

⁶³ Depending on their wealth, the number of *buqara* in their possession, and their sphere of influence, *manaps* were divided into sub-groups: *chong/agma* (great) *manap*, *orto* (medium) *manap*, and *chala* (half) *manap*. There was also a term *buqara manap* used to refer to an impoverished relative of a more influential *manap*. Abramzon, *Kirgizy*, 159; Israilova-Khar'ekhuzen, *Traditsionnoe obshchestvo*, 92-93.

⁶⁴ Valikhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, v. 1, 325.

⁶⁵ It should be recalled that Shabdan and Ûmötaaly's political lives coincided with the period of Russian conquest and rule over the northern Kyrgyz. By then, the institution of *manap* had undergone significant change and occupied a particular niche within the imperial system for ranking the native ruling elite.

⁶⁶ Valikhanov, 333.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

life and deeds were widely discussed in contemporary Russian and Kyrgyz historiography was Shabdan from Tynai Sarybaghysh. He is also perhaps the only *manap* to leave an autobiography, which was published during his lifetime.⁶⁸ O. Sydykov presents a somewhat idealized version of Shabdan's life, which highlights his accomplishments during the time of the Khanate of Kokand and depicts him as a generous person, who was esteemed by the common people, cared deeply for them in return, practiced Islam with piety and devotion, and subsidized mosques and *medreses*.⁶⁹ At the same time, B. Soltonoev provides an opposing perspective, however, referring to Shabdan and other famous *manaps* by epithets such as *qan sorghuch* [blood sucker] and *qan icher* [blood drinker].⁷⁰

Northern Kyrgyz culture of the nineteenth century was permeated by violence.⁷¹ Throughout the nineteenth century, the Kyrgyz were engaged in wars against the Junghars and Kokandians, raids against Kazakh *sultans*, and conflicts with rival Kyrgyz tribes. As a result, the Kyrgyz sought leaders who were strong, both physically and mentally. Such leaders were called *baatyr*s, or "heroes" and they were expected to gather and command groups of *jigits*, young warriors, when it was time to go off to battle.⁷² Many of the tribal chieftains, the *manaps*, led their tribes during the wars, and held the title of *baatyr* as well.⁷³ But there were also *baatyr*s who served a *manap*. Such *baatyr*s generally belonged to the same tribe as the *manap*, and

⁶⁸ I discuss Shabdan's autobiography in Chapter 2.

⁶⁹ Osmān 'Alī Sidikuf, *Tārikh-i Qirghiz-i Shādmāniya* (Ufa: Elektro-tipografiia "Vostochnaia pechat", 1914).

⁷⁰ B. Soltonoev, *Kyrgyz tarykhy*, 375, 378, 380, 387, 389, 408. B. Soltonoev states that he wrote his work between 1895 and 1934. By the end of this period, the program of collectivization and class consciousness, which began with the Bolshevik takeover, was in full swing, and Stalin's purges were about to begin. These historical circumstances, provide important contextualization for Soltonoev's harsh criticism of the "class of *manaps* and *bays*."

⁷¹ As per Prior in his "Heroes, Chieftains," 74.

⁷² Prior, "Heroes, Chieftains" p. 74.

⁷³ Usenbaev, *Obshchestvenno-ekonomicheskie otnosheniia*, 133. For example, Ormon, *manap* of the Sarybaghysh, led his tribe in the war with the Bughu Kyrgyz. Shabdan, of the Tynai Sarybaghysh tribe, also led forces against the Kokandians and had the title *baatyr*.

gained certain privileges by virtue of their *baatyr* status.⁷⁴ Although *baatyrs* and *jigits* received special recognition of warriors, when it was necessary to fight, the Kyrgyz expected every capable man to mount his horse and take up a weapon. Men from the northern Kyrgyz tribes often aided the rulers of Kokand during their wars, both within and outside the khanate. These Kyrgyz warriors were organized into units of tens (*on*), hundreds (*zhuz*), and thousands (*ming*) under the command of the Kokandian army.⁷⁵

Whereas the term *manap*, its origins, and the institution it represented have received much scholarly attention, studies of the common people, the *buqara*, are harder to find. Soviet historiography on the subject tended to place the *manaps* and *buqara* in opposition to each other analyzing their relationship according to a Marxist-Leninist ideology of class struggle.⁷⁶ According to these studies, the *buqara* were exploited by the ruling elite and derived little benefit from their one-sided relationship with the *manaps*. That the *buqara* were subordinated to the *manaps* is undeniable, but there were different levels of subservience, and the picture was not as straightforward as some Soviet-era scholars depicted it to be.

The *buqara*, constituted the base of Kyrgyz society. They not only supported themselves on the fruits of their labor, but sustained the ruling elite as well. Depending on their financial standing and occupation, *buqara* were sub-divided into several groups, but the boundaries between these groups were somewhat indistinct. In fact, even the *bays*, the wealthy, are analyzed as part of the *buqara* in some studies.⁷⁷ According to Ch. Israilova-Khar'ekhuzen, quantity of

⁷⁴ Törögeldi *baatyr*, who came from the Sarybaghysh tribe, led many incursions against the Bughu after the death of Ormon.

⁷⁵ Ploskikh, *Kirgizy i Kokandskoe khanstvo*, 249.

⁷⁶ Among them are works of Ploskikh, Usenbaev, Abramzon, and Dzhamgerchinov.

⁷⁷ Although Abramzon includes *bays* as a stratum within the *buqara*, he is cautious not to blur the line between them. He clarifies that the *bays* “resembled *manaps* in their ownership of numerous livestock, therefore they must be included within the ruling class.” See Abramzon, *Kirgizy*, 160.

livestock served as an indication of a nomad's wealth: a poor *buqara* could become a *bay* under better financial circumstances, but he could then also lose his livestock during a harsh winter season and go back to being *buqara*.⁷⁸ The more prosperous among the *buqara* were considered free people. They operated within their tribe, obeyed common tribal rules and regulations, and submitted to a single tribal chieftain, but due to their financial independence they were autonomous in their daily decision-making.⁷⁹ The poorer *buqara* did not own livestock or land, so their livelihood depended entirely on the wealthy of the tribe. A common name for them was *kedey*, meaning poor.⁸⁰ Some of them assisted the ruling elite of the tribe during their seasonal migrations, tended their livestock, and helped in their daily chores. Others stayed behind and worked their land.⁸¹ The lowest stratum of the society were the *malays*, people who had lost all their possessions and whose lives were at the complete mercy of their owners. They were used by *manap* households as servants: the men would herd livestock and the women would tend to the needs of the house.⁸²

Northern Kyrgyz society of the nineteenth century was interdependent; the rich could not survive without the help of the poor, and vice-versa. Every person within the tribe recognized the importance of mutual aid and the fact that the well-being of each individual within tribal society depended on the well-being of the tribe as a whole. The leaders of the tribe, the elders and the ruling elite were responsible for the less fortunate, whom they took under their protection, helped

⁷⁸ Israilova - Khar'ekhuzen, *Traditsionnoe obshchestvo*, 95.

⁷⁹ Ploskikh, *Kirgizy i Kokandskoe khanstvo*, 251.

⁸⁰ The subdivisions within the *kedey* were complicated depending on their tribal affiliation, occupation, and financial standing, each group of *kedey* had its own title. The *kongshu*, [neighbor], was a *kedey* who migrated with a *bay* and worked for him, but also maintained his own property; *zhataq*, [settled], was a *kedey* who was fully committed to farming; a *qoshchu*, [sower], was a *kedey* who tilled the land; an *ashtyqchy*, was a *kedey* who was responsible for irrigating *bay*'s crops. Ploskikh, *Kirgizy i Kokandskoe khanstvo*, 252.

⁸¹ Abramzon, *Kirgizy*, 160.

⁸² Ibid.

financially, and offered various forms of employment.⁸³ As a result, the most influential of the *manaps* could control up to a thousand or more *yurts* of the *buqara*.⁸⁴ The cohesion between the poor and rich of the society was reinforced by the sentiment that each member of the tribe was connected by blood and had descended from the same ancestor.

Barymta and raiding was a common occupation in Kyrgyz society.⁸⁵ It could be an easy and quick way of amassing wealth. At best, raiding another tribe could yield vast pasture lands, herds of livestock in great numbers, and perhaps even captives. At worst, it could result in the loss of a tribal leader along with many innocent lives, as happened when Ormon, *manap* of the Sarybaghysh, raided the Bughu Kyrgyz and died at their hands. The fate of the people captured in these raids depended on their social status: the ones who had kinship relations with the ruling elites of their tribe were used for exchange, while those who belonged to the lower social strata became *qul* or *küing* [male and female slaves], who had no rights within the society and were treated as commodities.⁸⁶ They could be given as part of a *qalyng*, bride price, or *sep*, dowry, or could be offered as a prize, during a *bayge*, horseback riding competition, or other celebrations.⁸⁷

⁸³ The economic benefits that the poor members of the society received from the patronage of the ruling elite is mentioned only by V. M. Ploskikh. He states that “an ordinary nomad depended on his feudal overlord as someone who managed the pasture lands by regulating the process and order of migration, as a keeper of traditions and customs, as an administrative official who was granted a certain administrative power, as a tax collector, and, finally, as a simple mightier economic neighbor to whom one could appeal in case of starvation or during natural disasters.” Ploskikh, *Kirgizy i Kokandskoe khanstvo*, 250.

⁸⁴ According to Abramzon, Jantay controlled 700 *yurts*, Borombay 1000, Ümötaaly 1500, and his brother Charghyn 1000 *yurts*. Abramzon, *Kirgizy*, 159.

⁸⁵ Ploskikh, *Kirgizy i Kokandskoe khanstvo*, 249.

⁸⁶ Thus, *manap* Borombay’s oldest wife, Alma, was captured during one of the raids in 1856 and in 1857 she was exchanged for noble captives of the Sarybaghysh tribe. See P.P. Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii, *Puteshestvie*, 176. B. Soltonoev mentions nine types of *qul* in his work on Kyrgyz history. Soltonoev, *Kyrgyz tarykhy*, 300-301.

⁸⁷ Jantay, *manap* of the Sarybaghysh, gave 45 slaves as part of a bride-price for his son Shabdan’s wife; 60 slaves were put out by *manap* Jangharach during one *bayge*. Cited in Ploskikh from I. Talyzin, *Pishpekskii uezd: Istoricheskii ocherk*, Vernyi, 1898. See Ploskikh, *Kirgizy i Kokandskoe khanstvo*, 255. There are two meanings of *bayge*: 1. Horse-back riding competition; 2. A prize awarded during that completion. See K. Iudakhin, *Kirgizsko-russkii slovar’ v dvukh knigakh* (Frunze: Izdatel’svo Kirgizskoi Sovetskoi Entsiklopedii, 1985), v. 1, 95.

The children of slaves also became slaves and all of a slave's possessions belonged to his or her owner.

Unfortunately, none of the studies on Kyrgyz society discuss Kyrgyz women specifically as distinct social group. If the scholarly coverage of the *buqara* as a social group is scarce and fragmented, the treatment of women is even more so. Kyrgyz society of the nineteenth century was patriarchal; it was organized around and centered on men as important figures. Men held the positions of political and moral authority and had full control over property. In this light, the fact that local observers overlooked the contribution of Kyrgyz women to the society is understandable, if deeply regrettable.

One source that does offer a glimpse into the lives of the Kyrgyz women is the work of the members of the Imperial Russian Geographic Society, whose representatives travelled to the region in the nineteenth century. N. A. Severtsov writes about Kyrgyz women that they were free-thinkers, who did not recognize power.⁸⁸ In his opinion, a woman might work all day around the house but this did not mean she was a slave. On the contrary, he states, that she was an absolute mistress (*khoziaika*) of the household. According to Severtsov, Kyrgyz women pretended to serve their husbands during large gatherings, or in front of the strangers. And yet, in reality, it fell to Kyrgyz men to be obedient: "It is true that if a Kyrgyz [man] is brave, it is only on his horseback and outside the house. A Kyrgyz woman, on the contrary, is [brave] inside her

⁸⁸ An example is provided by P.P. Semenov, who writes about the daughter of the Sarybaghysh leader Ormon (Ümötaaly's sister), who was given to Borombay's son Ömürzaq in marriage when the relationship between the Bughu and Sarybaghysh was still peaceful. It is said that Ormon died in his daughter's arms after being mortally wounded by Balbay *baatyr* of the Bughu tribe. At that time, she was taken away from her husband and brought to her father's tribe. During the feud between the Bughu and Sarybaghysh, Borombay and his family considered her to be in captivity. P. Semenov negotiated with Ümötaaly for her release and he let her choose to either to return to her husband's tribe or to go back to her brother. She explained that while her brother suggested that she could stay with him and live in prosperity, she strongly insisted that she would prefer to return to her husband's family and tribe, to which she had been given by her parents of their own will. This is one piece of evidence that women were offered alternatives and the freedom to choose between them. See P. P. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, *Puteshestvie*, 225.

own *yurt* where he is only a guest, quite esteemed but voiceless and passive; whereas, she is an independent and absolute mistress.”⁸⁹ Severtsov’s observations resonate with Ch. Valikhanov’s account of his travels to the Kyrgyz of the Bughu tribe: “Women can have an influence on their husbands. The wives of *manaps* do not work. Even among the *kedey* women work very little, in short, husbands carry the firewood... Unheard of perversion in the Muslim east.”⁹⁰ Works of Kyrgyz oral literature also support Russian imperial officials’ impressions of Kyrgyz women as relatively independent.

Some scholars have argued that this kind of autonomy for women grew out of a relative weakness of Islam among the nomadic Kazakhs and Kyrgyz.⁹¹ But given that women in Kyrgyz and Kazakh societies enjoyed far greater freedom than women among the sedentary population of Central Asia, it seems much more likely that the pattern of gender relations was the result of the nomadic lifestyle itself. Nomadism, with its regular migrations and frequent raids and wars, demanded the active participation of both men and women in the life of their society.⁹² It was impossible for Kyrgyz women to confine themselves within the walls of their dwellings under these circumstances. Their household obligations included food preparation and various types of needlework. They were also responsible for making all the furnishings of the *yurt*.⁹³ Women

⁸⁹ Severtsov, *Puteshestviia*, 266.

⁹⁰ Valikhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, v. 1, 371.

⁹¹ On Islam and its daily practice among the Kyrgyz see Ch. Valikhanov, “Zapiski o kirgizakh,” *Sobraniiie sochinenii*, v. 1, 301-379; idem., “Dnevnik poezdki na Isyk Kul,” *Sobraniiie sochinenii*, v. 1, 228-288. According to B. Soltonoev, when the Kyrgyz accepted Islam, they did so only in words, and not in practice. Before the Russian conquest, only one in a thousand prayed regularly (performed the *namaz*). B. Soltonoev, *Kyrgyz tarykhy*, 15. More recent studies, however, challenge this notion of “weak Islam” among the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz. They view this belief as something that was constructed by the Russian colonial officials and muster substantial evidence to contradict it. See A. Frank, “A Month among the Qazaqs in the Emirate of Bukhara: Observations on Islamic Knowledge in a Nomadic Environment” in P. Sartori, ed. *Explorations in Social History*, (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 247-266.

⁹² B. Soltonoev mentions that many women were even active participants in battle. Soltonoev, *Kyrgyz tarykhy*, 18.

⁹³ The basic structure of the *yurt* is made from wood, and is usually constructed by male craftsmen. But women are solely responsible for making the rest of the *yurt*’s furnishings, including its its reed walls, its wall covers made of wool, and interior decorations such as *tush kiyiz*, [embroidered wall-hangings], and *kiyiz* and *shyrydaq*, [felt rugs made by various techniques].

helped to tend cattle and carried much of the physical burden during seasonal migrations. Child rearing was also exclusively women's responsibility.

Polygamy was widely practiced among the wealthier strata of Kyrgyz society. Borombay, the leader of the Bughu tribe, had four wives.⁹⁴ Each wife had their own *yurt* and migrated as a separate *ayil*. There was a hierarchy among the wives: usually the oldest wife, *baybiche*, commanded greater power within the household and had a larger *ayil*. The rest of the wives were in subordinate to the *baybiche*. Although polygamy is considered by some to have religious origins, there are indications that it was practiced among the Kyrgyz even before the spread of Islam.⁹⁵ There were several practical reasons for having multiple wives. First, having several wives made it easier to manage a large household. Next, sons were the carriers of the bloodline, and the means to expand the tribe. Having multiple wives, in this case, would increase the chances of having sons and in greater number. Sometimes, a second marriage came at the blessing of the first wife due to latter's inability to bear a child. Finally, polygamy sometimes arose from the practice of levirate marriage, which was wide-spread among the Kyrgyz during the nineteenth century.⁹⁶ The organization and economics of the northern Kyrgyz of the nineteenth century were defined by the primacy of kinship relations, the communal ownership of land and livestock, and the nomadic lifestyle. Kyrgyz social structure, in turn, reflected these characteristics.

⁹⁴ Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, *Puteshestvie*, 176.

⁹⁵ Abramzon, *Kirgizy*, 255.

⁹⁶ Levirate marriages also resulted from the family's desire to realize the value of *kalyng*, [bride-price] that had already been paid. I. G. Andreev, *Opisanie srednei ordy Kirgiz kaisakov* (Almaty: Ghylym, 1998), 63.

Tribal Community

On the eve of the Russian conquest, the Kyrgyz were a scattered community of tribes. Besides the territory of the present-day Kyrgyzstan, these tribes could be found in southern Kazakhstan and the northwest China; in the Ferghana valley at the western end of the Tian Shan mountain range, the territory of the present-day Tajikistan and Uzbekistan; and the Pamir and Alay mountain ranges which includes the territory of present-day Afghanistan. Each tribe had their own leader, or *biy*, and tribal rule was their highest form of governance.⁹⁷ They led a nomadic-pastoral lifestyle without much attachment to a particular territory. War and feuds were a major occupation, and they were often recruited by their sedentary neighbors to join in battle against another political entity.⁹⁸

There is a common agreement among the scholars that the tribal structure of the Kyrgyz was fluid and complex.⁹⁹ Experts stress the unstable nature of Kyrgyz tribal divisions and their constant transformation in response to shifting power relations. According to Begamaaly Dzhamgerchinov, there were cases when some tribes completely disappeared, or when new elements emerged from within tribal units to take on independent existence. A wide variety of genealogical histories also attest to these facts.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Daniel Prior, "Heroes, Chieftains, and the Roots of the Kirghiz Nationalism," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 6, 2 (2006): 74.

⁹⁸ It is important to note that even when embroiled in such military campaigns, the Kyrgyz remained independent actors, motivated at least in part by the potential for profit.

⁹⁹ Begamaaly Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie Kirgizii k Rossii* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'ni-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1959), 14-28; Saul Abramzon, *Kirgizy i ikh etnogeneticheskie i istoriko-kul'turnye svyazi* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1971), 26-27; Chokan Valikhanov, "Zapiski o kirgizakh," in Chokan Valikhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, v. 2, 40-48.

¹⁰⁰ Kengesh Zhusupov, ed. *Kyrgyzdar: Sanzhyyra, tarykh, muras, salt* (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan, 1993), v. 1-2; Sabyr Attokurov, *Kyrgyz sanzhyrasy* (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan, 1995); Osmonaaly Sydykov, *Tarykh kyrgyz Shadmanii: Kyrgyz sanzhyrasy* (Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1990). Most of these works were published in the 1990s.

Both, historians and the authors of tribal genealogies agree that the Kyrgyz were divided into three major groups: *ong qanat* (Right wing), *sol qanat* (Left wing) and *ichkilik* (Interior). The two “wings” are believed to have originated from the two sons of Dolon *biy*, Ak uul and Quu uul respectively.¹⁰¹ The Right wing consisted of three major branches, each named for the founder of the tribe: Taghay, Adygine, and Mungush.¹⁰² The Taghay branch consisted of the Sarybaghysh, Bughu, Solto, Tynymseyit, Sayaq, Chekir-Sayaq, Zhediger, Cherik, Baghysh, Azyq, Mongoldor, Baaryn, and Suu Murun tribes. It was the largest branch among the existing branches and its tribes occupied the central and a section of the western Tian Shan mountain range, the Chui valley and the basins of Lake Isyk Kul and the river Tekes along the southern foothills of the K kshaal Mountain.¹⁰³ The Adygine branch consisted of the Zhoru, B r , Barghy, Qara Baghysh, and Sarttar tribes. The Mongush branch had two tribes – the Zhaghalmay and Qosh Tamgha.¹⁰⁴ Tribes that belonged to these two branches dwelled in the eastern end of the Ferghana valley and the foothills of the Alay Mountains.¹⁰⁵ The tribes of the Left wing, such as the Qushchu, Saruu, Munduz, Zhetigen, Qitay, Basyz, T b y, and Chong Baghysh occupied the foothills of the Talas and Chatkal mountains, the foothills of the Ferghana ridge, and the slopes of the K kshaal ridge.¹⁰⁶ Finally, the third, Interior, group included the Qypchaq, Nayman, Teyit, Kesek, Zhoo Kesek, Qangdy, Boston, Noyghut, D  l s, and Avagat tribes. The majority of these tribes dwelled on the foothills of Alay and Turkestan mountain ridges, in the southern part of the Ferghana valley, and in the eastern Pamir Mountains.¹⁰⁷ Within these major divisions, the tribes are subdivided into smaller units. But it is important to keep in mind that this

¹⁰¹ Abramzon, *Kirgizy*, 26.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Idem., 29; Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 78.

¹⁰⁴ Abramzon, *Kirgizy*, 26.

¹⁰⁵ Abramzon, *Kirgizy*, 29; Bregel, *An Historical Atlas*, 78.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Abramzon, *Kirgizy*, 29.

kind of division of the tribes, in addition to their place of dwelling, was not permanent. Thus, the nineteenth century Kazakh ethnographer Chokan Valikhanov's record of the tribal division of the Kyrgyz will differ from that of the Soviet era ethnographer Saul Abramzon, since they worked during different time periods on the territory of the modern day Kyrgyzstan. Genealogical histories recorded from some of the Kyrgyz bards also vary in their details regarding the origin and structure of the tribes.

One question that scholars of Central Asian and Kyrgyz history have raised is the link between the group of people under the common ethnic name "Kyrgyz" that were found in earlier times in southern Siberia on the banks of the Yenisei River, and the group that more recently dwelled in the eastern part of Central Asia, on and around the Tian Shan, Pamir, and Alay mountain ranges.¹⁰⁸ Scholars' opinion on this question is divided; some scholars insist on the migration of the Yenisei Kyrgyz to Tian Shan over the period of 1300-1400 years. According to them, that migration was complete by the time of the Mongol invasion of Central Asia. Other scholars maintain that the Kyrgyz dwelled in Tian Shan long enough to trace their origins to Tian Shan Mountains, although the migration of the Kyrgyz from Yenisei region is not part of their theory. And yet another group of scholars insists that it occurred in several stages and dates it to a later period (300-400 years).¹⁰⁹ Thus, these historians delineate two distinct groups of Kyrgyz, the Yenisei and Tian Shan.

¹⁰⁸ See Nikolai Aristov, *Usunii i kyrgyzy ili kara-kyrgyzy: ocherki istorii i byta naseleniia zapadnogo Tian'-Shania i issledovaniia po ego istoricheskoi geografii* (Bishkek: Soros-Kyrgyzstan, 2001); Vasilii Bartol'd, *Kirgizy. Istoricheskii ocherk* (Frunze: Kirgizskoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1927); Dzhangerchinov, *Prisoedinenie; Abramzon, Kirgizy*; A. Karypkulov, *Istoriia Kirgizskoi SSR s drevneishikh dnei do nashikh vremen v piati tomakh* (Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1984), v. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Abramzon, *Kirgizy*, 14.

In the wake of the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century, it is believed that most Kyrgyz had already moved to the territory of Tian Shan, although a small number remained in the Yenisei region.¹¹⁰ From the thirteenth to seventeenth century, the Tian Shan Kyrgyz fell first under the dominance of Chaghatayid and Timurid states, and later under various Central Asian khanates and confederations. The late seventeenth century saw an intensification of Junghar attacks on the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs. Although both groups resisted Junghar rule, in 1635 and again during the 1680s, Junghar attacks forced most of the Kyrgyz tribes to flee southward into the Ferghana valley.¹¹¹

The Qing Empire, Kokand, and the Kyrgyz

In China, the Qing dynasty came to power in 1644 and over the next century asserted itself as an important political player in the region. The dynasty emerged as a confederation of tribes in the northeast of China under the leadership of the three tribal chieftains of the Aisin Gioro clan.¹¹² The Junghar Empire, which was wedged between the Russian and Qing empires, fell during the rule of the Qianlong emperor (r. 1735-1796) in 1758.¹¹³ After their defeat by the Qing imperial army, the Junghars were massacred by the Qing, Kazakhs, and Kyrgyz.¹¹⁴ This period witnessed a major move by some of the Kyrgyz tribes. They swore allegiance to the Qing

¹¹⁰ On the basis of the Russian archival sources from the 17th century, Barthold came to the conclusion that the Yenisei Kyrgyz were driven out of their territory by the Junghars in the beginning of the 18th century and since then “the existence of the Yenisei Kyrgyz as *narod* came to an end.” See Vasilii Bartol’d, “Kirgizy: Istoricheskii ocherk,” in Vasilii Bartol’d, *Sochineniia* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Vostochnoi literatury, 1963), v. 2, pt. 1, 524.

¹¹¹ Bregel, *An Historical Atlas*, 78; Daniel Prior, *The Sabdan Baatir Codex: Epic and the Writing of the Northern Kirghiz History* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 31.

¹¹² William T. Rowe, *China’s Last Empire: The Great Qing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 14.

¹¹³ *Idem.*, 74.

¹¹⁴ Nailia Bekmakhanova, “Narody Tsentral’noi Azii v sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii: prisoedinenie i vzaimosviazi (XVIII-XIX vv.) in *Prisoedinenie Kazakhstana i Srednei Azii k Rossii (XVIII – XIX veka)*, *Dokumenty*, Nailia Bekmakhanova, ed. (Moscow: Rossiiskaia akademiia nauk, 2008), 18; Prior, *Codex*, 32.

emperor, and returned from Ferghana back to central Tian Shan, the basin of Lake Isyk Kul, and the Chui valley.¹¹⁵ Several tribes including the Sayaq, Sarybaghysh, Adygine, and Mongoldor pledged their allegiance to the Qing emperor around 1759.¹¹⁶ These tribes recognized their weakness before the Qing's military might, and wished to avoid a power struggle. At the same time, the Qing pursued a moderate policy, avoiding encroachment on Kyrgyz pasture lands, the imposition of taxes, or conscription of Kyrgyz into the Qing military.¹¹⁷

As Laura Newby has noted, Qing administration of newly subjugated nomadic and settled polities was ambiguous. Conquered tribes were expected to send missions to Beijing in order to express their goodwill and send gifts, but apart from that there were few indications that they maintained close ties with the Qing Empire.¹¹⁸ For its part, the Qing court did not levy taxes on the newly acquired people and territories, did not expect them to “adopt their ways,” and did not plan to incorporate them either administratively or culturally.¹¹⁹ The only thing the Qing desired from these nomadic and sedentary clients was peace; yet with so many tribal confederations struggling for power in the region, even this would be hard to secure.

During the Qing assault against the Junghars, the city-state of Kokand began to emerge in Ferghana.¹²⁰ At least one Kokandian ruler, Irdana, expressed Kokand's submission to the rule of the Qing emperor, but over time this status would change in light of the growing strength of the

¹¹⁵ Prior, *Codex*, 32; Laura Newby, *The Empire and the Khanate: a Political History of Qing Relations with Khoqand c. 1760-1860* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 23.

¹¹⁶ Newby, *Empire*, 25. According to Chinese sources, close to 200,000 Kyrgyz pledged to serve the Chinese emperor.

¹¹⁷ *Idem.*, 24.

¹¹⁸ *Idem.*, 28. On the relationship between the steppe people and the Russian Empire see: Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500-1800* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

¹¹⁹ Newby, *Empire*, 29; Vladimir Ploskikh, *Kirgizy i Kokandskoe khanstvo* (Frunze: Izdatel'stvo Ilim, 1977), 80.

¹²⁰ On the history of the Khanate of Kokand see: Timur Beisembiev, *Tarikh-i Shakhrukhi kak istoricheskii istochnik* (Alma-Ata: Izdatel'stvo Nauka, 1987). On the Kyrgyz under the Khanate of Kokand see Ploskikh, *Kirgizy i Kokandskoe khanstvo*.

khanate. The relationship between the Qing Empire and Kokand began with tribute missions. According to Newby, the primary beneficiaries of these missions were the Kokandian traders attached to them: not only were their goods transported for free, but they also enjoyed exemption from taxes.¹²¹ The missions did require long-distance travel, and faced significant risk of robbery when passing through Kyrgyz territory, before reaching Altishahr. The benefits of trade, however, made the journey worthwhile.

If the relationship between Kokand and the Qing Empire centered on trade, the early relationship between Kokand and the Kyrgyz tribes was marked by confrontation. One of the first clashes occurred in the region of Osh in the Ferghana valley, and was fought between Irdana of Kokand and Azhy *biy* of the Adygine Kyrgyz. The conflict was sparked by repeated attacks on Kokandian trade caravans that were travelling to and from Altishahr by Adygine and other Kyrgyz tribes.¹²² Such attacks were a common occurrence, since the Kyrgyz economy relied in part on the goods acquired from robbing trade caravans. In 1762 Irdana responded to these raids by conquering Osh, and with incorporating the Adygine Kyrgyz into the Kokand Khanate. Irdana declared in a letter to the Qing emperor that the Kashgar Mountains now marked the borders between Kokand and the Qing Empire.¹²³

There was little stability in the Khanate of Kokand and its surroundings: tribal units moved often from place to place, and frequently one Kokandian ruler was replaced by another. Although the Qing court initially attempted to intervene in Kokand politics, it soon reverted to the policies of non-interference and neglect. The Qing authorities came to see conflicts between

¹²¹ Newby, *Empire*, 47-50

¹²² *Idem.*, 30; Ploskikh, *Kirgizy*, 89.

¹²³ Newby states that Irdana complied with a Qing order and retreated but, according to Ploskikh, Irdana ignored the orders and moved further to conquer more nomadic Kyrgyz tribes in Eastern Turkestan. Newby, *Empire*, 32; Ploskikh, *Kirgizy*, 90.

tribes and political units in Central Asia as a common occurrence, and therefore simply chose to ignore their squabbles. This did not prevent the rulers of different tribes and polities from asking the Qing court to intervene in their feuds.¹²⁴ But at no other time after 1760 did the Qing court dispatch troops to fight beyond its frontier posts.¹²⁵ By the end of the eighteenth century, the Qing policy of non-interference in the affairs of the frontier tribes had begun to undermine its influence on its nomadic neighbors. Increasingly, Kyrgyz tribes came under the influence of Kokand, which was consolidating its power and moving further north into Tian Shan.

Feuds between Kyrgyz and Kazakhs

While some of the Kyrgyz tribes chose to stay in Ferghana valley, one of the biggest tribes, the Sarybaghysh, returned from Ferghana to the Chui valley, where it came in close proximity to Kazakhs of the Great and Middle Hordes.¹²⁶ Along with other Kyrgyz of the Solto and Sayaq tribes, the Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz entered into disputes for pasture lands with their Kazakh neighbors, and particularly with Ablay, *sultan* of the Middle Horde.¹²⁷ Ablay rose to power after several successful military campaigns against Junghars in the 1720s and 1730s. During these years he was elected as a *sultan* of the Middle Horde.¹²⁸ In 1748, he attempted to oppose the Qing, in alliance with Nurali, *khan* of the Small Horde, and the Junghars. But after

¹²⁴ In 1767, Ablay, a *khan* of the Middle Horde, requested the help of Qing troops against Irdana in retaliation for the abduction of his wife and daughter and a murder of his brother and four sons, but there was no reaction from the Qing emperor to this incident. See Newby, *Empire*, 43.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Those Kyrgyz tribes who stayed in Ferghana valley came under the direct rule of the Khanate of Kokand and later came to be known as “southern” Kyrgyz. As for those who moved and settled to the north-east of Ferghana, to Tian Shan and Isyk Kul, they came to be known as “northern” Kyrgyz. Prior, *Codex*, 33; Ploskikh, *Kirgizy*, 91.

¹²⁷ On the division of the Kazakhs into *Zhuz* (Hordes) see V. V. Vostrov and M. S. Mukanov, *Rodoplemennoi sostav i rasseleniie kazakhov (konets XIX-nachalo XX v.)* (Alma-Ata: Izdatel'stvo “Nauka,” 1968), 8-108.

¹²⁸ Linda Benson and Ingvar Svansberg, *China's Last Nomads: The History and Culture of China's Kazakhs* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 37.

having witnessed the Qing success against the Junghars, he realigned himself with the Qing and entered into a trade agreement with them.¹²⁹

In fact, Ablay had nominally submitted to both the Russian and Qing thrones, in 1740 and 1757 respectively. After the fall of the Junghars, he tried to expand his authority over the Kazakhs of the Great Horde to the south-east, whose pastures closely bordered with those of the Kyrgyz. Here he came into contact with the Kyrgyz Solto and Sayaq tribes. From 1760 until 1775, various Kyrgyz tribes and Kazakhs of the Middle and Great Hordes engaged in numerous raids accompanied by widespread looting and killing. During this time, Ablay also led formal military campaigns against the Kyrgyz tribes. One of the fiercest battles took place in 1770, when, according to Chokan Valikhanov, the Kazakh scholar and ethnographer who was affiliated with the Imperial Russian Geographic Society, Kyrgyz of the both the Left and Right wings joined the fight against Ablay.¹³⁰ Also in 1770, Baraq, another *sultan* of the Middle Horde, raided *mazar*, the holy place, of the Kyrgyz saint Qochqor Ata.¹³¹ The Kyrgyz were deeply disturbed and retaliated by attacking Baraq's encampment, and killing Baraq and his accomplices. From that point, Kyrgyz horse-raiding on the Kazakhs began to increase.¹³² The last battle in the Chui valley between Ablay and the Kyrgyz tribes ended with a disaster for the Kyrgyz, who had to leave the Ili region and restrict their encampments to the area surrounding Lake Isyk Kul and the Chui valley.¹³³

¹²⁹ Kazaks traded their horses, oxen and sheep for Chinese silk, satin, and cotton cloth. See Benson and Svanberg, *China's Last Nomads*, 38-39.

¹³⁰ Valikhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, v. 2, 77-78.

¹³¹ Ibid. Interestingly, although Soltonoev mentioned Baraq's raid, he did not mention anything about Kochkor Ata. Soltonoev, *Kyrgyz tarykhy*, 183-185.

¹³² Prior, *Codex*, 35.

¹³³ Idem., 36.

Two prominent Kyrgyz chiefs from the Sarybaghysh tribe, Esenghul Bolot uulu and Atake Tynai uulu, gained prominence following the destruction of the Junghar empire and the conflicts with the Kazakh Hordes. Although initially Esengul and Atake combined forces to fight against the Kazakhs, later they split up. Atake was driven with his tribe to the north-east of Lake Issyk Kul, to the encampment of another Kyrgyz tribe, the Bughu.¹³⁴ It is believed that Esengul, who supported closer ties with the Khanate of Kokand, took issue with the fact that Atake had sent an envoy to St. Petersburg in 1784 with a declaration of submission.¹³⁵ Although this mission did not bear fruit, it is considered to be the first expression of Kyrgyz interest in coming under Russian rule.

After his defeat at the hands of Ablay and the Middle Horde, Esengul moved to the south, and in 1791 sent an envoy to Kokand, along with a tribute of twenty-eight horses. This was the moment when the Kokand began expanding northward, eventually building twenty fortresses and taverns on the Ili River and conquering the northern Kyrgyz tribes.¹³⁶ In 1821, after an extended conflict, the Kyrgyz tribes in the south were finally subdued by Kokand, but well before this, by the end of the eighteenth century, the Kokandian army had already begun moving northwards.¹³⁷

The next major conflict between the Kazakhs and the Kyrgyz tribes dates to the mid-1840s, when Kenesary, *sultan* of the Middle Horde and a grandson of Ablay, began a new series of raids on the northern Kyrgyz tribes. The stories of his incursions are well preserved in the oral

¹³⁴ Ploskikh, *Kirgizy*, 93.

¹³⁵ This mission is mentioned in the contemporary work of I. G. Andreev which he wrote from 1785-1790. Andreev states that the mission was sent in 1786 and came back in 1789. See I. G. Andreev, *Opisanie Srednei ordy kirgiz kaisakov*, ed. I. V. Erofeeva (Almaty: Ghylym, 1998), 51; Vladimir Ploskikh, *Pervye kirgizsko-russkie posol'skie sviazi, 1784-1827 gg.* (Frunze: Ilim, 1970).

¹³⁶ Soltonoev, *Kyrgyz tarykhy*, 242.

¹³⁷ The Qing Empire and its influence in the region were in rapid decline. See Newby, *Empire and the Khanate*. One of the major battles occurred at Ketmen Töbö fortress. Ploskikh, *Kirgizy*, 96.

literature of the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs and in the writings of the native historians.¹³⁸ In 1845, Kenesary sent a letter to the leaders of the northern Kyrgyz tribes demanding they acknowledge him as their khan.¹³⁹ Leaders of various Kyrgyz tribes, including the Sarybaghysh, Bughu, Solto, Sayaq, Cherek, Saruu, Kushchu, held a gathering and decided not to fulfill Kenesary's demands, so in 1845 Kenesary launched an incursion against the Kyrgyz.¹⁴⁰ The dispute escalated when Shooruk, *baatyr*¹⁴¹ of the Kazakh Great Horde, captured the Kyrgyz warrior, Jamanqara, when the latter was sent as an envoy to Shooruk's encampment. Jamanqara was then turned over to Kenesary, who had him tortured and killed.¹⁴² In retaliation, the Kyrgyz attacked the settlement of Shooruk killing him and his men.¹⁴³ A seemingly endless cycle of retaliatory violence ensued between the Kyrgyz and Kazakh tribes. The end of one bloody event was the beginning of another, and people on both sides were devastated from the incessant feuding. Chieftains of the Kyrgyz tribes began seeking help from the surrounding political entities. The Khanate of Kokand was in decline economically and its political situation was destabilized by constant power struggles among the ruling elite. Hence, although Kyrgyz tribes were formally under Kokand's protection, in reality it could do little to protect its subjects. In despair, various Kyrgyz tribes began separately sending envoys to the Governor-General of Western Siberia expressing their desire to come under the Russian rule.¹⁴⁴ Finally, in the spring of 1847, during his campaign against the Kyrgyz, Kenesary and his army were surrounded and captured by several Kyrgyz

¹³⁸ Soltonoev, *Kyrgyz Tarykhy*, 327-328; Zaki Akhmetov, ed. *Tarikhi zhyrlar. Kenesary – Nauryzbai* (Almaty: Bilim, 1996); Ermukhan Bekmakhanov, *Vosstaniie khana Kenesary, 1837-1847* (Alma-Ata: Gylm, 1992); Musa Chaghatayev, *Kenesarynyn Qyssasy* in D. Prior *The Sabdan Baatyr Codex: Epic and the Writing of the Northern Kirghiz History* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 148-154.

¹³⁹ Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 108.

¹⁴⁰ Idem., 110-111

¹⁴¹ Literally "brave man" or "hero."

¹⁴² Prior, *Codex*, 80.

¹⁴³ Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 111.

¹⁴⁴ Different Kyrgyz tribes sent their envoys to Russia in 1812, 1824, 1844, 1848, 1852, and 1856. See Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 113-158.

tribes. They executed Kenesary and sent an envoy to Omsk, carrying his head.¹⁴⁵ After Kenesary's death, tensions between the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz decreased significantly, but another long war began this time between the two Kyrgyz tribes, the Bughu and Sarybaghysh.

Tribal Wars: the Bughu and Sarybaghysh

Wars between different tribes were a common occurrence throughout Kyrgyz history. These wars might arise from various causes, but the most common was tribal conflict over pasture lands. The nomadic lifestyle necessitated that tribes move from one place to another, in search of a better grazing land for their livestock. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, each Kyrgyz tribe had more-or-less designated areas where they spent their winters and summers. The decision to invade and occupy another tribe's pasture land was usually made by the leaders of the tribe. These campaigns resulted in rampant looting, numerous deaths, and sometimes the destruction of entire households.

The nineteenth century witnessed several of such wars among the Kyrgyz tribes. War between the Solto and Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz in the mid-1820s served as an excuse for the Khanate of Kokand to move into the Chui valley, to side with and protect the Solto.¹⁴⁶ In the

¹⁴⁵ According to one source, Jantay, the chief of Sarybaghysh tribe, gave Kenesary to another *manap* Khozhambek Tashtanbekov, who had lost two brothers during the feuds with Kenesary. Khodzhambek "...cut off Kenesary Kasymov's nose, pulled out his right mustache, then, after a series of tortures, he cut off his head and put it inside his belly." In K. Stepniak, *Materialy k istorii sultana Kenesary Kasymova. (Vospominaniia kara-kirgiza Kaligully Alibekova o poslednikh dniakh Kenesary)*, eds. Polivanov and Dosmukhamedov (Tashkent: Turkestanskoe Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1923). Also see Aristov, *Usuni i kyrgyzy*, 485; "Uvedomitel'noe pis'mo manapa plemeni Sarybaghysh Dzhantaia Karabekova General Gubernatoru Zapadnoi Sibiri P. D. Gorchakovu o zhelanii priniat' pokrovitel'stvo Rossii," ot 10 sentiabria, 1848. In Zhangyl Abdyldebek kyzy, ed. *Shabdan Baatyr: Epokha i lichnost'* (Bishkek: Sham, 1999), 31-34.

¹⁴⁶ In 1825, Madali, the *khan* of Kokand, sent close to 4,000 troops to subdue the Kyrgyz of the Chui valley. The Solto and Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz that inhabited the Chui valley were brought under the rule of the Kokand army. But part of the Sarybaghysh tribe moved to Lake Isyk Kul to the land of the Bughu Kyrgyz. That same year, Pishpek was established on the bank of the river Chui as a Kokandian fortress. See Ploskikh, *Kirgizy*, 102; Prior, *Codex*, 38; Vladimir Galitskii, *Istoriia goroda Pishpeka, 1878-1917* (Frunze: Izdatel'stvo Ilim, 1980), 19.

1830s and 1840s there were several clashes between the Sarybaghysh and Sayaq tribes. The Sayaq Kyrgyz, who inhabited Zhumghal and Qochqor valleys, had suffered incessant raids by the Sarybaghysh tribe. In retaliation, the Sayaq Kyrgyz attacked and razed several Sarybaghysh villages in the Chui valley, taking most of their livestock.¹⁴⁷ In another instance, during the 1850s, a Sayaq chief supported by Kokand, Medet *Datqa* (a title given by Kokand), moved against the Bughu tribe, raided their settlement, and took numerous captives.¹⁴⁸ Weakened, the Bughu Kyrgyz had to move south toward the Qing border, but once recovered, they attacked the Sayaq tribe in retaliation.¹⁴⁹ Thus, one conflict between the tribes led inevitably to the next one, and all sides weakened as a result.

In light of these wars, the Kyrgyz tribes looked for stronger political entities to provide aid and protection. Whereas the Sayaq tribe relied heavily on Kokand and the Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz, the Bughu looked for support among the Qing and the Russians.¹⁵⁰ Yet this kind of protection did not guarantee that the tribes would remain loyal towards their protectors. Loyalties could easily shift, depending on the profit to be gained from an alliance with a stronger partner. Whenever the opportunity presented itself, tribes were ready to expand their territory and sphere of influence.¹⁵¹

By the end of the eighteenth century, frequent wars between the tribes had weakened them, making them easy prey for the Kokand Khanate, which had already vanquished the

¹⁴⁷ Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 93; Soltonoev, *Kyrgyz tarykhy*, 250-255.

¹⁴⁸ Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 93; Prior, *Codex*, 37

¹⁴⁹ Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 94.

¹⁵⁰ In 1831, the Qing court made an agreement with Kokand about keeping the descendants of *khojas* outside its borders and thus gave up its rights over the earlier subjugated Kyrgyz. After that, Kokand built the fortification Qurtka in Naryn. See Aristov, *Usuni i kyrgyzy*, 478.

¹⁵¹ Thus, the same Sayaq tribe, who went against the Bughu with the help of Kokand earlier, showed their armed resistance to the Kokand army which moved to incorporate them into the khanate. See Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 94.

southern Kyrgyz tribes and was moving north. Its gradual conquest of the Kyrgyz tribes was completed by 1830s. The northern Kyrgyz tribes were subjugated to the Khanate of Kokand during the reign of Madali Khan (r.1823-1842). The last campaign against the northern Kyrgyz tribes was led by two prominent Kokandian military commanders: Lashkar Qushbegi and Khaq Quly. In 1831, Lashkar Qushbegi moved with his army through Chimkent and Auliya-Ata to the Chui valley; while, Khaq Quly moved from Ferghana to central Tian Shan. Almost all of the northern Kyrgyz tribes were subjugated at that time, and several military fortifications were built in order to administer the newly acquired subjects.¹⁵²

The Khanate of Kokand consisted of four *vilayets*: Andijan, Namangan, Marghelan, and Kokand.¹⁵³ Tashkent was added later, forming one of the largest *vilayets*.¹⁵⁴ The administrative structure of Kokand resembled that of its neighboring states, the Emirate of Bukhara and the Khanate of Khiva. State revenue derived largely from various taxes levied on its settled and nomadic population.¹⁵⁵ There was no written rule of law in the khanate, and power was concentrated in the hands of the reigning khan and those who were closest to him at any given point in time. High-level coups and intrigues were common, especially during the final years of the khanate.

The northern Kyrgyz tribes of the Chui and Talas valleys and the Isyk Kul basin were under the jurisdiction of the Tashkent *kushbegi*, and were governed from fortifications in Pishpek, Toqmoq, Auliya-Ata, and Merke.¹⁵⁶ These Kokandians strongholds were built to

¹⁵² Among them were Pishpek, Toqmoq, Qurtka, Toghuz Toroo, Barsqoon, etc. All of these fortifications were turned into administrative, trade, financial, and military centers after the Khanate of Kokand secured its position in the region. See Ploskikh, *Kirgizy*, 105; Dzhangerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 95.

¹⁵³ *Vilayet* is an administrative district or province. Each *vilayet* had its own head, a *kushbegi*.

¹⁵⁴ Ploskikh, *Kirgizy*, 111.

¹⁵⁵ Beisembiev, *Tarikh-i Shakhrukhi*, 18.

¹⁵⁶ Ploskikh, *Kirgizy*, 110; Dzhangerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 96.

facilitate the administration of each conquered territory as well as to discourage Russian encroachment from the north and interference in Kyrgyz politics.¹⁵⁷ These forts functioned as military, administrative, financial, and trade centers.¹⁵⁸ They were built at locations with concentrations of Kyrgyz tribes considered to pose a risk to the khanate.¹⁵⁹ Although each fortress had an officially appointed *rais* who was responsible for the collection of taxes and other administrative tasks, Kokand did not have strict rules for managing people whose lifestyle required seasonal migration. In reality, power among the nomadic Kyrgyz lay with the tribal chiefs (*biys* and *manaps*), and Kokandian administrators relied heavily on their influence and knowledge in governing the nomadic tribes.¹⁶⁰ Because they enjoyed the trust of the local Kokandian administrative officials and showed little dependence on the central authorities of the Khanate, some of the Kyrgyz tribal chiefs grew in power and influence. They began to exert their authority over other Kyrgyz tribal formations, which was to become another source of tribal conflict.

One of the bloodiest of these wars erupted in 1855, between the Bughu and Sarybaghysh tribes and resulted in the death of the chief of the Sarybaghysh, Ormon.¹⁶¹ Both tribes had been seeking Russian protection since 1812. The pasture lands of the Bughu tribe bordered with that of the Kazakhs, who had already become Russian subjects, and the Bughu felt empowered by their close proximity to the Russian military outpost in Vernyi to engage in military campaigns

¹⁵⁷ Aristov, *Usuni i kyrgyzy*, 487.

¹⁵⁸ Ploskikh, *Kirgizy*, 138.

¹⁵⁹ Idem., 140. On Kokandian fortresses see idem., 137-156; on Pishpek, idem., 144.

¹⁶⁰ Aristov, *Usuni i kyrgyzy*, 487.

¹⁶¹ According to Soltonoev, Ormon was born in 1791-92. He had participated in wars from the age of eighteen. When he was twenty-five, he assumed a ruling position in his tribe. When he was thirty-seven or thirty-nine, he was elected a *khan* of the northern Kyrgyz tribes during an all-tribal assembly in Qochqor (Although, his title as a *khan* is disputed, and interpreted differently in different sources). See Soltonoev, *Kyrgyz tarykhy*, 285. Different dates are given for Ormon's death; they range from 1853 to 1855 in various sources.

against the Sarybaghysh. Borombay, the chief of the Bughu tribe, hoped to regain his lost pastures around the Lake Isyk Kul with the help of the Russians. As for the Sarybaghysh, they were backed by Kokand, which had its own interest in suppressing the Bughu Kyrgyz.¹⁶² Kokand was aware of its nomadic subjects' growing interest in joining Russia, and sought every opportunity to bring these "stray" subjects back to the fold.

One of the leading figures in this war was Ormon, chief of the Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz of the Esengul branch. Although his tribe was under Kokandian rule, Ormon declared himself the khan of the Kyrgyz tribes,¹⁶³ and pursued his own policy distinct from that of the khanate. He collected taxes from other Kyrgyz tribes and took pains to demonstrate his independence of Kokand. Various sources note that under Ormon's leadership, his tribe was the most warlike among all of the Kyrgyz, and this made them particularly dangerous to Kokand.¹⁶⁴ Kokand attempted to maintain its authority over Ormon and other chieftains of the tribe by awarding them titles and gifts, but the war against the Bughu provided a unique opportunity for Kokand to demonstrate its importance to Ormon by backing him militarily.

The war between the Bughu and Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz can be traced to various causes. The underlying basis of the feud seems to be the Sarybaghysh tribe's deficit of good pasture lands.¹⁶⁵ Contemporary sources indicate that immediate cause that sparked the conflict was Borombay's refusal to return one of Ormon's tribesmen, who had fled unfair treatment by

¹⁶² Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 149.

¹⁶³ On the ceremony in which Ormon assumed the title of *khan*, see Soltonoev, *Kyrgyz tarykhy*, 285; Talyp Moldo, "Ormon khan tuuraluu," in *Kyrgyzdar*, ed. Kengesh Zhusupov (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan, 1993), v. 2, 518-519.

¹⁶⁴ Valikhanov mentions that Ormon crushed the Kokandian post in Kötimaldy (present-day Balyqchy) and burned down the palace of the *khan*. Valikhanov, *Sochineniia*, v.2, 81.

¹⁶⁵ Nikolai Severtsov, *Puteshestviia po Turkestanskomu kraiu* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Geograficheskoi Literatury, 1947), 176; Aristov, *Usuni i kyrgyzy*, 189.

Ormon and joined the Bughu Kyrgyz.¹⁶⁶ This led to incursions and *barymta* raids between the two tribes.¹⁶⁷ Finally, Ormon declared war on the Bughu and attacked their settlements. Initially Ormon had some success in his campaign, but later, during his assault on the Borombay's settlement, he was surrounded and fatally wounded by the Bughu military leader Balbay. He died in the hands of his daughter Qulan, who was married to Borombay's son Ömürzaq.¹⁶⁸ The Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz retaliated and Ümötaaly, Ormon's son, set out to take revenge for his father. He razed the Bughu settlements at night, and took many captives, mostly women and children.

After a fierce battle to the north-east of Lake Isyk Kul, the Bughu tribe was completely overwhelmed and forced to retreat towards the Qing border. There were significant casualties on both sides; however, the Bughu Kyrgyz suffered far greater losses: not only they were displaced from their pastures, but they also lost much of their livestock, and their crop for that year.¹⁶⁹ Desperate, the Bughu appealed to the Qing authorities in Eastern Turkestan for help in driving the Sarybaghysh from their lands and to recapturing their livestock. Borombay had been among the leaders of eighteen Kyrgyz tribes who, in the late 1820s, had sworn the allegiance to the Qing emperor and were awarded buttons ranging from 2nd to 5th rank, so it was natural that in this

¹⁶⁶ Talyp Moldo, "Ormondun bughudan ölüshü," in *Kyrgyzdar*, 519-523; Soltonev, *Kyrgyz tarykhy*, 332-337; Severtsov, *Puteshestviia*, 175.

¹⁶⁷ *Barymta* (also spelled as *baranta* in Russian) was a practice of the nomadic tribes of Central Asia, including the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs. It involves the theft of livestock from individuals or groups who overstep social norms, as a way of correcting their behavior and deterring future transgressions. For a detailed discussion of the practice of *barymta* within Kazakh cultural and legal contexts see Virginia Martin, *Law and Custom in the Steppe: The Kazakhs of the Middle Horde and Russian Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), 140-155.

¹⁶⁸ Soltonev, *Kyrgyz tarykhy*, 337; Mentioned by Semenov in Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 150.

¹⁶⁹ Dzhamgerchinov cites an archival document: a letter from Borombay to the *pristav* of the Great Horde, in which he complains about the loss of all their possessions. Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 151.

predicament, Borombay thought to request help from the Qing.¹⁷⁰ However, the Qing court, which initially courted these tribes, had soon realized that it could not trust their loyalties not to stray to the Khanate of Kokand or Russia. Qing rule in Eastern Turkestan was in decline and the Qing administration in Kashgar was continuously threatened by *khoja* resistance in the region. Under these circumstances, the court was no longer able to compel the allegiance of tribes outside its borders, nor to provide them any protection.

Since Kokand had backed the Sarybaghysh tribe, the Bughu Kyrgyz had no choice but to dispatch an envoy to Vernyi requesting Russian protection.¹⁷¹ In his letter to the superintendent of the Great Horde Kazakhs, Lieutenant Colonel M. D. Peremyshl'skii, Borombay reminded him that the Bughu had once taken an oath of allegiance to the Russian tsar, and that since that time they had "hoped for peaceful existence, but on the contrary, [their] misfortunes increased."¹⁷² He added that Kokand and the Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz were common enemies of the Bughu and the Kazakhs of the Great Horde. He requested that the Russians build a small outpost near Lake Isyk Kul and place military detachment there.¹⁷³ While they waited for their envoy to return, the Bughu had to prepare for the onset of winter. Since it was impossible for them to remain in the mountain gorges of Tekes and Karkyra, along the Qing border, they had to return to their previous winter pastures near Lake Isyk Kul. This brought the Bughu Kyrgyz back under

¹⁷⁰ Nayancheng, a Qing Councilor in Kashgar, secured the submission of the Bughu, along with many other Kyrgyz tribes including the Sarybaghysh, Solto, and Sayaq. He issued forty three leaders of various Kyrgyz tribes with rewards and insignia. Newby, *Empire*, 147.

¹⁷¹ Qachybek Sheralin of the Bughu was sent to the *pristav* of the Great Horde in Vernyi. Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 152.

¹⁷² Cited in Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 152. On ambivalence in the meaning of an oath of allegiance for Russian imperial officials and the nomads of the steppe see Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier: the Making of a Colonial Society, 1500-1800* (Bloomington: Indiana Univeristy Press, 2002), 51-56. On oath-taking within the imperial legal context see Virginia Martin, "Kazakh Oath-Taking in Colonial Courtrooms: Legal Culture and Russian Empire-Building," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, no. 3 (2004): 483-514.

¹⁷³ Idem., 153.

Kokandian jurisdiction and, while they waited to hear from their envoy, Kokand sent its people to collect taxes from the weakened Bughu.¹⁷⁴

In September of 1855, however, Peremyshl'skii sent the Bughu envoy back, accompanied by a Cossack regiment. Faced with a superior force, the Kokandians had to retreat. The Cossack commander was instructed to do his best to bring peace between the Sarybaghysh and Bughu Kyrgyz. This effort was unsuccessful, since neither party was ready to enter into peaceful negotiations. As soon as the Cossack regiment returned to Vernyi, the Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz once more attacked and razed the Bughu settlements and took captives. This time, Borombay's wives, daughters, and sons along with his servants and livestock were captured and taken away by the Sarybaghysh.¹⁷⁵ Again the Bughu migrated to the Qing border and sent an envoy to Vernyi. Borombay begged for a permanent Russian presence among the Bughu, so that "looking at them, the enemy would not be able to come close."¹⁷⁶ Interestingly, at the same moment as Borombay sent his envoy, Ümötaaly, son of the dead Sarybaghysh chieftain Ormon, sent his own representative to Vernyi with a letter in which he justified his attacks on the Bughu on the basis that they had not only killed Ormon, but also refused to pay the *qun*, [blood price] for the dead.¹⁷⁷ The new *pristav* in Vernyi, Colonel M.M. Khomentovskii, answered Ümötaaly with a harsh letter reprimanding him for the Sarybaghysh's unjustified war against the Bughu and threatening Russian military intervention if the raids continued.¹⁷⁸ At the same time, in order to

¹⁷⁴ Idem., 154.

¹⁷⁵ Idem., 155.

¹⁷⁶ Cited in Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 155.

¹⁷⁷ Expenses that are negotiated and paid by someone considered to be at fault in the death of an individual. In general, the higher the standing of that individual was in the society, the higher the *qun*.

¹⁷⁸ Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 156.

teach the Sarybaghysh a lesson and provide a counter-balance to Kokand, Khomentovskii encouraged the Kazakhs to undertake raids against the Sarybaghysh and Solto.¹⁷⁹

By this time it was obvious that the hostilities between the Bughu and Sarybaghysh would not end without outside intervention. In May 1856, Khomentovskii secured permission from G. Kh. Gasfort, the Governor-General of Western Siberia, to set out on an expedition to Lake Isyk Kul.¹⁸⁰ Although the main goal of the expedition was to conduct a reconnaissance of the region, Khomentovskii did meet with leaders of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz tribes and conducted peace negotiations.¹⁸¹ It appeared that the Bughu and Sarybaghysh had reached a mutual agreement and would be able to coexist peacefully. But this was not the case, and soon after the expedition's departure, the Sarybaghysh invaded the Bughu again, and the latter were forced to move once again to the Qing border. The Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz went on to rob a Russian trade caravan bound for Tashkent and made several *barymta* raids against the Kazakhs of the Great Horde who, by 1856, were fully integrated into the Russian empire.¹⁸² This escalation by the Sarybaghysh did not go unnoticed, and in the fall of 1856, a Cossack regiment attacked and demolished a Sarybaghysh settlement located near the Kokandian fortification of Toqmoq.¹⁸³

After the clash, Khomentovskii wanted to reevaluate the attitude of the Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz. He ordered P. P. Semenov Tian-Shanskii,¹⁸⁴ a Russian scientist and a member of the Imperial Russian Geographic Society, who was on a scholarly mission in the region, to undertake

¹⁷⁹ Idem., 157.

¹⁸⁰ Ch. Valikhanov participated in this expedition and wrote about it extensively in his "Dnevnik poezdki na Isyk Kul." See Ch. Valikhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, v. 1, 306-358.

¹⁸¹ Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 159; Valikhanov, v.1, 37.

¹⁸² Petr Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, *Puteshestviie v Tian'-Shan'* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo geograficheskoi literatury, 1958), 122.

¹⁸³ Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 162; Semenov, *Puteshestvie*, 122.

¹⁸⁴ On Semenov Tian-Shanskii see Bruce Lincoln, *Petr Petrovich Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii: the Life of a Russian Geographer* (Newtonville, Massachusetts: Oriental Research Partners, 1980).

a new expedition to the Sarybaghysh, accompanied by a regiment of ninety Cossacks.¹⁸⁵

Semenov reached the Sarybaghysh settlement at Kötimaldy, on the shores of Lake Isyk Kul, but was unable to meet with Ümötaaly, the Sarybaghysh chief. Semenov enjoyed the hospitality of the Sarybaghysh and later met with Ümötaaly's uncle and other tribal elders. He explained the purpose of his visit to the Sarybaghysh and warned them about the dire consequences if hostilities against the Russians and the Kazakhs of the Great Horde continued.¹⁸⁶

Yet, skirmishes between the Sarybaghysh and Bughu continued unabated. In the spring of 1857, Semenov organized another trip to Tian Shan. Once again his purpose was both scientific and diplomatic. During the trip Semenov met with Borombay, who was approaching his eighties.¹⁸⁷ He assisted the expedition by providing Semenov with supplies for his trip. In exchange, Borombay was to be protected from the Sarybaghysh by Tezek, the *sultan* of the Great Horde, and his army of eight hundred men, who were safeguarding Semenov on his trip.¹⁸⁸ On the way to Tian Shan, while crossing deserted Bughu pasture lands, Semenov and his expedition witnessed a "dead field" of frozen bodies, remnants of the latest battle between the Bughu and Sarybaghysh.¹⁸⁹

Semenov believed that the very fact of his expedition's visit and their stay with the Bughu guaranteed the return of all of Borombay's possessions in the basin of Lake Isyk Kul and that his union with the Kazakh *sultan* Tezek would provide him with reliable security.¹⁹⁰ When Semenov returned to the settlement, however, Borombay expressed two additional requests.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁵ Semenov, *Puteshestvie*, 122.

¹⁸⁶ *Idem.*, 128.

¹⁸⁷ *Idem.*, 175.

¹⁸⁸ *Idem.*, 177.

¹⁸⁹ *Idem.*, 192.

¹⁹⁰ *Idem.*, 209.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

First, he asked Semenov to write a letter to Ümötaaly asking that he return Borombay's wives and daughters-in-law. This wish was easy for Semenov to fulfill: he had already taken two Sarybaghysh men captive during his expedition, so he simply released them with the letter to Ümötaaly. Semenov had high hopes that his request would be granted, since he had earlier visited Ümötaaly's encampment and became *tamyr*,¹⁹² blood-related friend, with him.¹⁹³ Second, Borombay asked Semenov's assistance in helping him to become a Russian subject, along "with all his tribe and all of his possessions which consisted of all of the eastern part of the Lake Isyk-Kul basin and all of the northern hills of the Tian Shan Mountains."¹⁹⁴ This wish was harder to fulfill. Semenov promised that he would raise the issue of bringing the Bughu under Russian rule when he returned to Vernyi and to Saint Petersburg, but first, he needed to "finish his acquaintance with [Borombay's] domain."¹⁹⁵

The Russian Advance

Borombay died in 1858, but clashes between the Bughu and Sarybaghysh continued long afterward. Borombay's death led to the division of the Bughu Kyrgyz into two camps: one which sided with Kokand and one oriented toward Russia. As a result, the process of electing a tribal leader, a head *manap*, was fraught with difficulties. Finally, thanks to the intervention of the

¹⁹² *Tamyr* (also known as *tamyrstvo* in Russian) means "vein" in Kyrgyz, and here it means a very close, blood-related friend. V. Martin defines it as "a strong bond of friendship symbolically consecrated by the exchange of gifts." Martin, *Law and Custom*, 142.

¹⁹³ By the time Semenov returned to Borombay's settlement after his expedition to Tian-Shan, Ümötaaly had sent a letter to Semenov stating that he was not willing to negotiate with Borombay until both sides come to a peace agreement and could make a "calculated" exchange between the tribes. However, since Semenov had become *tamyr* with Ümötaaly, he was sending him Borombay's wife and daughters-in-law to Semenov as a gift, to do with as he pleases. See Semenov, *Puteshestvie*, 225.

¹⁹⁴ *Idem.*, 209.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Russian administration in Western Siberia, Borombay's son Ömürzaq was appointed temporary head of the tribe.¹⁹⁶ Meanwhile, Kokand, hoping to use the split within the Bughu tribe to its own benefit, instigated a new round of conflict between the Bughu and Sarybaghysh, as a way of bringing the Bughu tribe back under its wings. It was at this point that Russia began to seriously consider expanding its territory and assuming authority over the northern Kyrgyz tribes.¹⁹⁷ This change in policy came as a result of the frequent envoys sent by the northern Kyrgyz tribes expressing their wish to come under the Russian rule; the reports from several Russian military and scientific expeditions;¹⁹⁸ the endless clashes between the Kyrgyz and Kazakh tribes; and, Kokand's antagonistic policy which was aimed at controlling and taxing the Bughu.¹⁹⁹

The Russian advance into Central Asia was a final stage in its expansion to the south over the course of many centuries. Practical, geopolitical, and trade reasons drove the Russian imperial expansion first to the Kazakh steppe, then further down to the territory of Central Asian khanates.²⁰⁰ By the nineteenth century Kazakhs became a source of constant trouble at the frontier. They plundered Russian settlements, took hostages, and raided trade caravans that travelled between Russia and Central Asia. "Pacification" of the nomadic people of the steppe

¹⁹⁶Borombay's twenty year-old son Ömürzaq was presented to G. Kh. Gasford in Vernyi, where Gasford instructed him to "keep peace within his tribe so that Kokandians would not use their disputes and would not interfere in their affairs." Dokument no. 91, "1858 g. iul'ia 26 – otnoshenie komandira Otdel'nogo Sibirskogo korpusa, general-gubernatora G.Kh. Gasforda ministru inostrannykh del Gorchakovu A. M. o kokandsko-kirgizskikh otnosheniiakh i priniatii kirgizami Rossiiskogo poddanstva." In Bekmakhanova, ed., *Prisoedinenie Kazakhstana*, 222 – 225; Dzhangerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 174.

¹⁹⁷ Although the Russian advance further down south was planned in 1854, it was delayed due to the Crimean war (1854-1856). See Richard A. Pierce *Russian Central Asia 1867-1917. A Study in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), 19.

¹⁹⁸ Ch. Valikhanov, N.A. Severtsov, P.P. Semenov, M.I. Veniukov's expeditions from 1855-1860.

¹⁹⁹ There was a brief correspondence between the *rais* of Pishpek, Atabek *Datqa*, and the commander of Alatau district, colonel Kolpakovskii. The latter warned Kokand against any aggressive moves toward the Bughu, who had taken an oath of allegiance to Russia and been Russian subjects since 1855. See Dzhangerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 179.

²⁰⁰ On Russian imperial interest and presence in the Kazakh Steppe and Central Asia see Pierce, *Russian Central Asia*; Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier*. On Russian imperial expansion in general see John LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700-1917: the Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

would open up a possibility of Russian trade with Kokand, Bukhara, and Khiva and further with Persia and India. Another reason was the possibility of establishing Russian peasant settlements on what considered to be rich and vast Kazakh steppe. Finally, the Russian advance was driven by the imperial concerns for the British commercial and political expansion into Central Asia.²⁰¹ In this light, Russia's new goal became to connect the Siberian line of Russian fortifications with that of the Syr-Dar'ia line, thus achieving a reasonable degree of peace and stability at the border.²⁰²

In February of 1860, two Cossack regiments set out from Vernyi to the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul. They were instructed to destroy any fortifications built by the Kokandians to punish those *manaps* of the Bughu tribe who showed support for Kokand and to reward the ones who favored Russia's presence in the region.²⁰³ They also planned to carry off some of the *manaps* of the Sarybaghysh tribe,²⁰⁴ who had long battled the Bughu Kyrgyz and various Kazakh tribes, if they refused to reach a peace agreement with the Bughu. This expedition brought all the Bughu *manaps* securely under Russian rule, intimidated the Kokandian troops into fleeing the area and drove the Sarybaghysh deep into Tian Shan. It also demonstrated the relative weakness of the Kokandian troops and raised the possibility of further advances to capture Toqmoq and Pishpek, two Kokandian fortresses used to control the northern Kyrgyz tribes.

²⁰¹ Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: the Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (New York: Kodansha International, 1992).

²⁰² Kokand's belligerence affected more than just the Kyrgyz tribes. In 1855, *biys* of the Kazakh Great Horde sent a letter to the Governor-General of Western Siberia, G. Kh. Gasford, about Kokandian oppression. They wrote that they had killed Kokandian officials sent to collect *zakat*, surrounded Kokandian fortresses, and killed close to two thousand Sarts. They asked for military assistance and expressed their willingness to submit to Russia. See Dokument no. 90, "1858 g. – Perevod s tatarskogo pis'ma biev kazakhskikh rodov Starshego zhuza general-gubernatoru Zapadnoi Sibiri G. Kh. Gasfordu o pritesneniakh so storony kokandskogo pravitel'ia i pros'ba o priniatii ikh v poddanstvo Rossii." In N. Bekmakhanova, ed. *Prisoedinenie Kazakhstana*, 220-221.

²⁰³ Dzhangerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 178-181; Aristov, *Usuni i kyrgyzy*, 496.

²⁰⁴ The major target was the Sarybaghysh *manap* Törögeldi, infamous for his raids against the Bughu.

In August 1860, Russian troops led by Colonel A. E. Tsimmerman occupied and demolished the Toqmoq fortification without any casualties.²⁰⁵ Just before the fortress was captured, a delegation of *manaps* from the Sarybaghysh tribe, headed by Shabdan,²⁰⁶ came to Tsimmerman expressing their wish to become Russian subjects and their willingness to assist the Russian troops.²⁰⁷ This was a well- calculated move on their part, especially considering the Russian troops soon proceeded to take over and destroy another major fortification, Pishpek, further strengthening their position in the Chui valley. With that, the Russians had achieved their goals in the Chui and Zailiiskii regions: they had demonstrated their military capabilities to Kokand and to the northern Kyrgyz and Kazakh tribes. Soon after Tsimmerman's troops left the region, however, Malla khan of Kokand (r. 1823-1862) ordered his general and the governor of Tashkent, Qanaat Shah, to march his own large army into the area. In October 1860, Kokandian and Russian troops engaged in a major battle in the valley of the Qara-Qastek River, which ended with the victory of the Russian troops under Colonel G. A. Kolpakovskii.²⁰⁸ Because of their poor military training and equipment, the Kokandians suffered great losses, and were forced to retreat beyond the Chui valley, where Qanaat Shah began rebuilding destroyed fortifications.²⁰⁹

The northern Kyrgyz tribes did not participate in the battle of Qara-Qastek.²¹⁰ Instead, they took a wait-and-see approach as the events unfolded after Qanaat Shah's arrival. On the one

²⁰⁵ Aristov, *Usuni i kyrgyzy*, 496; Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 198.

²⁰⁶ Shabdan, son of the Sarybaghysh *manap* Jantay, will be frequently mentioned in later chapters of this dissertation in regard to the Russian rule and administration of the region.

²⁰⁷ Yet a part of the Sarybaghysh and Solto tribes, led by *manaps* Ümötaaly, Törögeldi, Baytik, and Zhangharach, refused to recognize the Russian rule and escaped, together with their tribes. See Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 197; Aristov, *Usuni i kyrgyzy*, 496.

²⁰⁸ Aristov, *Usuni i kyrgyzy*, 497-498; Prior, *Codex*, 41; Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 208.

²⁰⁹ Aristov, *Usuni i kyrgyzy*, 497; Ploskikh, *Kirgizy*, 299.

²¹⁰ One of the most influential chieftains of the southern Kyrgyz Adygine tribe, Alymbek *Datqa*, was among the battle leaders. He was close to Kokandian court and later played a major role in deposing Malla Khan of Kokand for

hand, this pleased the Russians, and G. Kh. Gasfort, the Governor-General of Western Siberia, ordered his men to avoid “repressive measures towards the Kyrgyz,” in order to convince them of the benefits of Russian rule.²¹¹ On the other hand, Kyrgyz indecisiveness was punished by the Kokandian leadership. Thus, Qanaat Shah reprimanded two of the *manaps* of the Solto tribe, Jangarach and Baytik, for sending congratulations to Tsimmerman after he took Pishpek. As punishment, Qanaat ordered the *manaps* to shoulder the entire burden for reconstructing the fortress at Pishpek and to provide the Kokandian forces with armed men, horses, and food.²¹²

After the battle of Qara-Qastek, the relationship between Russia and Kokand held steady until the summer of 1861, when Kokand again sent people to the Bughu tribe to collect taxes.²¹³ The pro-Russian Bughu *manaps* sent a letter to Kolpakovskii, letting him know about the Kokandian efforts. To this point, the Russian administration in Western Siberia²¹⁴ had believed the Bughu to be their subjects, but had done nothing to establish a permanent presence in their lands. Now, however, Russian leaders began to think seriously about stationing a military regiment among the Bughu as well as about the possibility of encouraging peasant settlement in the region.²¹⁵ Russian administration hoped that dissension among the ruling elite of Kokand would work to their benefit: there had been several coups against Malla Khan and in 1862 he was killed and his nephew, Shakh Murad, took the throne.²¹⁶ However, his reign was short-lived

which he assumed a post of the governor of Andijan. Alymbek was executed in 1862 for participating in a coup against Khudayar Khan. His tribe was one of the last southern Kyrgyz tribes to submit to the Russian rule under his wife Kurmanzhan *Datqa*'s leadership. Kurmanzhan, also known as the “Queen of Alay,” became Alymbek's successor and ruled Alay until the Russian conquest in 1875. See Ploskikh, *Kirgizy*, 300; on Kurmanzhan *Datqa* see Tursunai Ömürzakova, *Kurmanzhan datka: door, insan, ishmerdüülük* (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan, 2002).

²¹¹ Dzhangerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 209.

²¹² *Idem.*, 204.

²¹³ *Idem.*, 224.

²¹⁴ In March 1861, Gasfort had been replaced as Governor-General of Western Siberia by Governor-Lieutenant A. Diugamel'.

²¹⁵ Dzhangerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 226.

²¹⁶ Ploskikh, *Kirgizy*, 299.

and he was soon replaced by Malla khan's brother, Khudayar khan, with the backing of the Emir of Bukhara, Qanaat Shah and other court officials.²¹⁷ Since the Kyrgyz, the Qipchaqs, and their leaders had been among those opposing Khudayar khan, he began a merciless campaign to eliminate them.²¹⁸ This resulted in mass disturbances in many Kokandian cities, such as Namangan, Margelan, and Khozhent. The northern Kyrgyz tribes in the Chui valley also revolted against Kokandian rule: they refused to pay taxes and confronted Kokandian troops with armed resistance. A Kyrgyz force led by the Solto tribe and their *manap*, Baytik Qanaev, attacked the Kokandian fortress at Pishpek.²¹⁹ Baytik and his men lured Rakhmatullah, the governor of Pishpek, into their settlement, fatally wounded him, and began a siege of the fort. Meanwhile, the *manap* Jantay and his Sarybaghysh tribe attacked Toqmoq, which they occupied easily since the fortification was still being reconstructed following its earlier destruction by Russian troops.²²⁰

Fearing for the safety of his tribe, Baytik sent a letter to Kolpakovskii asking him to send heavy artillery and troops. The Russian administration was already inclined toward intervention, so with little hesitation Kolpakovskii set off toward Pishpek seeking to bring it under Russian rule. The siege of the fortification lasted for eleven days concluding with its destruction at the end of December of 1862.²²¹ After the capture of Pishpek, Auliya-Ata was the only Kokandian outpost that stood between the Siberian and Syr-Dar'ia lines of fortifications.²²²

Further Russian advances into the region were driven by Russia's trade interests in Kashgar, clashes between Russian and Qing border guards along the ambiguous borders between

²¹⁷ Idem., 300.

²¹⁸ Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 244.

²¹⁹ Idem., 245.

²²⁰ Idem., 247.

²²¹ Idem., 249.

²²² Auliya-Ata was finally taken in June of 1864 by Cherniaev.

the two empires,²²³ and the necessity of keeping the northern Kyrgyz tribes, such as the Sarybaghysh, Sayaq, Cherek, Mongoldor, from migrating to areas controlled by Kokand during summer months.²²⁴ In 1863, another expedition, under the name “Kashgar,” was sent to central Tian-Shan, where it was met by apparently friendly Kyrgyz tribesmen led by Ormon’s son Ümötaaly. They expressed their desire to help the expedition and provided the soldiers with horses, guides, and food.²²⁵ Despite these overtures, Ümötaaly was not eager to become a Russian subject and he later ambushed and attacked a Russian regiment that was bringing provisions to the “Kashgar” expedition.²²⁶ Fearing punishment, Ümötaaly migrated with his tribe further into Tian Shan and became one of the last northern Kyrgyz tribes to submit to Russian rule holding out until 1867.

During the “Kashgar” expedition, another large tribe, the Cherek Kyrgyz, expressed their wish to become Russian subjects and subsequently sent an envoy to Vernyi.²²⁷ The Cherek comprised five thousand households, who migrated along the border with Kashgar. Russian officials welcomed the Cherek’s request for submission, albeit with some caution. Since the Cherek migration routes were located along the roads that led to Kashgar, their submission would guarantee a secure passage for Russian trade caravans. Russian officials also hoped that other

²²³ The pasture lands of some of the Kyrgyz and Kazakh tribes considered to be Russian subjects were not clearly separated from the territory of the Qing Empire. The migration of those tribes often led to disputes and, sometimes, even armed confrontations. See Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 255.

²²⁴ Fedchenko mentions that nomadic Kyrgyz tribes created some difficulties in dividing the territory, since in winter they moved to the “Russian” territory (Turkestan), and in summer they moved out to the mountains of Tian Shan, which belonged to Kokand. See Aleksei Fedchenko, *Puteshestvie v Tian’ Shan’* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo geograficheskoi literatury, 1950), 215.

²²⁵ Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 258.

²²⁶ Aristov, *Usuni i kyrgyzy*, 505; Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 259; Severtsov, *Puteshestvie*, 177.

²²⁷ Dokument no. 128, “1879 – Proshenie kirgizov roda Chirik k upravliaiushchemu kazakhami Bol’shoi ordy i kirgizami Kolpakovskomu o priniatii ikh v rossiiskoe poddanstvo,” in N. Bekmakhanova, ed. *Prisoedinenie Kazakhstana*, 306-307. The document is dated 1879, but it is clearly a mistake, since by 1879 all of the northern Kyrgyz tribes had submitted to Russian rule. Also, in a letter, the Cherek mention that they want to follow the example of Borombay and his tribe, and lead a peaceful existence.

Kyrgyz tribes, the Sarybaghysh in particular, would follow the lead of the Cherik Kyrgyz.²²⁸

Although the Sarybaghysh were slow to respond, another branch of the Bughu tribe, the Tynymseit, and the Sayaq Kyrgyz did soon conform the Cherik example.²²⁹

In 1863, Khudayar khan of Kokand was deposed, and his place was taken by the twelve year-old Sultan Sayyid, Malla Khan's son. The coup was planned and executed by the Kyrgyz and Qypchaq rulers, led by Mulla Alymqul (r.1863-1865), who became regent and de facto ruler of the khanate.²³⁰ Alymqul tried to win back the chieftains of the Kyrgyz tribes and sent several letters and proclamations announcing his forgiveness of their earlier transgressions. These letters were accompanied by lavish gifts and promises of various honors to the Kyrgyz chiefs.²³¹ Knowing the instability of the Kyrgyz tribes, G. A. Kolpakovskii sent his troops to Chui valley and ordered the most influential of the Kyrgyz *manaps* to report to Vernyi. This turned out to be unnecessary, since most of the Kyrgyz chieftains remained peacefully disposed towards the Russian troops.

Although Alymqul and his supporters tried to rebuild the khanate's financial and military standing and to strengthen the strongholds in its northern parts, Kokand remained internally fractured with various tribes fighting for political power. It was also vulnerable to the outside political influences: Kokand's relationship with Bukhara was troublesome due to the Bukharan

²²⁸ At the same time, Russian officials realized that they would be responsible for the Cheriks' safety against Kokand and other Kyrgyz tribes. They discussed building a military fortress on Lake Isyk Kul. Dokument no. 105, "1863 g. aprelia 22. – Otnoshenie komandira Otdel'nogo Sibirskogo korpusa, general-maiora Krasovskogo k gosudarstvennomu vitse-kantsleru o proshenii kirgizov roda Chirik priniat' rossiiskoe poddanstvo." In Bekmakhanova, ed. *Prisoedinenie Kazakhstana*, 269-272.

²²⁹ Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 261-269.

²³⁰ *Tarikh-i Ali Quli Amir-i lashkar* written by Mulla Yunus Jan Shighavul is an excellent "native" source on Alymqul. See: Mulla Muhammad Tashkandi, *The Life of 'Alimqul: A Native Chronicle of Nineteenth Century Central Asia*, ed. Timur Beisembiev (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003). This source clearly reveals the internal dynamics of the khanate, and the intricate relations between different local fractions and tribes. It gives a voice to the native participants of these historical events, who usually silenced in Russian and Western European-language sources on Russia's conquest of Central Asia.

²³¹ Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 279.

emir's support for the deposed Khudayar Khan and its peace negotiations with Khiva were fruitless.²³² But the most direct threat to the khanate's integrity was the Russian Empire, which was moving swiftly to capture more of the khanate's territories. In June 1864, Colonel M. Cherniaev occupied Auliya-Ata and moved toward Chimkent.²³³ The capture of Chimkent in September 1864 completed the linkage between the Syr-Dar'ia and Siberian fortified lines, but Cherniaev did not stop there.²³⁴ Although he was warned by the Ministries of War and Foreign Affairs against further advances into the territory of Kokand, Cherniaev proceeded to besiege Tashkent, the largest city of the khanate.²³⁵ This time his attack was forced to fall back to Chimkent.²³⁶ Meanwhile, the issue of organizing and integrating the conquered territories into the empire became more pressing for the Russian government and in 1864 it created the "New Kokandian line" which included the territory starting from the Chu River, along the Syr-Dar'ia, and all the way to the fortress Yani-Qurgan. M. Cherniaev, now a major-general, was appointed to command the new line.²³⁷ In the spring of 1865, despite renewed warnings from St. Petersburg, Cherniaev captured Tashkent after a three-day siege.²³⁸ Earlier that year, in February, the newly conquered territory, stretching from Lake Isyk Kul to the Aral Sea, had been

²³² Idem., 274. On Khiva and Bukhara see Seymour Becker, *Russia's Protectorates in Central Asia: Bukhara and Khiva, 1865-1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); Svat Soucek, *A History of Inner Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

²³³ Simultaneously, there was another Russian offensive from Perovsk, headed by Colonel N.A. Verevkin, moving against another Kokandian city, Turkestan. Bregel, *An Historical Atlas*, 64; Richard Pierce, *Russian Central Asia, 1867-1917: A Study in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 19.

²³⁴ Alymql and his troops were able to fend off Cherniaev's first attempt to take Chimkent, which ended in his retreat to Auliya-Ata. See Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 293.

²³⁵ On the debates between the Ministries of Finance, War, and Foreign Affairs surrounding the conquest and colonization of Central Asia see: David Mackenzie, "Turkestan's Significance to Russia (1850-1917)," *Russian Review* 33, 2 (1974):167-188.

²³⁶ Pierce, *Russian Central Asia*, 21.

²³⁷ Bregel, *An Historical Atlas*, 64; Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 295.

²³⁸ Alymql was fatally wounded and died during the siege of the city. See Mulla Muhammad Tashkandi, *The Life of 'Alimql*, 76.

integrated into Turkestan Oblast.²³⁹ Two years later, in 1867, it was reorganized into the Governorate-General of Turkestan which consisted of the Syr-Dar'ia and Semirech'e *oblasts*, and had its capital in Tashkent. By that time all of the northern Kyrgyz tribes had accepted Russian rule, with Ümötaaly and his Sarybaghysh tribe being the last among them.²⁴⁰

Conclusion

On the eve of the Russian conquest, the Kyrgyz were a scattered community of tribes that inhabited different parts of Central Asia. Being a small nomadic tribal confederation, it was necessary for the Kyrgyz to pursue political and economic alliances with the more powerful states around them and, at times, request their protection. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the most important political entities surrounding the Kyrgyz tribes were the Qing Empire, the Khanate of Kokand, and the Russian Empire. By the 1850s, many of the Kyrgyz tribes had come to be politically dominated by Kokand, yet this did not prevent them from seeking other patrons when they felt their well-being was threatened. Their nomadic lifestyle made it relatively easy for the Kyrgyz to rearrange their alliances.²⁴¹ This arrangement was convenient for the Kyrgyz, but also proved to have benefits for their more powerful neighbors. For the Qing Empire, the

²³⁹ Cherniaev's reckless actions against Bukhara and Kokand cost him his position as a governor. In 1866 he was replaced by Major General D. I. Romanovskii and after the establishment of the Governorate-General of Turkestan, Romanovskii was replaced by General K. P. von Kaufman, who became the first Governor-General.

²⁴⁰ After 1863, as Russia advanced toward the territories of northern Kokand, Ümötaaly and his tribe migrated deep into Tian Shan. His attempts to forge an alliance with Yakub Bek of Kashgar were unsuccessful. Ümötaaly was not on good terms with Khudayar Khan of Kokand, due to his frequent raids on Kokandian trade caravans. Other Kyrgyz tribes which had already accepted Russian authority were also on hostile terms with him. In these circumstances, Ümötaaly was forced to ask for Russian protection, which occurred during N.A. Severtsov's expedition to Tian Shan. For a detailed description of this event see Severtsov, *Puteshestviia*, 243-252.

²⁴¹ The process of modifying an existing political alliance was initiated by a tribal chief and discussed at a tribal council. Borombay's words at the beginning of this chapter are a case in point.

Kyrgyz could be used as a bargaining chip to help secure peace on its borders. For Kokand, the Kyrgyz offered a crucial source of military assistance and revenue.²⁴²

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the geopolitical situation in the region began to change as Russia advanced relentlessly southward and gradually annexed more and more of Kokand's territory and population. It took more than ten years for all of the northern Kyrgyz tribes to come under Russian rule. Their incorporation into the empire was not an easy process: Russia had to navigate an intricate political terrain in which power was broadly distributed and devise a skillful campaign with both military and political dimensions. By then the Kyrgyz were devastated by the internal tribal struggles and were becoming more frustrated by the ineffectiveness of Kokand's efforts to protect them. Heavy taxes and military demands that Kokandian leaders frequently imposed on the Kyrgyz resulted in impoverishing many tribes.²⁴³ Increasingly, the Kyrgyz started to look for support elsewhere.

²⁴² In the beginning of the 1870s, the population of Kokand paid twenty different types of taxes. Three major ones were the *kharadzh*, a tax on field plants; the *tanap*, land tax from gardens and orchards; the *zakat*, a tax on livestock and trade. See Anvarbek Khasanov, *Vzaimootnosheniia kirgizov s Kokandskim khanstvom i Rossiei v 50-70 godakh XIX veka* (Frunze: Kirgizskoe gosudarstvennoe uchebno-pedagogicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1961), 8-9.

²⁴³ Frequent uprisings against Kokand were a normal occurrence by the beginning of the 1860s. Ploskikh, *Kirgizy i Kokandskoe khanstvo*, 299-303.

Chapter Two

Northern Kyrgyz under Russian Rule

...they said, a yellow skinned and blue eyed Russian would appear,
 They said, for thousand households one *bolush*¹ would become.
 They said, forced settlements would appear.
 They said, [they] would cut all tall grass down.
 They said, [they] would safeguard all short grass.²

Qalyghul Bay uulu (d. 1855)

An infidel came and made the city of Toqmoq his home,
 He cut fir trees and made the surroundings suffer.
 Those are Russian people and their deeds are severe:
 He turned Kyrgyz into servants.
 Those who knew the language, he put into offices.³
 Those who broke the law, he put into jails.
 He appointed *bolush*, and elected *biys*.⁴
 And brought *borum* (order) to people.⁵

Moldo Qylych Shamyrgan uulu (d. 1917)

Introduction

Sixty two years elapsed between the deaths of Qalyghul Bay uulu and Moldo Qylych Shamyrgan uulu, two northern Kyrgyz poets from the Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz. Russia's imperial advance into the territory of the northern Kyrgyz and further south was only beginning in 1855, the year of Qalyghul's death; whereas Russia as an empire was beginning to crumble in 1917, the year Moldo Qylych died. Although the final conquest of the southern Kyrgyz tribes was not completed until the abolition of the Khanate of Kokand in 1876, all northern Kyrgyz tribes had

¹ *Bolush* comes from Russian *volost* and means *volost* head.

² Melis Abdyldaev, ed. *Muras: Qalyghul, Arstanbek, Moldo Qylych, Aldash Moldo, Zhengizhok, Toqtoghul zhana bashkalar* (Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1990), 28.

³ *Kengse* in the original, which is taken from Russian "kantseliariia" and here has a meaning of an office.

⁴ A term for judge among Kazakhs and Kyrgyz.

⁵ Moldo Qylych, *Qazaldar* (Frunze: Adabiiat basmasy, 1991), 71.

fallen under Russian rule by 1868. According to the Statute for the Administration of Turkestan, most parts of present-day Kyrgyzstan were incorporated into Semirech'e *oblast*. Territorially, the basin of Lake Isyk Kul, and the Qochqor, Jumghal, Naryn, At Bashy, and Toghuz Toroo valleys became part of Isyk Kul (later Przheval'sk) *uezd*; Chong and Kichi Kemin valleys and all of the Chui valley became part of Toqmoq (later Pishpek) *uezd*; and the Talas and Chatkal valleys came to be part of Aulie Ata *uezd* within Syr-Dar'ia *oblast*.⁶ These were the territories inhabited by the majority of the northern Kyrgyz tribes. As for the southern Kyrgyz tribes, they were divided between Osh, Namangan, Marghelan, and Andijan *uezds* of Ferghana *oblast* and Khozhent *uezd* of Samarkand *oblast*.⁷

This chapter examines the social transformations in the region after the Russian conquest and describes the reality into which the Kyrgyz modernist intellectuals were born and within which they operated. It tells the story of how the territories of the northern Kyrgyz were created, developed, and appropriated by Russian imperial officials and peasant settlers, and how these processes affected the existing social order of the Kyrgyz.⁸ The goal of this chapter is to provide an overview of Russian administration of the northern Kyrgyz territories after the conquest. Comprehension of this process is essential to understanding the grievances that Kyrgyz *aqyns*, and later modernist intellectuals, expressed in their works. This chapter discusses major aspects of the colonization process, such as the administrative and territorial division and organization of the northern Kyrgyz tribes and territories, the role of the Kyrgyz tribal elite in the process of

⁶ Begamaaly Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie Kirgizii k Rossii* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1959), 347.

⁷ On the history of the conquest of the southern Kyrgyz tribes see Kushbek Usenbaev, *Prisoedinenie iuzhnoi Kirgizii k Rossii* (Frunze: Kirgizskoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1960).

⁸ Details of the administrative division of Central Asia have been extensively discussed by the scholarship on late-imperial Russia and colonial Central Asia. See Richard Pierce, *Russian Central Asia 1867-1917: A Study in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960); Daniel Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003).

colonization, Slavic peasant settlement, the establishment of major urban centers on the territory of southern Semirech'e and the resulting socio-economic relations between the new settlers and the existing local population, and finally, the role of Islam in the lives of the northern Kyrgyz.

Administrative Division of the Northern Kyrgyz Territories

Ümötaaly, the son of Ormon from the Esengul branch of the Sarybaghysh tribe, was the last northern Kyrgyz tribal chief to submit to Russia. With his capitulation in 1867, all of the northern Kyrgyz and their territories came under Russian rule. Russian imperial officials drew on their experiences with nomadic Kazakhs of the Small and Middle Hordes, following the conquest of the Kazakh steppe earlier in the nineteenth century.⁹ They applied some of the same principles when it came to the administration of the Kyrgyz nomads.¹⁰ The majority of the northern Kyrgyz tribes lived in the territory of Semirech'e *oblast*. Following its formation in 1868, Semirech'e *oblast* was attached to various administrative units over time. It was part of the Governor-Generalship of Turkestan from 1867 to 1882. In 1882, to accommodate political shifts in the higher echelons of power, Semirech'e was transferred to the Governor-Generalship of the Steppe.¹¹ In 1898 it was re-united with the Turkestan Governor-Generalship and remained there

⁹ The process of the integration of the Kazakhs of the Middle and the Senior Hordes, which began in 1818, was completed by the end of the 1860s. During that time, many Kazakh tribes such as the Uisyn, Zhalaiyr, Adban, Suan, Dulat, and Chaprashty, petitioned and were integrated into the Russian empire. See N. E. Bekmakhanova, comp. *Prisoedinenie Kazakhstana i Srednei Azii k Rossii (XVIII – XIX veka), Dokumenty* (Moscow: Rossiiskaia akademiia nauk, 2008), 37-38

¹⁰ The Statute on the Siberian Kirghiz (Kazakhs) of 1822 drawn up by Speranskii delineated the major principles in administering the nomads of the steppe. It was geared toward diminishing the influence of the Kazakh *khans* and *sultans*, the “white bone” group of Kazakh society, bringing the administration of the Kazakhs in line with the rest of the empire, and a gradual destruction of the estate and clan/kinship structure. In P.P. Rumiantsev, *Kirgizskii narod v proshlom i nastoiashchem* (Sankt Peterburg, 1910), 28-35.

¹¹ In his report to the Governor-General of the Steppe from December of 1882, the military governor of Semirech'e *oblast*, G. A. Kolpakovskii, states that the population of the region was 639,078 and that 85.5 % of them were Kirghiz nomads (he did not distinguish between Kyrgyz and Kazakhs). See Dokument no. 137, “1882 g. dekabr”. –

until 1917. With each of these administrative shifts, Semirech'e oblast came to be governed by a different statute (*polozhenie*).¹² Each statute had a sub-section on the administration of the nomadic population, and despite the fact that various statutes were issued in different years, this sub-section did not undergo through significant changes.¹³

In 1863, the majority of the northern Kyrgyz were administratively attached to the Alatau *pristavstvo*, which was created in 1842 to govern the Kazakhs of the Senior Horde and later converted into the Alatau *okrug* based in Vernyi.¹⁴ Further reorganizations in the region in 1867 resulted in the creation of Toqmoq and Isyk Kul *uezds*, largely populated by the Kyrgyz from the Sarybaghysh, Solto, and Bughu tribes. These two *uezds* were renamed Pishpek and Przheval'sk in 1878 and 1889 respectively.¹⁵ According to the data from 1910, Pishpek *uezd* consisted of three *uchastki* (districts), Pishpek, Belovodsk, and Toqmoq, with each district comprising seven to twelve *volosts*.¹⁶ As for Przheval'sk *uezd*, it consisted of Przheval'sk and At-Bashy districts, with twelve *volosts* in each district.¹⁷

According to the statute of 1891, a *volost* was to contain not more than two thousand *ayils* (village) and an *ayil* was to consist of not more than two hundred *kibitki*, or households.¹⁸ The Kyrgyz nomads were allowed to participate in elections at the level of *volost* and *ayil* administrative units. These elections were held to elect the *volost* administrator (*bolush* in

Otchet voennogo gubernatora Semirechenskoi oblasti A. G. Kolpakovskogo general-gubernatoru Stepnogo general-gubernatorstva," in Bekmakhanova, *Prisoedinenie*, 337-338; also see Pierce, *Russian Central Asia*, 55.

¹² Statutes of 1868, 1886, and 1891. I base my discussion on the 1891 statute.

¹³ A. Dzhumanaliev, ed. *Kyrgyzskaia gosudarstvennost' v XX veke (Dokumenty, istoriia, kommentarii)* (Bishkek: Natsional'naia akademiia nauk Kyrgyzskoi respubliky, 2003), 26 – 52.

¹⁴ Bekmakhanova, *Prisoedinenie*, 38.

¹⁵ Usenbaev, *Prisoedinenie*, 35.

¹⁶ This data includes only former Kyrgyz and Kazakh nomadic encampments and does not cover all of the Russian settlements, Dungan quarters (*sloboda*), and the very few Kyrgyz *ayils* that had settled prior to the Russian arrival. In Usenbaev, *Prisoedinenie*, 34-35.

¹⁷ *Idem.*, 37.

¹⁸ "Polozhenie ob upravlenii Akmolinskoi, Semipalatinskoi, Semirechenskoi, Ural'skoi i Turgaiskoi oblastiami" March 25, 1891. In Dzhumanaliev, *Kyrgyzskaia gosudarstvennost'*, 45.

Kyrgyz; *volostnoi upravitel'* in Russian) and *ayil starshina* (*ystarchyn* in Kyrgyz; *ayil'nyi starchina* in Russian).¹⁹ During these elections the presence of Russian *uezd* leaders was mandatory. Winning election did not guarantee a position within the colonial administrative system, since these positions still had to be approved by the military governors.²⁰ Both *volost* and *ayil* heads were elected for three years. A *volost* head was responsible for implementing government directions and judicial decisions, managing *ayil* elections, maintaining the list of *kibitkas*, keeping track of the population inflow and outflow, and keeping track of all tax collections.²¹ As for the *ayil* head, he was responsible for calling up an *ayil* congress in order to elect *volost* head candidates, presiding during those conventions and keeping order, and collecting taxes and duties, and presenting them to the *volost* head.²² Native judges, *biys*, were also elected from the local population along with *volost* leaders during the *volost* congress (*top*). Each *volost* elected four *biys*, and their adjudication was to be based on nomadic customs and traditions.²³

Imperial officials believed that in order to understand and effectively govern the northern Kyrgyz, they must be divided into rigidly organized administrative units. For the Kyrgyz nomads, the notion of being attached to a particular territory was at odds with the very nature of their lifestyle. There was no concept of land ownership among the Kyrgyz before the Russian conquest. Land was something that sustained the nomad's livelihood and his livestock; it had a strict utilitarian value, and as such, good pasture land could be a cause for dispute or even armed conflict. Kyrgyz nomads had a clear sense of geographic space, and understood certain territories

¹⁹ Dzhangerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 349.

²⁰ "Polozhenie," no. 70, in Dzhumanaliev, *Kyrgyzskaia gosudarstvennost'*, 47.

²¹ "Polozhenie," no. 79, *idem.*, 48.

²² "Polozhenie," no. 81, *ibid.*

²³ Dzhangerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 350.

as belonging to a particular tribe, state, and people. They justified their own occupation of a specific territory using stories that linked their ancestors to it. But the loyalty of the nomad did not belong to any particular land, but rather, it belonged to his family, his tribe, and his people (*el*). This meant that for the imperial administrative apparatus to function properly, tribal loyalty needed to be weakened, and eventually broken, and social relations that were based on kinship ties had to be transformed into relations based on administrative-territorial and political affiliation.

The statute of 1891 had several articles that interfered directly with the nomadic-pastoral lifestyle of the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs. Its main goal was to limit the movement of the nomads, so as to encourage their eventual settlement. The administration sought to achieve this goal by making the migration of the nomads as cumbersome a process as possible. According to the statute, transfers from one *ayil* or *volost* to another were to be allowed only after obtaining permission from the officials at the *uezd* and *volost* levels.²⁴ Transfers also had to be approved at the *ayil* level by the *ayil* congress. Another issue that concerned imperial officials was the taxation of nomads: the imperial strategy to divide the Kyrgyz and their territories into permanent administrative units was driven in no small part by the desire to ease the process of tax collection. Kyrgyz were subject to the household tax, which was collected annually; but seasonal migrations of the nomads created chaos and complicated this process. To add further complications, although nomads were to obey the laws of the territorial units they were in during their seasonal migrations, tax collections were done according the units to which they were

²⁴ Petitions requesting a transfer from one administrative unit to another or the creation of an entirely new administrative unit for a single tribal lineage were frequent. See “Zaiavleniie odnogo iz obshchestv kirgizov sarybaghyshevskoi volosti voennomu gubernatoru Semirechenskoi oblasti o pritesneniakh manapov DZHantaevykh i volostnogo upravitelia i s pros’boi obrazovat’ samostoiatel’nuu volost’.” August 19, 1888. In Zhangyl Abdyldabek kyzy, ed. *Shabdan Baatyr, epokha i lichnost’: dokumenty i materialy* (Bishkek: Sham, 1999), 76; TsGA KR, f. 93, op.1, d. 22, l. 89 ob.

permanently assigned.²⁵ Native officials were put in charge of collecting taxes and received generous rewards for their service from the imperial administration. This strategy was also a way for the empire to tie some portion of the native population more closely to the empire. The statute further strengthened the authority of the native officials by allowing them to retain their positions during their seasonal migrations.²⁶

This is how the imperial administration envisioned the legal and administrative system of the nomads, and how it was represented in official documents. By introducing local self-government, the imperial administration pursued two distinct goals. First, it hoped to cultivate a civic consciousness among the nomads which would increase the feelings of connection and loyalty toward the empire. And second, by relying on local self-government, it sought to reduce the cost of colonial rule.²⁷ The reality, however, was far removed from these bureaucratic aspirations. Local elections caused significant unrest among the Kyrgyz. The position of the *bolush* became a highly coveted position for those who had wealth and could afford to spend it on elections. The electoral process itself was filled with fraud, bribery, and extortion. And although the tsarist administration had tried to create a new type of the native official, which would replace the old tribal elite, their attempts were never successful; the office of the *bolush* was consistently held by the members of the most influential tribal lineage, and abuse of power was rampant.²⁸

²⁵ “Polozhenie,” no. 59, 61, in Dzhumanaliev, *Kyrgyzskaia gosudarstvennost’*, 46.

²⁶ “Polozhenie,” no 61; *ibid.*

²⁷ Svetlana Jacquesson, “The Time of Dishonour: Land and Murder under Colonial Rule in Tian-Shan,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 55, 4/5 (2012): 664-687.

²⁸ This interesting observation is made by S. Jacquesson in her “The Time of Dishonour.” See *idem.*, 678. For example, many of the *volosts* were ruled by the representatives of a single tribal lineage from the time of the Russian conquest of the northern Kyrgyz tribes in 1868. The office of the *bolush* was held by Jantay Karabek uulu, of the Tynai branch of the Sarybaghysh tribe, and his descendants from the inception of the *volost*. Shabdan, Jantay’s son, was the only exception. Despite all his service to the empire, he did not hold the office.

Correspondence between Russian imperial officials on the topic of sedentarizing the Kyrgyz indicates the imperial desire to weaken or break up tribal ('clan') affiliation among the nomads.²⁹ The state pursued this course with the purpose of weakening the more powerful Kyrgyz tribes and the influence of their leaders, the *manaps*, since their existence threatened and undermined the role of the imperial government.³⁰ This echoed the policy of the tsarist government in the Kazakh steppe a few decades earlier. In order to provide security in the imperial borderland and safety for Russian trade caravans, the government had at first relied heavily on Kazakh *khans* and *sultans* to pacify the people under their authority. The empire had rewarded these rulers generously with titles and gifts. But soon the government realized that the power of these rulers was nominal among their people, and that they had begun to abuse the authority bestowed upon them in pursuit of personal enrichment.³¹ The result was a major shift in the imperial policy toward the Kazakhs, codified in the 1822 "Statute on Siberian Kirgiz."³² The new approach, which has been described by Virginia Martin as the "bureaucratization of the steppe," embraced not only the Kazakhs, but also those Kyrgyz who were located in the southern Semirech'e region of the Turkestan Governor-Generalship.³³ Here, too, the government's bureaucratic machine made Kyrgyz commoners into local officials, responsible for upholding imperial laws and regulations, in an effort to counterbalance the *manaps*' influence. But the tribal affiliation of the nomads and the authority of their tribal chieftains proved to be resilient phenomena that lasted well into the Soviet period. The imperial administration's effort to create

²⁹ Correspondence between several Russian imperial officials cited in Svetlana Jacquesson, "Reforming Pastoral Land Use in Kyrgyzstan: from Clan and Custom to Self-Government and Tradition," *Central Asian Survey* 29, 1 (2010):106.

³⁰ Ibid. In this case, the power of the *sultans* of the Kazakh Hordes was also under threat since the statute applied to five *oblasts* (Akmola, Semipalatinsk, Semirech'e, Ural, and Turghai) within the Turkestan Governor-Generalship.

³¹ Rumiantsev, *Kirgizskii narod*, 28.

³² *Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii (PSZRI)*, Vol. 2, XXXVII, No. 29127

³³ Virginia Martin, *Law and Custom*, 47.

a new administrative elite that would undermine the authority of the old tribal aristocracy was futile, and the system of local self-government thus introduced never lived up to its expectations.

The *Manap* Phenomenon Among the Northern Kyrgyz

Among the northern Kyrgyz, as in the Kazakh steppe, Russian imperial officials initially relied on and promoted the authority of the tribal elite, the *manaps*, during Russia's advance into the northern Kyrgyz territories. Back in 1864, Chokan Valikhanov condemned Russian officials for promoting Zarypbek from the Bughu tribe to the position of *agha* (great) *manap* and thereby making "a chance (*sluchainoe*) occurrence a permanent virtue (*dostoinstvo*)."³⁴ The majority of tribal chieftains expressed a desire to come under Russian rule. It was Kyrgyz tribal chieftains, such as Ormon, Baytik, Shabdan, Borombay, Jangarach, Jantay and others, who initiated the process of joining the empire and who actively assisted Russian military operations against Kokand. And, although they were generously rewarded by the empire for their assistance, all of them were gradually removed from positions of official power.³⁵ Thus, during elections to *volost* and *ayil* administrative positions, none of the old *manaps* was elected to office in the newly established tsarist administrative units, even though positions did stay within their tribes. For

³⁴ Cited in Vasilii Bartol'd, *Sochineniia* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vostochnoi literatury, 1963), vol. 2, pt. 1, 542.

³⁵ In a document from 1852, the Governor of Western Siberia G. Kh. Gasford wrote about Ormon's contributions during the uprising of *sultan* Kenesary and asked that Ormon be rewarded for his assistance to the imperial troops with a title and pasture lands in Zailiiskii valley, where he moved with his tribe when he heard that Kazakhs of the Senior Horde had abandoned those lands and migrated to the land of Qipchaqs. Gasford hoped to achieve two goals by giving those lands to Ormon. First, those Kazakhs who stayed on the Russian side of the Ili would begin to value their lands and seek Russian protection against Ormon. And second, Ormon's loyalty to the empire and his presence on the other side of Ili would help to tame the rest of the Kazakhs and support further colonization of the region. See Dokument no. 78, "1852 g. maia 11. – Pis'mo general-gubernatora Zapadnoi Sibiri G. Kh. Gasforda v MID ob otnosheniakh kazakhov Starshego zhuza i kirgizov," in Bekmakhanova, *Prisoedinenie*, 201-203; Dokument no. 81, "1853 g. fevralia 26. – otnoshenie ispolniaiushchego dolzhnost' general-gubernatora Zapadni Sibiri Gasforda upravliaiushchemu MID, tainomu sovetniku Seniavinu o priniatii dikokamennymi kirgizami poddanstva Rossii," in Bekmakhanova, *Prisoedinenie*, 207-209.

instance Ümötaaly, *manap* of the Sarybaghysh, did not hold any position, and remained an ordinary nomad.³⁶ Ümötaaly and his men attacked Russian troops in the summer of 1863, and from 1863 until 1865 he regularly raided the Bughu and Cherik tribes, which were already under Russian protection.³⁷ In 1867, when Ümötaaly and his tribe officially submitted to Russia, the head of the Alatau *okrug* decided to charge Ümötaaly with the *qun* for two Russian soldiers killed and several wounded in his 1863 attacks. He was expected to pay seventy-five horses for each soldier killed and twenty-five horses for each wounded, for a total of 375 horses, or 7,500 rubles.³⁸ By the time Ümötaaly had paid off all the *qun*, in autumn of 1865, not only did he lack an official governmental position, but his wealth had also been depleted, and with it his power.³⁹ Most traditional leaders were more fortunate than Ümötaaly. *Manap* Jangarach of the Solto tribe and his sons did not hold any *ayil* or *volost* posts, but as *manaps* they continued to “have an influence” on several hundreds of *yurts*.⁴⁰ Other *manaps*, like Shabdan from the Tynai branch of the Sarybaghysh tribe, also did not hold official positions within the imperial administrative system. And yet for the most part they too were able to maintain their affluence and traditional authority.

As a result, colonial officials frequently complained about the strong grip that *manaps* held over their subjects. According to A. Talyzin, the head of the Pishpek *uezd*, *manaps* exerted a powerful influence over the administrative affairs of the *uezd* and their sphere of influence did not diminish with the establishment of the imperial institutions of power.⁴¹ Despite the

³⁶ A. Khasanov, *Vzaimootnosheniia kirgizov s Kokandskim khanstvom i Rossiiei* (Frunze: Kirgizskoe gosudarstvennoe uchebno-pedagogicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1961), 47.

³⁷ *Idem.*, 43-44.

³⁸ *Idem.*, 45.

³⁹ *Idem.*, 47.

⁴⁰ A. Talyzin “Raport nachal'nika Pishpekskogo uezda v Semirechenskoe oblastnoe pravlenie o meste i roli Shabdana Dzhantaeva sredi kara-kirgizov” in Zh. Abdyldabek kyzy, *Shabdan baatyr*, 86.

⁴¹ *Idem.*, 81-95.

government's introduction of the electoral system, in most parts of Semirech'e, the *sultans* and *manaps* of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz ruling elite were still in good standing economically, they owned large plots of land, and exerted tremendous influence over the commoners.⁴² What could explain the lasting nature of this phenomenon? Why, despite the empire's efforts to create a new stratum of native imperial officials and to shift the power relations within the Kyrgyz society in their favor, was the institution of the *manap* so persistent among the Kyrgyz?

Shabdan's story provides the best illustration of the enduring nature of the *manap* institution. According to his own biography, which he dictated to N. Aristov, Shabdan was born in 1840 to the family of Jantay Qarabekov (1794-1867), an influential *manap* of the Tynai Sarybaghysh.⁴³ He was one of Jantay's many sons who, when he turned five, was given away to the family of one of his poor relatives. At the age of nine he returned and entered into his father's service.⁴⁴ Shabdan spent his youth leading *barymta* and other raids in order to gain prominence within the tribe.⁴⁵ For his many victories, Shabdan was recognized and respected by his own and many other Kyrgyz tribes. Moreover, he was recruited for service to the khanate of Kokand and assisted various Kokandian military commanders, especially Qanaat shah.⁴⁶ Shabdan participated in the court coup that brought Khudayar Khan into power in Kokand and was rewarded accordingly. His highest reward was his appointment as a *bek* of Azret-i Sultan (present-day city of Turkestan).⁴⁷ Shabdan did not take up this appointment however - in his autobiography he

⁴² Shkapskii, *Pereselentsy-samovol'tsy i agrarnyi vopros v Semirechenskoi oblasti*, " cited in P.P. Rumiantsev, *Kirgizskii narod*, 57.

⁴³ N. A. Aristov, *Usuni i kyrgyzy*, 512-515.

⁴⁴ "Avtobiografiia Shabdana Dzhantaeva" in Zh. Abdyldebek kyzy, *Shabdan Baatyr*, 65. Shabdan's exact words are: "I began to serve him."

⁴⁵ One such raid against Junghars is depicted by Musa Chaghataev, a Kyrgyz oral poet. See D. Prior, *The Shabdan Baatyr Codex: Epic and the Writing of Northern Kirghiz History* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013). The poem depicts a particular episode from Shabdan's life before the northern Kyrgyz came under the Russian rule.

⁴⁶ "Avtobiografiia," in Zh. Abdyldebek kyzy, *Shabdan Baatyr*, 66.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

stated that he needed a break in order to see his family. Upon his arrival in the Kokandian fortress of Pishpek, Shabdan learned that the Russians advanced to Merke, and that his father and other Kyrgyz leaders had shifted their loyalties from Kokand to Russia. As Shabdan told it, Rakhmatulla, the *bek* of Pishpek, ordered that Shabdan and his *jigit* Bayake be imprisoned in response to his father's treachery and Shabdan was therefore forced to flee Kokand.⁴⁸ Regardless of particulars, the salient fact is that Shabdan now joined forces with the Russians and began to assist their Russian military officers, in what turned out to be a well-calculated strategic move. In 1868, Shabdan and his men helped the Head of Toqmoq *uezd*, Major G. Zagriazhskii, to deflect the attacks of Osmon Tailaqov from the Sayaq tribe.⁴⁹ Shabdan actively participated in the conquest of the Khanate of Kokand in 1876 and the southern Kyrgyz tribes shortly thereafter.⁵⁰ During his military campaigns, Shabdan personally met with the Governor-General of Turkestan, K. P. von Kaufman, and received an honorary robe and monetary rewards from him. He also accompanied General M. D. Skobelev on his military expedition to pacify the Alay Kyrgyz.⁵¹ For his excellent service, Skobelev recommended Shabdan for the rank of *voiskovoi starshina*, or Lieutenant Colonel. But, according to Shabdan, von Kaufman declined this request due to Shabdan's illiteracy, and promised to award him the title after he learned to read and write.⁵² In 1883, Shabdan was chosen by General G. A. Kolpakovskii as a representative of the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs at the coronation ceremony of Alexander III, and at that time he did receive the rank of

⁴⁸ *Idem.*, 67.

⁴⁹ Khasanov, *Vzaimootnosheniia*, 57.

⁵⁰ For details see Shabdan's obituary in *Semirechenskiie oblastnye vedomosti* 1912, no. 96.

⁵¹ The Alay Kyrgyz were among the last Kyrgyz to come under the Russian rule. Their leader was Alymbek *Datqa*, who was active in the Kokandian court and held several important positions in Kokand. He was killed by Khudayar *khan*'s people, and his wife Kurmanzhan replaced him as leader of the Alay Kyrgyz. She was also awarded the title *Datqa* by Kokand, and was later also recognized by Russian imperial officials as well. Her son, Abdullabek, led an uprising against Russia and was executed for it.

voiskovoi starshina and was also rewarded with a gold watch and a lifetime pension of 300 rubles per year.⁵³

Shabdan never held an official post within the imperial administrative system, but nevertheless, he remained an authoritative figure within and outside his tribe. After his father's death Shabdan became a worthy successor, consolidating the power and authority for himself within the Sarybaghysh tribe of the Tynai branch. He served at an arbitration court, resolving many personal cases according to *adat* (customary law) and serving as a mediator between his tribesmen and Russian imperial officials. Thanks to his faithful service to the empire, Shabdan was able to gain the trust of imperial officials, and obtain many privileges for himself and his family. Although Russian officials sought to break up the clan system among the Kyrgyz nomads, by creating a new imperial elite embodied by the *bolush* and other native officials, they had to rely on the power and knowledge of the old elite in order to gain access to Kyrgyz society.⁵⁴ *Manaps* such as Shabdan were instrumental for the empire in order to elevate the financial burden that otherwise would fall on the imperial treasury for maintaining additional administrative personnel.⁵⁵ The *manap* phenomenon should not be oversimplified. Many elements involved in the construction and maintenance of traditional authority - such as wealth, charisma, and personal and political alliances – did not relate directly to Russian imperial rule. Nevertheless, *manap* influence increasingly became linked to the imperial administration in

⁵³ Khasanov, *Vzaimootnosheniia*, 63.

⁵⁴ The state rewarded these “new tribal elites,” from time to time, for their “excellent and zealous service” to the empire. Thus, Qanat Abukin, the head of the Temirbolot *volost*, received a robe of the third degree in 1892 from the Governor-General of the Steppe, Baron M. A. Taube; Dür Sooronbaev, the head of the Tynai *volost*, received a silver watch with a silver chain in 1890. In U. Subkhanberdina, ed. “*Dala ualaiatynyng gazeti*”: *adam, kogham, tabighat, 1888-1902* (Almaty: Ghylm, 1994), 151, 256.

⁵⁵ Tetsu Akiyama, “On the Authority of a Kyrgyz Tribal Chieftain: The Funeral Ceremonies of Shabdan Jantai,” 13. Electronic source: http://www.orientphil.uni-halle.de/sais/pdf/2009-12-11/On_the_Authority_of_a_Kyrgyz_Tribal_Chieftain.pdf, 12 November, 2014.

subtle and complex ways. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the authority of Shabdan and many other Kyrgyz *manaps* within and outside their tribes stemmed from their service to the Russian empire, and from the rewards and recognitions received from the imperial officials. At the same time, the *manaps*' authority over their people provided them with a privileged standing within the imperial administration, thus making it a reciprocal and resilient phenomenon.

Peasant Resettlement and the Northern Kyrgyz

The administrative division of the northern Kyrgyz territories went hand in hand with the in-migration of large numbers of peasants from the central Russian *gubernii*s and the establishment of urban centers with diverse ethnic and religious populations. In this context, the settlement of the northern Kyrgyz nomads became an issue that was all the more pressing for imperial administrators. Peasant migration had increased as the empire extended its borders further south in the second half of the nineteenth century, and their presence had added to the already complex socio-economic and demographic landscape of the region.⁵⁶ The state's initiative to divide the region into administrative units and settle the northern Kyrgyz went on in parallel with the process of migration and settlement of peasants from the heartland of the Russian empire. Peasant migration to Semirech'e was part of a long process that started in the early-sixteenth century. At that time, those who passed beyond the Urals were mostly runaways

⁵⁶ On peasant resettlement in other frontier regions see Nicholas B. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Ch. Steinwedel, "Resettling People, Unsettling the Empire: Migration and the Challenge of Governance, 1861-1917" in N. Breyfogle et al. *Peopling the Russian Periphery: Borderland Colonization in Eurasian History* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 128-147; Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); K. Nishiyama "Russian Colonization in Central Asia: a Case Study of Semirechye, 1867-1922," in H. Komatsu et al., *Migration in Central Asia, Its History and Current Problems*, Japan Center for Area Studies Symposium Series no 9 (Osaka: Japan Center for Area Studies, 2000), 87-111.

from the state's punitive apparatus – people who had nothing to lose and, on the contrary, hoped to gain freedom by joining the Cossacks, who were still considered a “free” people at the end of the sixteenth century.⁵⁷ As they moved progressively further to the south and east, appropriating lands, establishing settlements, and using natural resources, the state had no choice but to follow them, claim those territories as property of state, and begin the process of official colonization.⁵⁸

By the time of the imperial expansion into Central Asia, the Cossacks were no longer a free people, but instead a military estate relied upon heavily by the government for borderland colonization.⁵⁹ The Semirech'e Cossack host was formed in 1850 as part of the Siberian Cossack host. Families of the Siberian Cossacks were forced to settle in Semirech'e, and provided with money, land, and provisions.⁶⁰ Peasant migration to Central Asia increased after the abolition of serfdom in 1861. Land deficits, in central Russia and the harsh economic conditions that resulted drove peasants to the eastern parts of the empire in large numbers in search of a better life.⁶¹ The state did not have a firm policy on peasant migration to the region. Its view on resettlement

⁵⁷ Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field*, 23. On the origin and the history of Cossacks in Central Asia, see B. V. Bezsonov, “Kazaki i kazach'i zemli v Aziatskoi Rossii,” *Aziatskaia Rossiia, liudi i poriadki za Uralom* (S. Peterburg: Izdanie pereselencheskogo upravleniia glavnago upravleniia zemleustroistva i zemledeliia, 1914), vol. 1, 361-387; IU. B. Simchenko, ed. *Kazaki Rossii: Proshloe. Nastoiashchee. Budushchee* (Moscow: Rossiiskaia Akademiia Nauk, Institut etnologii i antropologii im. N.N. Miklukho-Maklaia, 1992).

⁵⁸ On imperial expansion see John LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700-1917: the Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Alfred Rieber, “How Persistent are Persistent factors?” in *Russian Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century and the Shadow of the Past*, ed. Robert Legvold (New York: Columbia Univeristy Press, 2007), 205-278.

⁵⁹ One of the duties of the Siberian Cossack host was to “settle and defend new lines, fortresses, and posts established by the Government.” *Polozhenie o Sibirskom lineinom kazach'em voiske* (S.-Peterburg: V Tipografii Departamenta Voennykh Poselenii, 1847) IV, 42(8), 11.

⁶⁰ There are no exact numbers for those who settled in Semirech'e, but information exists on the Cossacks who settled in Semipalatinsk oblast in 1867. Each Cossack who settled in the region received 30 *desiatina* of land and 55 rubles. They were also freed from military service for three years and provided with building materials, medical services, and money to spend during the duration of their trip, at the state's expense. See Nailia Bekmakhanova, *Formirovanie mnogonatsional'nogo naseleniia Kazakhstana i severnoi Kirgizii: posledniaia chetvert' XVIII – 60-e gody XIXv.* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo “Nauka,” 1980), 175.

⁶¹ A. P. Fomchenko, *Russkie poseleniia v Turkestanskom krae* (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo “FAN” Uzbekskoi SSR, 1983), 18-24.

changed throughout decades, initially seeing it as undesirable, then necessary and, finally as advantageous.

Immediately after the abolishment of serfdom in 1861, any agitation in favor of resettlement was punishable according to Article 947 in the “Code of Punishments,” and could result in two weeks to three months imprisonment.⁶² Peasants had to go through many steps before they could leave their communes, and the government did everything it could to make the process as complex as possible. Yet, peasants took the initiative to migrate to the Kazakh steppe and further into Central Asia during the 1860s and 1870s, despite state’s sanctions against resettlement and its rejection of peasants’ appeals to relocate. By the beginning of the 1880s, peasant land shortages posed a real threat to the stability of the empire, and in 1881 the state was forced to adopt the “Temporary rules on peasant resettlement into the state lands.”⁶³ These rules, although with some limitations, granted landless peasants the right to resettle, and eased their withdrawal from their commune. Between 1889 and 1904, the government issued several additional laws based on the “Temporary rule,” intended to control peasant resettlement, prevent the unauthorized seizure of land, and to manage tensions between settlers and the local nomadic and sedentary population.⁶⁴ According to these laws, peasants still had to obtain special permission from the government to move, the government reserved the right to decline peasants’ appeals due to the shortage of lands available for resettlement, and the right to resettle was granted only to those peasants deemed to possess sufficient funds to be successful.⁶⁵ At the same time, these laws provided peasants with subsidies to ease the burden of resettlement, and with

⁶² Fomchenko, *Russkie poseleniia*, 28.

⁶³ Sergei Abashin, ed. *Tsentral’naia Aziia v sostave Rossiiskoi imperii* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2008), 218; Willard Sunderland, “Peasant pioneering: Russian Peasant Settlers Describe Colonization and the Eastern Frontier, 1880s-1910s,” *Journal of Social History* 34, 4 (2001): 897.

⁶⁴ Fomchenko, *Russkie poseleniia*, 31.

⁶⁵ Idem., 32.

benefits such as exemption from taxes and military service.⁶⁶ Despite the state's efforts to regulate and control the outflow of peasants to the eastern and southern margins of the empire, peasant migration and the establishment of settler communities continued through the beginning of the twentieth century in haphazard fashion. Crop failures in central Russia in 1891-1892 and famine that followed it brought an enormous number of peasants to the eastern borderlands.⁶⁷ The state had no choice but to allocate plots of arable land to these migrants, and to legitimize the newly established settlements.

In 1904, the government issued a new resettlement law that allowed peasants to move freely to the imperial borderlands, particularly to the Kazakh steppe, Siberia, and the Far East. Turkestan was officially closed to settlers, but this did not prevent thousands of peasants moving to that region as well.⁶⁸ Peasant resettlement was now explicitly and enthusiastically supported by the Russian government.⁶⁹ Imperial administrators initiated a massive advertising campaign to encourage resettlement; they published and distributed leaflets with appeals to settle in "Asiatic" Russia, along with pamphlets and concise guide books containing information that state thought would be useful for peasants during their journey and at their final destination.⁷⁰

Typically peasants moved in groups of several families, but there were also some cases where a capable male member of the family journeyed alone, to be joined later by the rest of his family. Sending scouts, or *khodoki*, ahead to discover the quality of the soil and reconnoiter the future resettlement areas was another common practice at the end of the nineteenth century.

⁶⁶ Abashin, *Tsentrāl'naia Aziia*, 219.

⁶⁷ On the 1891 famine in Russia see Richard G. Robbins, *Famine in Russia, 1891-1892: the Imperial Government Responds to Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975).

⁶⁸ Abashin, *Tsentrāl'naia Aziia*, 220.

⁶⁹ Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field*; idem., "Peasant pioneering."

⁷⁰ On peasants' interpretation of these pamphlets see Sunderland, "Peasant pioneering," 897.

Peasants usually sold all their possessions before embarking on the trip and took very little with them. In the 1860s and 70s, horse carts (*brichka*) served as a primary mode of transportation for resettlement; but in the 1890s, those headed to the Steppe and Turkestan regions used the Trans-Siberian and later the Orenburg-Tashkent railroads.⁷¹ Spatially, peasant settlements were located in close proximity from each other. This offered various benefits of scale - more convenient administration, larger trading posts, spaces for social interaction, and a better public infrastructure. But the main reason for this planning approach was the administration's concern for the security of the peasants. In the Turkestan Governor-Generalship, even though the number of settlers swelled by the beginning of the twentieth century, they were still outnumbered by the local nomadic and settled population: in 1911, out of a total population of 6,492,692, only 406,607 were of Slavic origin.⁷² The ability of the new settlements to defend themselves in conflicts with the local population over water and land resources was crucial for both the administration and the settlers themselves. The military governor of Syr-Dar'ia *oblast*, General N. I. Grodekov, first raised the issue of arming the settlers in 1888. After much discussion and debate in government circles, the state issued a law in 1891 allowing "reliable" settlers who had previously held low ranks in the military to receive arms.⁷³ The government also prohibited settlers from selling their weapons to the local population. The process of arming the settlers proceeded slowly until 1898. However, the Andijan uprising in 1898, heightened the fears of the colonial administration, and between 1898 and 1908 the distribution of arms picked up speed.⁷⁴ By 1908 there were reports of violent clashes between the settlers and the local population of

⁷¹ Abashin, *Tsentral'naia Aziia*, 224.

⁷² G. V. Glinka, ed. *Aziatskaia Rossiia, liudi i poriadki za Uralom. Izdanie pereselencheskogo upravleniia glavnago upravleniia zemleustroistva i zemledeliia* (S. Peterburg: Tovarichestvo A. F. Marks, 1914), vol. 1, 87.

⁷³ P. G. Galuzo, *Vooruzheniie russkikh pereselentsev v Srednei Azii, istoricheskii ocherk* (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo Sredne Aziatskogo Kommunisticheskogo Universiteta im. V.I. Lenina, 1926), 16.

⁷⁴ *Idem.*, 21.

Central Asia, and the government decided to again proceed cautiously. The beginning of the First World War put an end to any further weapons allocation in Central Asia, but sources show that during the 1916 uprising in Semirech'e, most of the settlers were armed and able to resist Kyrgyz and Kazakh attacks.⁷⁵

In Semirech'e, imperial expeditions to the region had located and marked suitable land for peasant resettlement during the 1850s, but permanent Slavic settlements did not appear in the region until 1868.⁷⁶ Russian Cossacks predated these settlements slightly, beginning with the establishment of the fourteen Cossack stations and settlements in 1867 of the Semirech'e Cossack Host.⁷⁷ Cossack settlement in the region was necessary in order to keep peace on the borderlands, but it soon became obvious that Cossack colonization alone would not ensure the region's successful integration with the rest of the empire. At the end of the 1860s, Governor-General K. von Kaufman initiated the search for suitable lands for the establishment of peasant settlements.⁷⁸ Peasant resettlement was also strongly supported by the Governor of Semirech'e region, G. A. Kolpakovskii. He hoped that peasant settlers would encourage the nomadic Kazakh and Kyrgyz to settle as well.⁷⁹ Thus instead of sending peasants back to their homeland, the local administration supplied them with land in Semirech'e and provided them money to buy livestock and household items.⁸⁰ But the region was also home to the nomadic Kazakh and Kyrgyz, and the tsarist administration had to act carefully to avoid disturbing their seasonal land use and migration patterns. Word about Semirech'e's fertile land and mild climate spread quickly, and soon it became hard to contain peasant migration to the region. Finally, in 1889 the region was

⁷⁵ I will discuss the uprising of 1916 in Chapter 5.

⁷⁶ Dzhangerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 353.

⁷⁷ Fomchenko, *Russkie poseleniia*, 34.

⁷⁸ Idem., 35.

⁷⁹ Idem., 36.

⁸⁰ Abashin, *Tsentral'naia Aziia*, 220.

officially closed to peasant resettlement and remained so until 1910.⁸¹ Other regions, however, such as Syr-Dar'ia and Ferghana, were still taking in peasants at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Within Semirech'e, a mild climate and the presence of vast arable lands made the Chui valley and the basin of Lake Isyk Kul one of the most desirable places for peasant resettlement. The mountainous area of central Tian-Shan, beset by a harsh climate and suited more to livestock grazing than agriculture, was designated for resettlement only much later, when the government had exhausted more suitable land reserves. The first large settlements, such as Toqmoq (1868), Karakol (1869), Pishpek (1878), and Naryn (1867), originated as Kokand fortresses, turned into Russian military fortresses after the Russian advance to the region. Gradually these settlements became administrative and cultural centers, and eventually grew into major urban centers. In 1868, fifty peasant families apiece were to be settled near the fortresses of Toqmoq and Karakol, with a fixed allocation of fifteen *desiatina*⁸² of land per male member of the household.⁸³ But the number of peasants hoping to relocate to these territories exceeded the state's expectations, and by the end of 1868 the number of peasant families settled in Toqmoq alone had reached one hundred and fifty.⁸⁴ By the beginning of the twentieth century the state had to take measures to remove those peasants who had settled without authorization on the lands of nomads in the Kyrgyz *volosts*.⁸⁵ There were thirty-two peasant settlements in Semirech'e region, including sixteen in Pishpek (10) and Przheval'sk (6) *uezds*. The rest of the settlements were distributed between Lepsinsk, Kopal, and Vernyi *uezds* of Semirech'e *oblast*.⁸⁶ Peasants from central black-

⁸¹ Fomchenko, *Russkie poseleniia*, 37.

⁸² 1 *desiatina* equals 2.7 acres.

⁸³ Kolpakovskii's request to the Governor-General of Turkestan. In Dzhamgerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 357.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ TsGA KR, f. 6, op. 1, d. 1, l. 159.

⁸⁶ Fomchenko, *Russkie poseleniia*, 38.

soil *guberniias*, such as Penza, Samara, Voronezh, and Tambov, were among the first to settle in these places.⁸⁷

Soviet and western views on peasant resettlement policy and its influence on the nomadic economy have tended to differ dramatically. Whereas Soviet scholars viewed peasant resettlement as having had a largely positive influence on the nomadic Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, encouraging the nomads to embrace a more peaceful and stable lifestyle; Western scholarship has stressed the dire consequences of resettlement, such as the loss of grazing lands and the economic hardships that resulted. It is true that after the introduction of the imperial legal and administrative system in the region, *barymta* and other types of raids became less frequent and eventually ceased altogether, offering the nomads a more peaceful existence. Similarly, although change happened slowly and the main occupation among the northern Kyrgyz remained livestock grazing, by the end of the nineteenth century the majority of the northern Kyrgyz had come to see advantages in settlement and farming. In 1897, a group of Kyrgyz from several *volosts* of Pishpek *uezd* petitioned the local administration for the right to settle. Their wish was granted in 1899, leading to the establishment of the first permanent Kyrgyz settlement, Tash Töbö, located in Pishpek *uezd*.⁸⁸ From then on the number of petitions from Kyrgyz of various *volosts* desiring to settle steadily increased. Usually several yurts, or *kibitki*, came together to form such a request to create a settlement.⁸⁹ Most of these applications came from poor Kyrgyz, *jalchy*, who owned little or no livestock, and therefore had existed by hiring themselves out to Russian peasants and more affluent Kyrgyz. The impoverishment of the nomadic households and consequent settlement of the nomads were a direct result of imperial resettlement policy, which,

⁸⁷ V. IA. Galitskii, *Istoriia goroda Pishpeka, 1878- 1917* (Frunze: Ilim, 1980), 34.

⁸⁸ Kyrgyz settlements existed before this, but this was the first containing permanent structures instead of yurts. The first Kyrgyz settlement in Przheval'sk *uezd* appeared in 1900. Dzhangerchinov, *Prisoedinenie*, 364.

⁸⁹ TsGA KR, f. 6, op. 1, d. 1, l. 89, 92 ob., 93.

in trying to accommodate the land shortages of incoming Slavic peasants, failed to consider the complexities of seasonal migration patterns and the nomadic lifestyle. Wealthier Kyrgyz, meanwhile, continued to oppose permanent settlement for fear of losing their pasture lands and the work force to tend their herds, and sometimes offered fierce resistance to particular settlement proposals.⁹⁰

Economic changes were followed by social and demographic changes in the region. These changes were felt most acutely among the Kyrgyz nomads. Individual ownership of land redefined the social structure of the Kyrgyz society: social relations based on kinship ties were replaced by ones based on political and territorial units. The arrival of Slavic peasant settlers also drastically changed the composition of the once insular northern Kyrgyz community. No other places demonstrate the scope of this multi-ethnic regional configuration better than the urban centers like Pishpek, Toqmoq, and Przheval'sk.

Development of Urban Centers

Towns in Semirech'e were initially Kokandian fortresses later turned into Russian military outposts, intended to provide peace and stability, and secure imperial interests in the region. Around these military fortresses, Russian imperial officials had created new settlements to house peasants from the central *gubernii*s of the Russian empire. As peasant colonization intensified, these fortresses were gradually transformed into towns and cities. In the second half of the nineteenth century Toqmoq became the center of culture and trade in Semirech'e region. It was the hub for the network of merchants from Russia, Siberia, the Central Asian khanates, and

⁹⁰ *Turkestanskii vedomosti*, 1910, no. 98.

Kashgar. Toqmoq was home to a large population of Slavic peasant settlers, as well as the handful of Kyrgyz tribes that were gradually settling in and around the city.⁹¹ Besides the Russian peasants and Kyrgyz, Toqmoq's population also included Tatars, Dungans, Taranchi, Kazakhs, and some Sart families.⁹² Initially the town served as the administrative center of Toqmoq *uezd*. But Toqmoq's swampy environs, close proximity to the Chu River, and tendency to flooding provoked concerns beginning in 1874.⁹³ Efforts to dry the swamps failed, and the regional administration decided to move the *uezd* capital to Pishpek in 1878.

As an administrative center, Pishpek's development paralleled that of many other Russian colonial cities, with the exception that it did not have a settled local population prior to the Russian conquest.⁹⁴ Originally a fortress of Kokand, Pishpek had contained Kokandian officials' quarters, a mosque, a prison, and military barracks, but the site was demolished and abandoned with the arrival of the Russian imperial army in 1862.⁹⁵ The destruction was so complete that plans to situate a Cossack outpost at Pishpek were initially dropped. As Russian troops continued their advance, however, Pishpek's convenient position between Aulie Ata and Vernyi prompted officials to reconsider this decision. The fortress was rebuilt in 1864, and garrisoned by a small part of the Semirech'e Cossack host. Pishpek's public infrastructure began to develop after it was designated as the *uezd* center. In addition to the buildings of the *uezd* administration, Pishpek

⁹¹ Duishe Aitmambetov, *Kul'tura kirgizskogo naroda vo vtoroi polovine XIX - nachale XX vekov* (Frunze: Ilim, 1967), 107.

⁹² These are the ethnic terms used by colonial officials in their correspondence. TsGA KR, f. 92, op. 1, d. 16, l. 10 ob.; The ethnonym "Sart" was further qualified by location, e.g. "Namangan Sart," Kokandian Sart," "Tashkendi Sart," etc. TsGA KR, f. 13, op1, d. 15, l. 66-68.

⁹³ "Russkie poseleniia v Tokmakskom i Isyk Kul'skom uezdakh," *Turkestanskii Vedomosti*, 1874, no. 38, p. 146.

⁹⁴ On Russian colonial cities in Central Asia see Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent, 1865-1923* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Alexander Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarqand, 1868-1910: a Comparison with British India*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁹⁵ Galitskii, *Istoriia Pishpeka*, 30.

also became a home to a parish school, women's and men's gymnasiums, and a school of gardening. A medical center and a pharmacy were also transferred from Toqmoq to Pishpek.⁹⁶

Towns like Pishpek and Toqmoq in southern Semirech'e were the result of Russian colonization in the region, and their structure and demographic composition reflected this tendency. The presence of Cossacks in Pishpek led to the establishment of Russian peasant settlements around it. In addition to these peasants, Sart, Chala-Kazakh, and Tatar families also settled in the area.⁹⁷ Most Russian settler families were engaged in agriculture, but there were also those who owned modest shops or engaged in small-scale trading. Nearly half of the Sart families farmed, while the remainder engaged in trade, or, occasionally, earned a living by craftwork.⁹⁸ Due to the scarcity of arable land in the immediate vicinity of Pishpek, peasants rented plots of land from the Kyrgyz who lived in the *volosts* surrounding the city, and sowed oats, barley, wheat, and rye on these plots.⁹⁹ The population of Pishpek grew slowly but steadily after it became the administrative center of the *uezd*. By 1882, the population of Pishpek reached 2,135. Following the failed rebellion by Hui Muslims, or Dungans, in the Qing Empire between 1863 and 1873, small groups of Dungans began migrating to Central Asia. In 1881-83, the

⁹⁶ Idem., 57-73.

⁹⁷ For discussions of the term *sart* see A. Ilkhamov "Archaeology of Uzbek Identity," *Anthropology and Archaeology of Eurasia* 44, 4 (2006): 10-36; Sergei Abashin, "Problema sartov v russkoi istoriografii XIX - pervoi chetverti XX v.," Sergei Abashin, *Natsionalizmy v Srednei Azii, v poiskakh identichnosti* (Sankt – Peterburg: Aleteia, 2007), 95-176; J. Schoberlein-Engel, "Identity in Central Asia: Construction and Contention in the Conceptions of 'Ozbek,' 'Tajik,' 'Muslim,' 'Samarqandi' and Other Groups" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1992). The origin of the *Chala Kazakhs* as an ethnic group is not well recorded. A. Frank defines them as "...the descendants of Central Asian fathers and Qazaq mothers, who were granted a legal status equivalent to that of nomadic Qazaqs after the conquest of Central Asia." Here, by "Central Asian fathers" Frank means men who came from Tashkent, or *Sarts*, and settled in the Kazakh steppe in the 18th century. The word "chala" means "half" in Turkic. See Allen Frank, *Bukhara and the Muslims of Russia* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012), 61-62. N. Bekmakhanova states that the greatest concentration of *Chala Kazakhs* was in Alatau *okrug* of Semipalatinsk *oblast*. In 1856, the state issued an order enlisting the *Chala Kazakhs* living in the Kazakh steppe into the Siberian Cossack host for a period of ten years. But the majority of the *Chala Kazakhs* preferred to be included within Kyrgyz or Kazakh *auls*, rather than the Siberian Cossack host. N. Bekmakhanova, *Formirovanie*, 180-181.

⁹⁸ Galitskii, *Istoriia Pishpeka*, 35.

⁹⁹ TsGA KR, f. 6, op. 1, d. 1, l. 46; Galitskii, *Istoriia Pishpeka*, 44.

Dungans joined the mix of town dwellers in Pishpek, forming their own Dungan quarters (*sloboda*) there.¹⁰⁰ As for the Kyrgyz, they do not appear in the sources as town dwellers in Pishpek until 1889; according to the statistics recorded, there were only six Kyrgyz living in the city at that time.¹⁰¹ Their number grew during the 1890s, as impoverished Kyrgyz began to settle in the vicinity of Pishpek, to work as hired laborers for Russian settlers.

Although personal interactions between Russian settlers and the local population were limited, economic interactions involving agriculture, cattle-breeding, and trade were quite widespread. Settlers introduced new types of plant cultures, brought new breeds of cattle and horses, established tobacco plants, grew hops, and opened a new market for their products.¹⁰² The local population also benefited from the veterinary services introduced in the region with the arrival of Russians. These services were crucial during the acute bouts of livestock disease which beset the region periodically. In 1871, representatives from several *volosts* in Toqmoq *uezd* petitioned the head of the *uezd* to open an agricultural school. These Kyrgyz were, they felt, losing too much of their livestock - their primary source of wealth - from a lack of knowledge of farming and animal husbandry. Each Kyrgyz *volost* pledged to collect money from every *kibitka* within their *volost* to support the school, where they hoped their children would study “farming,

¹⁰⁰ Idem., 55. On the history of the Chinese Muslims, or Dungans, see Jonathan N. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

¹⁰¹ Galitskii, *Istoriia Pishpeka*, 55.

¹⁰² Tobacco farming was wide-spread in Pishpek *uezd*, with twenty tobacco plantations in existence in the 1890s. Although some of wealthy Kyrgyz continued to breed horses, trading them at local markets or selling them to the state, horse-breeding as a large-scale business had begun in the 1880s with the establishment of several horse-breeding ranches around Przheval'sk and Toqmoq. In addition to gardening and farming, some settlers also benefitted by the region's mild climate and rich flora to keep bees. Aitmambetov, *Kul'tura kirgizskogo naroda*, 23-40.

cattle-breeding, veterinary science, and Russian language and laws.”¹⁰³ In 1874, the school finally opened in Pishpek, enrolling fifteen boys from the local population.¹⁰⁴

Perhaps the best description of Toqmoq, one of the largest towns in Pishpek *uezd*, belongs to Moldo Qylych (1866-1917), who visited the town in the early twentieth century, and wrote a lengthy poem, *Chüy baiany* (The story of Chui), overwhelmed by the unique things he found in the city.¹⁰⁵ He wrote about the city’s diverse population: Russians, Dungans, Nogoys, Sarts, Kazakhs, and Kyrgyz, and spun engaging tales of their respective characters and occupations. Thus, Qylych sang of the “Russians who came and settled in Toqmoq and made it their place, who occupied themselves with farming and raising pigs; the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz who filled the sheep bazaar; and the Dungans who spoke their own language and took up the front rows in the bazaars.”¹⁰⁶ Qylych was astonished by the choices at the bazaar, and masterfully described the various food items, fruits and vegetables he saw there—cabbage being the most exotic to him. Similarly he provided detailed accounts of Chui’s natural environment, rich vegetation, and many birds.

People like Moldo Qylych were drawn to urban centers, such as Pishpek, Przheval’sk, and Toqmoq, for they were places of novel experiences, encounters, and opportunities. These towns had the largest concentration of stores, *bazaars*, and *ashpaz*,¹⁰⁷ all of them being spaces of

¹⁰³ TsGA RK, f. 44, op. 1, d. 21204, l. 11-11 ob.

¹⁰⁴ The first Russian-native school opened in Toqmoq *uezd* in 1884 with 23 students - twenty Dungans and three Kyrgyz. Instruction was conducted in Russian, however only two of the students who attended between 1884 and 1896 learned to speak “proper” Russian. TsGA RK, f. 90, op. 1, d. 91, l. 2. Initially locals in Semirech’e greeted these schools with distrust, but by the 1890s people from many *volosts* began asking the *uezd* administration for their own Russian-native schools. TsGA RK f. 90, op. 1, d. 90, ll. 2-40. These schools were largely financed by the *uezd* population. Some had boarding schools attached, where Kyrgyz students lived. TsGA RK, f. 44, op. 1, d. 21204, l. 61.

¹⁰⁵ Moldo Qylych, “Chüy baiany,” in M. Qylych, *Qazaldar*, 71-85.

¹⁰⁶ Abdylidaev, *Muras*, 81-83.

¹⁰⁷ Moldo Qylych, “Chüy baiany,” 73. *Ashpaz* means “eatery.”

social interaction between groups from different ethnic, social, and confessional backgrounds. *Mektebs* and *medreses* which were mainly located in larger urban centers also attracted those Kyrgyz willing to continue their education they received locally from a village *mullah*. Toqmoq and Przheval'sk were two towns in Pishpek *uezd* which hosted a large number of Tatar population from Volga region whose educated elites frequently opened *medreses* and taught Muslim children. As we will see in Chapters 3 and 4, in the late-imperial period, almost all of the northern Kyrgyz poets and intellectuals came to these Tatar Muslim *medreses*, either in Toqmoq or Przheval'sk, to further their studies before going off to the centers of Islamic learning in Russia or Central Asia.

Imperial Confessional Politics and the Kyrgyz Nomads

Confession was a major tool through which the Russian empire governed its subjects; it was one of the building blocks of the empire, and it played an important role in the formation of imperial identities. Confession was used to ensure stability in the empire and to efficiently integrate newly acquired territories into the imperial administrative structure. As an Orthodox Christian polity, the Russian empire used Orthodoxy as a force to bring unity among its subjects. This approach was useful until the empire began its territorial expansion in the sixteenth century and incorporated people of various faiths - Jews, Muslims, Catholics, Buddhists, and pagans - under one roof. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the state tried different coercive measures to assimilate these people into the imperial polity. However, by the end of the eighteenth century the state realized the futility of such efforts and adapted a policy of religious

toleration.¹⁰⁸ As Paul Werth has recently noted, “religious toleration,” could mean different things to different imperial agents.¹⁰⁹ But overall, religious toleration entailed tolerance of officially recognized non-Orthodox religions as long as the representatives of those religions contributed to the welfare of the empire in some capacity. Non-Orthodox religions were tolerated if they tolerated other religions themselves, i.e. their representatives did not engage in proselytizing. Finally, religious toleration was guaranteed, if members of the non-Orthodox religious community did not engage in politics (in this case, the empire required non-interference of the non-Orthodox faiths into the affairs of the state).¹¹⁰

Recent scholarship on imperial governance and the politics of confession has noted that at the end of the nineteenth century, the empire had to find ways to deal with its multi-ethnic and multi-confessional population and had to find effective ways to reconcile the imperial diversity with its aspiration to be perceived as the Orthodox state.¹¹¹ What then, was the imperial confessional policy in Turkestan, among its ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse

¹⁰⁸ Several scholars have discussed pre-modern Russian views of diversity and the state’s attempts to deal with it. See Michael Khodarkovsky, “Ignoble Savages and Unfaithful Subjects: Constructing non-Christian Identities in Early Modern Russia” in Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini, eds. *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 9-26; Yuri Slezkine, “Naturalists versus Nations: Eighteenth-Century Russian Scholars Confront Ethnic Diversity,” *idem.*, 27-57.

¹⁰⁹ Paul Werth, *The Tsar’s Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 106-122.

¹¹⁰ *Idem.*, 107-112. The final aspect of “toleration” was extended to the western regions where some non-Orthodox Christian faiths enjoyed predominant status. In this case, favoring, or “tolerating,” non-dominant faith could lower the status of the dominant faith. *Idem.*, 111.

¹¹¹ While Paul Werth has demonstrated the changes in the politics of confession after the 1860 when the state began to view Orthodoxy as a tool which could lead to eventual assimilation of the natives into the empire, Robert Crews has emphasized mutual collaboration and a deep interdependence between the state and Islam, and stressed the role of the state in integrating its Muslim population effectively into the imperial structure. But, as Brower and Campbell’s works show, this integration was not devoid of anxieties and fears on the part of the state officials and the Russian educated public. See Paul W. Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance, and Confessional Politics in Russia’s Volga-Kama Region, 1827-1905* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Robert Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Daniel R. Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire* (London, New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003); Elena I. Campbell, *The Muslim Question and Russian Imperial Governance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

population? Among the people whose worldview and lifestyle were largely guided by the teachings of Islam?

After the conquest of Turkestan, imperial officials initially disagreed on how to align the norms of Islam with the secular administration of the region.¹¹² N. A. Kryzhanovskii was among those who viewed Islam as a threat to the peace and stability of the empire. As the Governor of Orenburg, he strongly advocated for the repression of Islam.¹¹³ In contrast to Kryzhanovskii's views was a more tolerant approach to Islam taken by von Kaufman, the Governor-General of Turkestan. Von Kaufman formulated his policy toward Islam based on his many years of experience in the service of the empire in Caucasus and the western borderlands.¹¹⁴ In Turkestan, his policy toward Islam was one of tolerance and complete disregard with the goal to eradicate Islam's appeal to its followers. Von Kaufman recognized the danger of Islam as a political force, but he believed that if the state ceased to support both official and unofficial displays of Muslim piety, then Islam would soon become obsolete.¹¹⁵ For him, religion existed in two domains – private and public. Driven by the practical goal of stability in the region, von Kaufman supported private devotion through sponsoring participation in the *hajj*, the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca; however, his support for Islam ended at that.¹¹⁶ His measures to weaken and eradicate Islam in the public domain included withholding official support for Islam, which meant the exclusion of Muslim clergy from official positions; abolishment of the highest religious position

¹¹² These views ranged from calling for repressive measures against Muslim propaganda in Turkestan, to insisting on religious tolerance. See Daniel Brower, "Islam and Ethnicity: Russian Colonial Policy in Turkestan," in *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and People, 1700-1917*, ed. Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 118.

¹¹³ Brower, *Turkestan*, 30; Campbell, *Muslim Question*, 86.

¹¹⁴ Brower, *Turkestan*, 31-33.

¹¹⁵ On von Kaufman's attempted measures to eradicate Islam see Elena Campbell, *The Muslim Question and Russian Imperial Governance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 88; Brower, "Islam and Ethnicity," 119-120; Alexander S. Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarkand, 1868-1910. A Comparison with British India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 55-58.

¹¹⁶ Brower, *Turkestan*, 33-34.

of *Sheikh ul-Islam*, and the position of the chief Muslim judge (*qadi-kalan*); and finally, the refusal of the Orenburg Muslim Religious Administration's request to extend its authority over the Muslims of Turkestan.¹¹⁷

Existing views about the degree of adherence to Islam of the nomads and the sedentary population of Turkestan informed von Kaufman's policy and became part of his guiding principles. These views, expressed in the works of imperial ethnographers, military officers, scholars, and writers, claimed that Islam was weak among the Kazakh and Kyrgyz nomads whereas Islam held a strong grip over the sedentary population of Turkestan. One of the ardent proponents of the view of "weak" Islam among the nomads came from a representative of the nomadic culture itself. Chokan Valikhanov, a Kazakh by birth but a Russian imperial scholar by training and worldview, penned several works on Kazakhs and Kyrgyz and their religious views. His writing later influenced Russian imperial officials' views of religion among the nomads and shaped the imperial confessional policies. Valikhanov insisted that although the "wild mountain Kyrgyz" (*dikokamnennye kirgizy*) refer to Islam as their religion and call themselves Muslims, they do not know or obey any of the pillars of Islam, and their rituals and beliefs contain traces of shamanism.¹¹⁸ He attributed these nomadic tendencies to the fact that *mullahs* and *khojas* did not penetrate deep into the nomadic territories and that there was an absence of mosques in those same territories.¹¹⁹ In light of this assessment, Russian imperial officials viewed removing nomads from the influence of "fanatical" sedentary Muslims, especially Tatars, as a necessity.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Idem., 34.

¹¹⁸ Chokan Valikhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* (Alma-Ata: Glavnaia redaktsiia Kazakhskoi sovetskoi entsiklopedii, 1985), v. 2, 72. One of the best works that describe syncretism between Islam and shamanism belongs to a cultural anthropologist. See Bruce Privratsky, *Muslim Turkistan: Kazakh Religion and Collective Memory* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2001).

¹¹⁹ Valikhanov, *Sobranie Sochinenii*, v.2, 72.

¹²⁰ "Statute on regulation of spiritual affairs of the Kyrgyz" is a good illustration of this isolationist politics of the tsarist regime, which implicitly curbs the activities of the Tatar *mullahs* in the steppe. See "Polozhenie ob upravlenii

One of the attempts to separate nomads from the sedentary populations of Central Asia was to govern them through distinct laws. Since nomads were not considered “true” Muslims, they were to be ruled by *adat*, customary law; and sedentary people were to obey the *sharia*, Islamic law.¹²¹ In reality, however, isolation and containment of the nomads and their territories from outside Islamic influences proved to be difficult and impossible.

Islam spread to Central Asia with the Arab conquest in the beginning of the eighth century. It moved northwards into the territory of the nomads in the tenth century. Its advent resulted in the formation of various types of Islamic societies. Among nomadic people, Islam became part of popular identity and belief, but it did not constitute the basis of social organization. Naqshbandi and Yasavi missionaries were the ones who began to convert Kazakhs in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. However, it was not until the eighteenth century that Kazakhs, initially those of the Inner Horde, began to adhere more closely to Islam, when they

dukhovnymi delami kirgizov v oblastiakh Stepnogo general-gubernatorstva,” in D. IU. Arapov ed. *Imperatorskaia Rossiia i musul'manskii mir* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo “Natalis,” 2006), 94-97. In addition to limiting Muslim Tatar missionary activity, von Kaufman prohibited Russian Orthodox proselytization in Turkestan. He assigned a minimal space for the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church in the region; the Turkestan diocese was established in 1871, though its center was not located in Tashkent but in Vernyi, which had the highest concentration of the Russian population in the area. See Campbell, *Muslim Question*, 88. There were cases in which Russian peasants converted to Islam, which was worrisome for the imperial officials and local Russian Orthodox leaders. The Russian Orthodox Church viewed these converts as having been “seduced” from Orthodoxy to Islam, and urgently requested the military governor of Semirech'e *oblast* to intervene. Cases of Muslim conversion to the Russian Orthodox faith also appear in the archives. It is hard to tell, however, what the real motivation behind these conversions was, the extent to which such conversions were common among the Kyrgyz, and what consequences, if any, these apostates may have encountered from their communities and from Muslim religious authorities. For the most part the documentary record consists of appeals from these converts to be enrolled into townspeople's (*meshchane*) communes in Pishpek *uezd*. For instance, “O prichislenii k obshchestvu meshchanina g. Pishpeka vykreshchennogo iz kirgiz Chuiskoi volosti Kozhubeka Bakashbaeva po sv. kreshcheniiu Fedora Nikolaeva,” 1896; TsGA KR, f. 6, op. 1, d. 1, l. 66 ob.; “Kolombai Aitmambetov po sv. kreshcheniiu Stepana Aleksandrova kirgiza Dzhalkankuzovskoi volosti o prichislenii ego k Pishpekskomu meshchanskomu obshchestvu,” 1896. TsGA KR, f. 6, op. 1, d. 1, l. 72. See also Alexander Morrison, “Peasant Settlers and the ‘Civilising Mission’ in Russian Turkestan, 1865 – 1917,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 1(2014):13; Duishe Aitmambetov, *Kul'tura kirgizskogo naroda*, 62. On Russian peasants as unreliable *kulturtragers* see Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field*.

¹²¹ On the *sharia* courts in Russian Central Asia see Adeeb Khalid, *Islam After Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 38-49. The best work on the practice of *adat* within imperial legal system up to date remains Virginia Martin's work. See Virginia Martin, *Law and Custom in the Steppe: the Kazakhs of the Middle Horde and Russian Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001).

came into close contact with Tatars and began to follow Muslim rituals and practices.¹²² Tatar proselytization among the nomadic Kyrgyz and Kazakhs increased by the mid-nineteenth century, undermining the policy of religious tolerance.¹²³

And yet, Islam did not “arrive” amongst the northern Kyrgyz only from the north, through religiously educated Muslim elites of Kazan, Orenburg, and Ufa. Previous ties of the northern Kyrgyz tribes with the Kokand Khanate to the south played a crucial role in spreading and strengthening Islam in the northern Kyrgyz territories. Kyrgyz were exposed to the works of Naqshbandi missionaries by the seventeenth century. Adherence of the Ferghana Kyrgyz to Islam had been noted in a Sufi hagiography, entitled *Ziya al-Qulub*, written in the beginning of the seventeenth century which mentioned the missionary works of the Naqshbandi shaykhs among the “infidel” Kyrgyz.¹²⁴ If we take into consideration that part of the Kyrgyz migrated from Ferghana to Tian Shan (north) in the second half of the eighteenth century (see Chapter 1), it would mean that those influences were carried along with them and spread further.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Ferghana valley hosted a number of Sufi brotherhoods and their leaders, the *ishans*, who gathered around themselves a large number of disciples (*mürids*).¹²⁵ Sufi disciples were known for travelling extensively throughout the region and recruiting followers during their journeys. The fact that Sufi brotherhoods existed in Tian

¹²² See V. Bartol'd, *Istoriia kul'turnoi zhizni Turkestana* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo akademii nauk SSSR, 1927), 21-66; Ira Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 415-430. For the detailed discussion of the Islamization of the nomads of the steppe see Devin DeWeese, *Islamization and the Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tükles and the Conversion to Islam in the Historical and Epic Tradition* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

¹²³ Tatar and Russian missionary activities were already under way in the middle of the nineteenth century in the Kazakh steppe. On the Russian missionary activities among the Kazakhs see Robert Geraci, “Going Abroad or Going to Russia: Orthodox Missionaries in the Kazakh Steppe, 1881-1917,” in *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky eds. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 274-310.

¹²⁴ Komatsu, “Andijan Uprising,” 39.

¹²⁵ There were close to 700 Sufi leaders with more than 60,000 disciples in Turkestan at the end of the nineteenth century according to Russian imperial studies conducted right after the Andijan revolt of 1898. See Brower, *Turkestan*, 97-98.

Shan among the northern Kyrgyz is indicative of this trend.¹²⁶ Furthermore, Sufi ideas were reflected in the poetry of the Kyrgyz and Kazakh oral poets of the late-imperial period, who became increasingly critical of *mullahs* and their teachings and called for purification of spirit and morals (Chapter 3).

Recent studies on Islam and empire have been successful in revealing the complexity of the interrelationship between the imperial officials and the Muslim population of Turkestan. Scholars have demonstrated that despite its politics of non-interference and complete disregard, the two worlds, of the Russians and Muslims of Turkestan, often collided in real life. Conflicts in Semirech'e continued to stem largely from land and water deficits, aggravated by the particularly large number of Russian settlers admitted to the region. Although there were some skirmishes involving both sides, they never took the form of large-scale protests.¹²⁷ As early as 1874, *Turkestanskii Vedomosti* published an article which stated that "in almost every settlement peasants complain about the pressure of the Kyrgyz. They graze their cattle on Russian fields, [and] steal hay... In Isyk Kul' skirmishes generally arise over irrigation and cattle theft."¹²⁸ These conflicts escalated over the following decades; for example, 130 conflicts were registered in 1904, 235 in 1905, and 372 in 1915 in Pishpek and Przheval'sk *uezds* alone.¹²⁹ The first major disturbance in Turkestan since the beginning of Russian imperial rule came in the form of a religious uprising that killed nearly forty Russians and forced the imperial administration to seriously reconsider its policy toward Islam. The importance of the uprising for the present study

¹²⁶ Abramzon, *Kirgizy*, 271.

¹²⁷ Beatrice Forbes Manz, "Central Asian Uprisings in the Nineteenth Century: Ferghana Under the Russians," *Russian Review* 46, 3 (1987): 275.

¹²⁸ "Russkie poseleniia v Tokmakskom i Isyk Kul'skom uezdakh," *Turkestanskii Vedomosti*, 1874, no 38, p. 150.

¹²⁹ P. K. Alpatskii, *K istorii osedaniia kochevykh i polukochevykh khoziaistv Kirgizii* (Frunze: Mektep, 1959), 22.

lies in the fact that more than half of its participants were members of the Kyrgyz tribes of Ferghana and the mountainous areas of the Semirech'e *oblast*.

On May 18, 1898, a group of close to 2,000 Muslims attacked a Russian military garrison in Andijan killing and wounding several Russian soldiers.¹³⁰ A leader of the uprising, Dukchi *ishan*, gained a prominent position as a Sufi Naqshbandi shaykh through many years of apprenticeship with famous Naqshbandi shaykhs in the region, his pilgrimage and travels to Mecca and Medina, and his care of the poor.¹³¹ The uprising came as a shock to the Russian imperial officials, both in St. Petersburg and in Turkestan, specially, in light of the recent visit of Senator F. K. Girs, who came to inspect Turkestan's readiness to be integrated into the imperial administrative system, and the nature of his report based on his findings.¹³² In this report, Girs' criticized both Russian and native systems of regional governance: he noted the unlimited authority of the governor-general of Turkestan and the corruptibility of the native officials. He stressed the abuse of power by native officials at the *volost* level and the Russian officials' negligence of native affairs due to their disinterest in native languages, customs, and traditions.¹³³ But Girs concluded his report with a firm belief that there were no reasons to prevent bringing the region in line with the rest of the imperial structure.¹³⁴ Moreover, he asserted that the Muslim population's disposition towards the Russian power was friendly, there were no "wars, raids, and robberies," and that the "religious fanaticism" declined

¹³⁰ "Raport komandira 20 turkestanskogo lineinogo kadrovogo batal'ona in nachal'nika Andizhanskogo garnizona podpolkovnika Mikhailova na imiia Nikolaia II, 20 maia 1898 g., no. 633," in *Krasnyi Arkhiv, istoricheskii zhurnal* 3 (1938):129-132.

¹³¹ Hisao Komatsu, "The Andijan Uprising Reconsidered," in Sato Tsugitaka ed. *Muslim Societies, Historical and Comparative Aspects* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 31-33.

¹³² Campbell, *Muslim Question*, 90.

¹³³ F. Girs, *Otchet revizuiushchego, po vysochaishemu poveleniiu, Turkestanskii krai, Tainogo Sovetnika Girs*, (n.p., 1884).

¹³⁴ *Idem.*, 461.

considerably.¹³⁵ The Andijan revolt, however, proved the contrary and instigated heated debates about religious “fanaticism” of Turkestan’s Muslims among the imperial officials and the Russian educated elite.¹³⁶

Scholars’ opinions on the causes of the Andijan uprising are divided. Since the uprising was initiated by a Sufi leader and his followers, some scholars examined the uprising through the prism of Muslim *ghazavat*, a holy war, against the Russian “infidels.”¹³⁷ Beatrice Manz viewed the uprising as an extension of the long-lasting tradition of factional wars between various tribes in the Khanate of Kokand dating back to the early nineteenth century.¹³⁸ This rivalry was mainly between the Qipchaq and Kyrgyz tribes of the Ferghana valley. Hisao Komatsu has analyzed the uprising as part of a larger problem related to the Russian absorption of the Khanate of Kokand and the peasant colonization of the Ferghana valley that followed.¹³⁹ He placed a greater emphasis on the role of the Kyrgyz tribes of the Ferghana valley in the uprising. Komatsu argued that the Kyrgyz tribal leaders followed, and even encouraged, Dukchi *ishan* to rise against Russian rule.¹⁴⁰ Half of the Dukchi *ishan*’s 2,000 followers were “semi-settled” Kyrgyz, who by the 1890s were deprived of their pasture lands due to intense peasant colonization of the region.¹⁴¹ Reports of the imperial officials also support the evidence about Dukchi *ishan*’s

¹³⁵ *Idem.*, 454.

¹³⁶ “Iz otcheta gen.-leit. Korol’kova Turkestanskomu gen. gub. Gen.-leit. Dukhovskomu, 3 avgusta 1898 g. no. 240” in *Krasnyi Arkhiv, istoricheskii zhurnal* 3 (1938):154-155; “Muslim fanaticism,” was often used by Governor General Dukhovskoi, see “Iz raporta komanduiushchego voiskami Turkestanskogo voennogo okruga gen.-leit. Dukhovskogo gen.-leit. Kuropakinu, 5 avgusta 1898g.” in *idem.*, 160-161.

¹³⁷ Pierce, *Russian Central Asia*, 227; Salavat Iskhakov, *Pervaia russkaia revoliutsiia i musul’mane Rossiiskoi imperii* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo “Sotsial’no-politicheskaia MYSL’,” 2007), 69-71.

¹³⁸ Manz, “Central Asian Uprisings.”

¹³⁹ Komatsu, “Andijan Uprising Reconsidered.”

¹⁴⁰ *Idem.*, 40.

¹⁴¹ Anke von Kügelgen, “Predisloviia k perevodu,” in *Manakib-i Dukchi Ishan (Anonim zhitiia Dukchi Ishana – predvoditelia Andizhanskogo vosstaniia 1898 goda)*, ed. Anke von Kügelgen (Tashkent-Bern-Almaty: “Daik-Press,” 2004), 11.

Kyrgyz followers.¹⁴² As early as 1896 Kyrgyz tribal leaders of Ketmen Töbö and Kökart *volosts* were joined by the tribal leaders from Toqmoq in order to petition the *ishan* about the Russian peasants' offenses.¹⁴³ They sent a delegation of twenty-five people to ask Dukchi *ishan* for his permission for *ghazavat*, a holy war, against Russian peasants for disrupting their way of life. Dukchi *ishan* postponed the uprising referring to the unpreparedness of the settled population of Ferghana, but the next year, more than 1,000 Kyrgyz gathered again and requested Dukchi *ishan's* participation in their meeting. In it, they urged the *ishan* to lead them against the Russians.¹⁴⁴

Russian imperial officials explained Kyrgyz participation in the uprising by their poor economic conditions resulting from the loss of their lands to Slavic peasants. According to Manz, the roots of the Kyrgyz militancy go back to the period of the Kokand khanate, the time of factional struggles between various ethnic groups for political domination.¹⁴⁵ During those times nomadic Kyrgyz often supported various political figures who proclaimed themselves as khans and fought for domination in the Kokandian court. She argues that Russian occupation of Kokand in 1876 changed the dynamics of political leadership and struggle among the local population. It weakened the role of the traditional tribal leaders and, therefore, Kyrgyz tribes began to gather around spiritual leaders, the Sufi shaykhs.¹⁴⁶ Although tribal leaders did exist among the nomads, their ability to mobilize their tribes politically and militarily against another political entity decreased significantly with the Russian conquest of the region. Many came to be viewed as the agents of the empire and lost their credibility among the nomads. Viewed in this

¹⁴² A Russian officer M. H. Chanishev noted that Dukchi *ishan* could gather as many as 10,000 followers from among the Kyrgyz. Cited in Komatsu, "Andijan Uprising Reconsidered," 39.

¹⁴³ *Idem.*, 39-40.

¹⁴⁴ *Idem.*, 40

¹⁴⁵ Manz, "Central Asian Uprisings."

¹⁴⁶ *Idem.*, 273-274.

light, the nomads' military backing of the Muslim religious authority, who derived his legitimacy from the service to God and not the empire, makes sense.¹⁴⁷

After the Andijan uprising, von Kaufman's policy of ignoring Islam came under scrutiny. S. M. Dukhovskoi, the newly appointed Turkestan Governor-General, raised the question of reconsidering imperial policy toward Islam. In his report to the tsar, Dukhovskoi discussed regional particularities of Islam on the territory of the Russian empire and laid out his thoughts about how to contain Islam.¹⁴⁸ He stated that it was undesirable, and even impossible, to further ignore Islam and suggested an increased Russian military presence in Turkestan.¹⁴⁹ Calling Islam a "painful sore" for the state, he suggested several measures for bringing the population of Turkestan closer to the empire. These measures involved increasing the number of Russian-native schools, extending Russian medical assistance to the natives, limiting the use of translators and gradually increasing the use of the Russian language for official communication, and finally, considering the possibility of, if not registering inter-religious marriages by the Orthodox church, then adopting children born as a result of these relationships.¹⁵⁰ He called for strict surveillance of Muslim educational institutions and mosques, requested replacement of "alien" Tatar and other foreign instructors in Muslim school by Russian subjects, and prohibited missionary travels for *ishans* and the settlement of Tatars among the nomads.¹⁵¹ His view of

¹⁴⁷ Unfortunately, lack of sources on the Andijan uprising in "Kyrgyz" collective memory makes it impossible to speculate further about the nature and scale of Kyrgyz participation in the uprising. The only known case is that of Toqtoghul Satylghanov (1864-1933). Toqtoghul, hailed as a "democrat-*aqyn*" by Kyrgyz Soviet government, was born in Namangan *uezd* of Ferghana *oblast*. He participated in the uprising and was sentenced to hard labor camp in Siberia, from where he escaped sometime in 1910. He did not compose anything on the uprising (at least nothing of his on the subject has been published). The lack of treatment of the Andijan uprising in Kyrgyz historiography might have something to do with the fact that Andijan became part of Uzbekistan after the national delimitation of Central Asia and as such, the uprising became part of the "Uzbek" collective memory.

¹⁴⁸ "Vsepoddaneishii doklad Turkestanskogo general-gubernatora ot infanterii Dukhovskogo 'Islam v Turkestane,'" in D. IU. Arapov ed. *Imperatorskaia Rossiia i musul'manskii mir* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Natalis," 2006), 142-163.

¹⁴⁹ *Idem.*, 158.

¹⁵⁰ *Idem.*, 155-158.

¹⁵¹ *Idem.*, 159-160.

Islam as a hostile force and his calls for strict measures against its spread, however, did not find resonance in official circles in St. Petersburg.¹⁵² The issue itself was lost in the arguments between the Ministries of War, Finance, and Internal Affairs, each having different plans and perspectives for the future development of Turkestan.¹⁵³ Concerns about Islam and its possible threat to the integrity of the empire increased after the revolution of 1905.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Islam started to play an important role in the lives of the northern Kyrgyz and became an integral part in their daily existence. The generation of young people who were born after the 1860s, received either formal or informal *mekteb* education. The number of *mektebs* in the territory of southern Semirech'e increased drastically by the end of the nineteenth century. According to the official statistics of 1909, there were 14 *mektebs* in Pishpek and 11 *mektebs* in Przheval'sk *uezds*.¹⁵⁴ These were officially registered *mektebs*, but among the Kazakh and Kyrgyz nomads, schools also were organized in an informal setting and were a seasonal enterprise. Due to their mobile nature, they escaped state control. In the early twentieth century, the Kyrgyz tribal elite sponsored the construction of mosques and *medreses*, and donated large sums to cover the cost of those who expressed willingness to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca. It came to be viewed as a pious act and those who had means chose to memorialize their names and the names of their ancestors by investing into spiritual well-being of their people.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, Islam came to occupy an important place in the imaginations of the Kyrgyz educated elite. As we will see in Chapters 3 and 4, some poets and intellectuals began to

¹⁵² The issue of Muslim "fanaticism" was also a topic of the debates in the circles of the Russian Orthodox missionaries, who sided with Dukhovskoi's vision of Islam. See Campbell, *Muslim Question*, 99-105.

¹⁵³ Brower, *Turkestan*, 97-102.

¹⁵⁴ A. Dzhumanaliev et al., *Shabdan baatyrdyn medresesine – Tar-Suu mektebine 100 zhyl: Tarykhyi maalymattar, ocherkter, zhana eskerüü, oi-tolgoolor* (Bishkek: Uchkun, 2009), 10. Meanwhile, the number of *mektebs* in the "south of Kyrgyzstan" during the same time reached 169. Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ I will discuss this in Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation.

weave Islamic motives into their poetry as well as seek and find solutions to contemporary problems through Islam.

Conclusion

In the 1860s, the northern Kyrgyz tribes were a tight-knit kinship society that led a nomadic pastoral lifestyle, based on the communal ownership of land and livestock and the principle of mutual assistance. This lifestyle became unsustainable as they fell under Russian rule. This society, which had previously relied on mutual support for survival, now had to adapt to a new social order and a profoundly different form of governance. After the conquest, the tsarist government divided the territory of the northern Kyrgyz tribes into several administrative units; it started the process of official peasant colonization by controlling the movement of peasants into the region; and it intervened into the Kyrgyz traditional system of self-government by diminishing the authority of the old tribal elites and creating a new tribal bureaucracy. These social and economic changes interrupted the traditional lifestyle of the Kyrgyz, based on seasonal migration and livestock grazing, and in so doing drove many of them to poverty.

The Kyrgyz oral poets, or *aqyns*, emerged as ardent critics of Kyrgyz society in the middle of the nineteenth century. They traced the ills of the society to the changing world order. In their poems, poets like Qalyghul expressed their worries about peasant resettlement, land shortage, and the changing social relations among the Kyrgyz that had resulted from exposure to outside influences. By the early twentieth century, their efforts had been picked up by the modernist intellectuals, who began to mobilize their efforts around the issues of education. Although they, too, viewed many of the ills of their society as a product of Russian colonization,

they also blamed the wretched condition of their people on their own ignorance and backwardness. The next two chapters tell the story of their origin and development.

Chapter Three

Laying the Groundwork: the Northern Kyrgyz *Aqyns* and Their Literary**Milieu**

Which one should I talk about?
 The Kyrgyz became weak, what kind of days fell upon [us]?
 Those poor ones who had passed away.
 There is no difference between the wealthy and the poor,
 [Their] horses cannot be mounted.
 There is no difference between slaves and *biys*.
 They used to take over an enemy by facing them.
 They used to win suits in singing competitions.
 Now the smell of mint is gone,
 The light of a star has been turned off.
 The value of otter is gone.
 The fitness of Kyrgyz is gone.¹

Arstanbek (1824-1878)

Introduction

The northern Kyrgyz of the nineteenth century did not have a written literary culture; instead much of their literary heritage was preserved in oral form. Two distinct groups of cultural producers played leading roles in this literature: *zhomoqchus* and *aqyns*. The *zhomoqchus*, or singers of tales, performed what was then the most developed genre in Kyrgyz literature, the Kyrgyz oral epic, or *zhomoq*.² These epic poems provided the best reflection of the Kyrgyz worldview, and served as repositories of Kyrgyz history and culture.³ Nineteenth century bards,

¹ Batma Kebekova, ed. *Arstanbek* (Bishkek: Kyrgyz entsiklopediiiasynyn bashky redaktsiiasy, 1994), 37.

² Today the term *manaschy*, or reciter of the *Manas* epic, is widely used for someone who pursues epic performance as a career. This was not always the case, however; the term *manaschy* was introduced only in the 1920s, replacing the term *zhomoqchu*, *yrchy* (singer) during the period when scholars were actively recording and collecting samples of Kyrgyz oral literature. I use *zhomoqchu* throughout my dissertation.

³ Soviet-era Kyrgyz scholars were often too quick to take Chokan Valikhanov's assessment of the *Manas* epic at face value. While travelling among the Bughu Kyrgyz and recording excerpts from the epic, he wrote: "*Manas* is an encyclopedia. It contains the tall tales, stories, legends, and geographic, religious, and intellectual knowledge and moral notions of the people, collected into one whole that belongs to a single period. And all of it is concentrated around the main hero Manas. ...it is a popular epic similar to the steppe *Iliad*." Chokan Valikhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* (Alma Ata: Glavnaia redaktsiia kazakhskoi sovetskoi entsiklopedii, 1985), v. 2, 70.

including Keldibek, Balyk, Kenzhe Kara, Nazar, Tynybek, Saghymbay and many others, provided masterful recitations of the *Manas*, *Semetey*, and *Seytek* epic trilogy, as well as a variety of smaller epics. Their talent lay in their ability to recite various episodes from the epic from memory, over a span of many days and nights, and in front of a large audience.⁴ Improvisation formed an important part of their craft; although the main storyline and key episodes of the epics remained consistent, each performance was unique according to the bard's verbal talents. The *zhomoqchus* claimed that their abilities stemmed from divine revelation, but they also embraced practical methods for perpetuating the craft. Experienced bards took younger poets as apprentices, travelled with them, and taught them their skills, in an informal learning environment specific to the Kyrgyz and Kazakh nomadic cultures. The *aqyns*, or oral poets, exercised a similar set of skills; they were expected to compose, as well as perform and elaborate, their poetry. *Aqyns* played a societal role that emphasized cultural criticism, composing and performing poems on social and moral problems of the day. The early Kyrgyz intellectuals were the direct product of the predominantly oral literary milieu of the *zhomoqchus* and *aqyns*.

This chapter enquires into the world of the Kyrgyz *zhomoqchus* and *aqyns* of the nineteenth century. It draws on their works to consider how they imagined themselves and their community.⁵ In the process, it asks when they began to develop a sense of *Kyrgyzchylyk*, Kyrgyzness or being a Kyrgyz, how they understood this concept, and how their views changed over time. Next, it will turn to the genre of *zamana* poetry, which the *aqyns* developed in the

⁴ Valikhanov noted: "Three nights are not enough to listen to the *Manas*, one needs the same amount for the 'second *Manas*'" (referring to *Semetey*, the epic about Manas' son Semetey's deeds). In Ch. Valikhanov *Sobranie sochinenii*, 70.

⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 1983), esp. "Introduction."

middle of the nineteenth century as a reaction to the socio-economic changes wrought in Kazakh and Kyrgyz society by the Russian conquest. *Zamana*⁶ poets, including Qalyghul, Arstanbek, Aldash Moldo, Moldo Qylych, and many others described the hopelessness of the situation the Kyrgyz found themselves in by the end of the nineteenth century. They criticized the social and economic changes that occurred after the arrival of the Russians, and how these had, in turn, affected Kyrgyz social norms and morals. Some of the *zamana* poets offered solutions in the form of resignation and Islamic mysticism, while others called for struggle against the social and economic injustices imposed by the tsarist administration and the newly appointed Kyrgyz administrative elite. Finally, the last part of this chapter will examine the life and works of Moldo Qylych Shamyrgan uulu (1866-1917), a prominent *aqyn* from the Sarybaghysh tribe, whose case sheds light on the period of transition in Kyrgyz literary history from oral to print literature, and provides a connection between the *zhomoqchus* and *aqyns*, and the emerging modernist Kyrgyz intellectuals.

Sources of Kyrgyz Identity: *Zhomoqchus*, *Aqyns* and Kyrgyzness

The idea of a distinct Kyrgyz identity, which would supersede tribal and clan identities to unite the Kyrgyz into a single political entity, did not appear until the early twentieth century with the emergence of the modernist intellectual movement in Central Asia.⁷ Nevertheless, earlier notions of what it was to be Kyrgyz did exist. These views were expressed, first and foremost, in the *Manas* epic, devoted to the legendary deeds of the Kyrgyz leader Manas and his

⁶ *Zaman* in Arabic means “time, epoch.” *Zar zaman* means “time of sorrow, grief.”

⁷ Adrienne Edgar, *Tribal Nation: the Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*.

forty companions. The epic is organized as a trilogy, which tells the story of three generations of heroes: Manas, his son Semetey, and his grandson Seytek. At the center of all three tales is the quest to unify the Kyrgyz, and the struggle against their common enemies, the Chinese and the Kalmyks.⁸ More than sixty distinct renditions of *Manas* have been recorded, but despite their variety, they all retain the core episodes that define the epic. These include the birth of the hero Manas and his childhood, his first heroic deeds, his marriage to Kanykei, the story of his best friend Almambet, the military campaign to Beijing [*Chong Qazat*], and finally, Manas' death.⁹ The first written records of *Manas* date to the middle of the nineteenth century, and the work of Russian imperial scholars Wilhelm Radlov and Chokan Valikhanov, but the epic itself is believed to have been composed well before the nineteenth century.¹⁰

The performative aspect of *Manas* was highly developed among the northern Kyrgyz of the nineteenth century. The epic was presented without the accompaniment of any instrument, usually by male performers. Performances drew large audiences, and created spaces for social interaction. *Manas* not only entertained the Kyrgyz, it also allowed them to connect with their cultural heritage. Episodes from the *Manas* epic evoked a wide range of emotions, which were intensified by the theatrical artistry of the *zhomoqchu*. While reciting a battle scene, the *zhomoqchu* did his best to recreate and act out the scene for his audience; while singing about the death of a hero, the bard's heart-wrenching laments would bring his audience to tears. Often the

⁸ This account refers to Saghymbay Orozbaqov's early-twentieth century rendition. Earlier recorded versions of the epic tell a different story, as discussed later in the chapter.

⁹ The number of episodes varies from one *zhomoqchu* to another depending on their mastery of the epic. But the core episodes remain consistent. For the summary of the *Manas* epic trilogy in prose in Kyrgyz see Samar Musaev, *Manas, Semetei, Seitek qara söz menen* (Bishkek: Sham, 2003). Some episodes from the *Manas* epic were translated by Elmira Kochumkulova, see "The Kyrgyz Epic *Manas*," translated, introduced, and annotated by Elmira Kochumkulkizi, accessed May 17, 2015. <http://www.silk-road.com/folklore/manas/manasintro.html>. Episodes from *Manas* and *Semetey* epics in prose in English can be found in Keith Howard and Saparbek Kasmambetov, *Singing the Kyrgyz Manas: Saparbek Kasmambetov's Recitations of Epic Poetry* (Global Oriental, 2001), 3-62.

¹⁰ Samar Musaev, *Epos Manas: Nauchno-populiarnyi ocherk* (Frunze: Ilim, 1984), 102-103.

zhomoqchu would reach such a state of ecstasy that he was entirely lost in the performance. For instance one prominent *zhomoqchu*, Keldibek (1800-1880), would start reciting an episode from the epic sitting at the *tör*¹¹ of the yurt, but by the end of the performance he would find himself outside the yurt.¹²

Zhomoqchus of exceptional talent were patronized by tribal leaders and wealthy members of Kyrgyz society, for having a singer in one's entourage was an indicator of high economic and social standing. Thus, Balyq (1793-1873), a singer from the Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz, enjoyed the patronage of Baytik of the Solto tribe, while his son Naimanbay (1853-1911) was in the service of Baytik's son Sulaimanqul.¹³ Two famous bards, Muzooke (1800-1878) and Keldibek (1800-1880), were patronized by Ormon khan of the Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz.¹⁴ Another highly esteemed *zhomoqchu*, Saghymbay Orozbaqov (1867-1930), had the support of the Kyrgyz *manap* Sooronbay, and often sang for Kyrgyz and Kazakh tribal leaders such as Tezek, Dür and Mambetaaly. Saghymbay's father Orozbaq was likewise believed to have been a trumpeter for Ormon khan.¹⁵ Finally, the *manap* Shabdan of the Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz was among the tribal leaders who continued to patronize the *zhomoqchus* and *akyns* into the early-twentieth century, exerting tremendous influence over the cultural life of the region.¹⁶

The *Manas* epic trilogy shaped Kyrgyz collective memory, and had a great impact on the formation of a Kyrgyz group identity. This was noted by both Wilhelm Radlov and Chokan

¹¹ A seat of honor usually located opposite the door.

¹² Raisa Kydyrbaeva, *Skazitel'skoe masterstvo manaschi* (Frunze: Ilim, 1984), 14.

¹³ Idem., 15, 18.

¹⁴ Belek Soltonoev, *Kyrgyz tarykhy* (Bishkek: Arkhi innovatsiialyk borboru, 2003), 210.

¹⁵ Mukhtar Auezov, "Skaziteli eposa" in *Mysli raznykh let* (Alma-Ata: Kazakhskoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhesvennoi literatury, 1961), 493; Soltonoev, *Kyrgyz tarykhy*, 287.

¹⁶ Shabdan's impact on cultural life in the region is treated at length in Chapter 4.

Valikhanov during their travels among the Kyrgyz in the middle of the nineteenth century. In Radlov's words:

[T]his epic gives a vivid picture of the spiritual life and customs of the whole people. Military campaigns, match-making, funeral ceremonies, and everyday life are depicted with great epic breadth. All of the characters of these narratives come alive in front of our eyes and become real-life people; we see how they act, what they think. The main point of the whole narrative is the victory of the Muslims over the infidels. Every "Kara-Kirghiz" knows some parts of this epic, which lives in the consciousness of the people and does not allow the appearance of any other poetic creations in it.¹⁷

In the absence of written and print literature, episodes from the oral epics were acted out in the minds of the audience. These epics guided the audience to imagine themselves as part of a larger community with a shared past, gradually helping to define how the Kyrgyz came to see themselves. The bards shaped their narrative according to the demands of the day and, in turn, their narrative shaped the world view and attitudes of their audience. It is important to note that in the versions of the epic that were recorded before the beginning of the twentieth century, the hero Manas is of Noghoi descent, and the Kyrgyz are presented as one of many tribes that dispersed after the death of Noghoi Khan. The Kyrgyz follow Jaqyp, Noghoi Khan's son and Manas' father, to Altay, where Manas is born.¹⁸ The Noghoi connection in this version of the story reflected popular conceptualizations of a larger and more inclusive Islamic heritage; and thus as Radlov mentioned, the mid-nineteenth century *Manas* epic was centered on the conflict between Muslims and infidels. In the early-twentieth century, by contrast, the narrative began to elevate the Kyrgyz as the main actors, in what Daniel Prior has characterized as a shift to accentuating "ethno-national" rather than religious identity. One example of this new development was the poetry of Musa Chaghataev, another Kyrgyz oral poet of the early

¹⁷ Vasilii Radlov, *Iz Sibiri* (Moscow: Glavnaia redaktsiia vostochnoi literatury, 1989), 354.

¹⁸ A. Hatto, *The Manas of Wilhelm Radloff* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasowitz, 1990).

twentieth century, written in 1909-1910, in the epic style and devoted to the heroic deeds of Shabdan, but pursuing a nationalist theme in which Shabdan was substituted for Manas, and the Kyrgyz were valorized in the battle scenes against the Kazakhs.¹⁹ Other bards, too, began adapting the epic form to reflect the changing social landscape, and to incorporate contemporary themes and actors into the narrative.²⁰ In the early-Soviet period, this trend culminated in the version of *Manas* recorded by the legendary bard Saghymbay, in which the Noghoi heroes were identified exclusively as Kyrgyz.²¹

In addition to the epic literature of the *zhomoqchus*, the poetry of nineteenth century Kyrgyz *aqyns* offers us a complementary glimpse into how the Kyrgyz understood themselves, their character, and the situation in which they found themselves. These *aqyns* were born and lived during the time of Kokandian rule. They witnessed major inter-tribal feuds between two prominent northern Kyrgyz tribes of the period, the Bughu and the Sarybaghysh, along with lesser skirmishes; they also witnessed (and sometimes fought in) the battles against the Kazakh tribes; finally, a few lived to see the Russian conquest of the region, and the social and economic transformations that resulted. These experiences played a critical role in shaping the poems the Kyrgyz *aqyns* would go on to create.

One of the most important of these *aqyns* was Qalyghul Bay uulu (1785-1855), from the northern Kyrgyz Sarybaghysh tribe. Qalyghul lived and wrote during the turbulent period in the nineteenth century when the northern Kyrgyz were still under Kokandian hegemony, but when

¹⁹ Daniel Prior, "Heroes, Chieftains," 71-88. These kinds of adaptations were not new. Often *aqyns* and *zhomoqchus* improvised and incorporated details from their surroundings that inspired them. They were led by their audience and its reaction to the narrative. There were also cases where they wove a highly esteemed guest present among the audience into their narrative. In late-nineteenth century performances of *Manas*, episodes involving the "White Tsar" were common, usually evoked by the presence of Russian imperial administrators in the audience.

²⁰ Daniel Prior, *The Shabdan Baatir Codex: Epic and the Writing of Northern Kirghiz History* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 314-317.

²¹ Idem., 316.

word of the Russian advance into Central Asia was already beginning to spread among the Kyrgyz. Qalyghul was an advisor to Ormon khan of the Sarybaghysh tribe and died at the age of seventy, three years after Ormon's death at the hands of the Bughu Kyrgyz.²² All of the information available about Qalyghul and his poems was recorded in the early 1920s, from Kyrgyz *aqyns* and *manaschys* who had once had personal connections with the poet.²³ According to these sources, Qalyghul came from a wealthy family and received a traditional *mekteb* education. He was known to be a visionary and eloquent man, and was believed to have made significant contributions to the Sarybaghysh tribe's independence and strength during the period of Kokand's rule over the northern Kyrgyz.

Another prominent *aqyn*, Arstanbek Builash uulu (1824-1878) of the Bughu tribe, was born into the family of a wealthy Builash *biy*. Arstanbek played the *qomuz*, a three-stringed instrument, very skillfully and was known among his people as a composer of *qomuz* melodies. He performed at gatherings and celebrations, earning respect from Kazakh and Kyrgyz tribes alike. Arstanbek's fame grew after he was brought to the Kokandian court by Alymbek *Datqa* from the southern Adygine Kyrgyz tribe and won a *qomuz* performance contest. Later, he participated in an *aitysh*, or singing competition, with *aqyns* from both the Kazakh and Kyrgyz tribes and became famous as a poet, as well as a *qomuzchu*, or *qomuz* performer.²⁴

The poems of Qalyghul, Arstanbek and the many other Kyrgyz oral poets were never recorded during their lifetime, and only reached us through the efforts of early-Soviet Kyrgyz intellectuals to collect and preserve what they considered to be a Kyrgyz national heritage. As

²² Abdylidazhan Akmataliev, ed. *Kyrgyz adabiiatynyn tarykhy* (Bishkek: Kyrgyz uluttuk ilimler akademiiasy, 2002), vol. 5, 87.

²³ Among these were Shapak Rysmendeiev, Sagymbay Orozbaqov, Kaium Miftakov, and Belek Soltonoev.

²⁴ Tazabek Samanchin, "Arstanbek," Batma Kebekova, ed. *Arstanbek*, 151.

with any other works of oral tradition, these poems underwent various changes during the process of oral transmission and recording; therefore, despite the fact that they were attributed to various poets, the themes and content of these poems bear striking resemblances to one another.²⁵ Many of the poems of the Kyrgyz *aqyns* were didactic in nature, invoking the notions of good and bad, and striving to raise the listener's awareness of right and wrong. Taken as a whole, these poems reflected the values of Kyrgyz society of the time. Qalyghul sang of the consequences of befriending a bad and a good person, and the theme was echoed by Arstanbek and Moldo Qylych.²⁶ These artists celebrated concepts such as *yntymak* (peaceful existence), *iyman* (piety), *meenet* (hard work), and *abiyir* (consciousness) as values essential to supporting healthy family relations, tribes, and people. By contrast, the concept of *napsi* (greed) was the foremost of the negative character traits condemned by these poets.²⁷

In addition to poems on moral values, Kyrgyz *aqyns* also composed songs describing the natural beauty of their place of origin or habitation. For instance, Qalyghul sang of Isyk Kul as a place of abundance. He praised its mild climate, and asked his fellow tribe members (referring to them as “my children”) not to abandon Isyk Kul.²⁸ In a contest with Chongdu, a poet from the Saruu tribe residing in the Talas valley, Arstanbek belittled Talas, while praising Isyk Kul as the land of the Bughu, and of their talented *zhomoqchus* and *aqyns* such as Keldibek, Nazar, and

²⁵ On the history of collecting, recording, transcribing, and preserving Kyrgyz oral literature, see Omor Sooronov, *Kol zhazmalar zhönündö söz* (Bishkek: Turar, 2009).

²⁶ If you befriend a bad person,
He will become your law suit (*doo*) one day.
If you befriend a good person,
He will say goodbye to you until the end of his days.
If you befriend a bad person,
Saying “Give back that thing you borrowed,”
He will pick a fight with you after two months.

In Abdyldaev, *Muras*, 24.

²⁷ Idem., 74.

²⁸ Kengesh Zhusupov, ed. *Qalyghul, Qazybek: Qazaldar* (Bishkek: Ala-Too zhurnalynyn redaktsiiasy, 1992), 34.

Akylbek.²⁹ He sang of the beauty of the Bughu women, the bravery of their men, the wisdom of their elders, and the wealth of the Bughu people.

Another concern for the *aqyns* was the question of life and death. They acknowledged the fleeting nature of life and the inevitability of death, and sang convincingly of the transiency of material experience. Thus, Arstanbek said:

When one is alive, livestock is one's power.
 The fact that one is alive is itself a power.
 When one has a tongue, the tongue is a power.
 The existence itself is a power.
 When one is alive, relatives visit him/her.
 Once your head is removed from a pillow (once you are dead),
 Everything that you gathered will remain behind.
 When your eyes exist (when you are live), relatives visit,
 Once your eyes are closed,
 Whatever you gathered will not be visible.³⁰

According to Qalyghul, everyone, regardless of wealth and social status, goes to the same place at the end of one's days, and all are equal in the face of death:

Prophets all had passed away,
 Rivers passed down Namangan,
 So saints passed away,
 And many dignitaries passed away
 If one thinks of an era,
 Only speech had come around.³¹

Aqyns often connected the concept of *napsi*, or greed, with their thoughts on life and death. They believed *napsi* was at the center of people's misfortunes; they perceived the unbounded desire for power and wealth as contradictory to the nomadic lifestyle, and used their poems to convey this idea to the Kyrgyz people.

²⁹ Kebekova, *Arstanbek*, 50-51.

³⁰ Idem., 10-11.

³¹ Zhusupov, *Qalyghul, Qazybek*, 9.

The poems of Qalyghul and Arstanbek contained few references to Islam. Both *aqyns* considered themselves Muslims, but religion was far more muted in their poetry than in the epics of the late nineteenth-century *aqyns*.³² Qalyghul made reference to Islam largely as a quality lacking in the Russians. Thus, he stated: “They [Russians] are infidels, who do not say *bissmilda*,”³³ or “...this is the time [the Russian arrival] when *khojas* and *mullahs* disappear and religion ceases to exist.”³⁴ For Qalyghul, it was only necessary to invoke religion when speaking of someone of another belief, an infidel. In his poems, Arstanbek addressed his fellow “Kazakh, Kyrgyz Muslims” and sang about the arrival of an era (*zaman*) when nobody cared about the *sharia*, Islamic law, and when people stopped performing *namaz*, the obligatory prayer performed five times per day.³⁵ For Arstanbek, Islam was neither a way of life nor a measuring stick for Kyrgyzzness; the primary significance of Islam lay instead in its connection to life-cycle rituals related to birth, marriage, circumcision, and death.

The nineteenth-century *aqyns* did not address the theme of difference between “the Kyrgyz” and others. Their works suggested the existence of a certain way of life, characterized by specific practices, behaviors, and morals—a way of life which belonged to and was valued by a distinct group of people. However these ideas were not explicitly developed and woven into a concept of Kyrgyzzness. On the contrary, the *aqyns*’ frequent references to tribal membership suggested that they continued to define themselves chiefly by kinship and tribal affiliations, and only secondarily by any larger ethnic affinity. Such sensibilities were particularly evident during the *aitysh*, when one *aqyn* might belittle another by stressing the weaknesses of the other’s

³² I will discuss this point later in this chapter when I talk about Moldo Qylych.

³³ Abdyl daev, *Muras*, 29. *Bissimilda* comes from Arabic and means “in the name of Allah.”

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Kebekova, *Arstanbek*, 29, 40, 43.

tribe.³⁶ As Ali Igmen has pointed out, the Kyrgyz themselves were never confused about what it meant to be “Kyrgyz,” thanks in large part to their legends and origin myths.³⁷ But in the nineteenth century, identifying oneself as Kyrgyz, or assuming any other Central Asian identity, was not as important as identifying oneself with one’s tribe or place of origin. Therefore, when speaking of matters internal to the Kyrgyz, *aqyns* relied on the names of tribes, such as the Sarybaghysh, Bughu, Sayaq, Saruu, Kushchu, or Solto. The question of ethnic identity became relevant only when people found themselves outside their customary setting, or in contact with an outsider. It was when the safety and unity of the Kyrgyz was under threat, and they became entangled with neighboring peoples and places, that the Kyrgyz were placed into opposition with Kokandians, Kashgarians, “Sarts,” or Kazakhs.³⁸ This tendency became still more pronounced after the Russian conquest, with the emergence of the *zar zaman* genre within the *aqyns*’ poetic repertoire.

***Zar Zaman* Poetry and the Kyrgyz *Aqyns*’ Reflections on Social Change³⁹**

Qalyghul lived to see the beginning of the Russian advance; while Arstanbek lived on through the economic and social transformations set in motion by the Russian conquest, to become a founder of the genre of *zamana* poetry. Studies of the *zamana* genre in both Kyrgyz

³⁶ For example, Arstanbek’s *aitysh* with Chongdu. Kebekova, *Arstanbek*, 45-58.

³⁷ Igmen, *Speaking Soviet*, 20.

³⁸ When Arstanbek sings of the Kokandian rule over the Kyrgyz he says:

The surroundings of the Kyrgyz became an iron net.

A place where the Kyrgyz fell became a deep hole equal to forty *qulach*.

Our numerous nomadic Kyrgyz became a toy in the hands of blue *chapan* wearing *Sarts*.

In Kebekova, *Arstanbek*, 103-105.

³⁹ Debates persist as to whether *zamana* was a movement, or a specific genre in Central Asian poetry. On *zamana* poets see Abdysalam Obozkanov, *Tokmoluktun bashaty, kalyptanuu etaptary zhana sinkrettuu tabiiaty* (Bishkek: Sham, 2006); Abdysalam Obozkanov, “*Zamana*” *poeziiiasynyn genezisi* (Bishkek: Zhamaat press, 2008); K. Koilubaeu, “*Zamana* adabiiatynyn salttuu belgileri.” *Kyrgyz tili zhana adabiiaty* 6 (2004): 90-93.

and Kazakh oral literature have stressed that these works, composed by Kyrgyz *aqyns* and Kazakh *zhyraus*, represented a social critique of the changes in traditional nomadic society that followed the Russian conquest. The emergence of the genre itself was conditioned by the Russian conquest – it came as a response to and a reflection on the changes brought by Russian rule, and the ascendancy of a people whose culture and religion were entirely alien to the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs. It was an attempt on the *aqyns*’ part to make sense of the changes, to explain the differences between the alien rulers and themselves, and to make their people conscious of these changes, in a desperate effort to preserve their culture and way of life. These poems were nostalgic for the past, critical of the present, and offered little hope for the future, with at least a hint of millenarianism. Although the poems composed in the second half of the nineteenth century did refer to Islam, the references were subtle and subordinated to the central themes of sorrow, loss, and the destruction of the nomadic way of life. In the poems composed in the early-twentieth century, however, religion took center stage, and the struggles of nomadic society were commonly explained by reference to religious apostasy. Islam became a solution for the *aqyns* of the late-imperial period for the problems of the day, it provided them with a framework to understand the ongoing changes in their society. Among the Kazakhs, the *zar zaman* genre had emerged much earlier, with the poems of Bukhar zhyrau (1693-1787). As early as the eighteenth century, Bukhar zhyrau was singing of the changes wrought by Russia’s advance into the Kazakh steppe.⁴⁰ Other Kazakh *zhyraus*, such as Dulat Babatay uly (1802-1871), Shortanbay Qanay uly (1818-1881), and Murat Monke uly (1843-1906), who witnessed Russian colonization of the Kazakh steppe and its dire consequences for Kazakh nomadic culture, called this period

⁴⁰ Mukhametzhan Karataev, *Buqar zhyrau Qalqamanuly: shygharmalary* (Almaty: Qazaqstan respublikasynyn madaniet qory, 1992).

zar zaman (the time of sorrow) and, through their poetry, tried to reveal the negative effects of colonization on Kazakh society.⁴¹

Similarly, the Kyrgyz *aqyn* Qalyghul sang of *akyr zaman*, “the end of times,” when people would “settle on a grassless, stony place and starve; the number of their livestock would decrease and they would become poor; the young would not be listening to the old, and people would settle together with infidels.”⁴² In his earlier poetry, Qalyghul is believed to have predicted the coming of Russians and the changes that follow after their arrival:

A cow will become money, a slave will become *biy*.
 A mountain will become flat, a field will become a forest.
 A younger wife will become *baybiche*, and a commoner will become a leader.
 Leaders will lose dignity, these kinds of interesting things will happen.
 A windmill will spring up on a flat land,
 A *biy* will spring up from non-noble family.⁴³

Clothes without hem and sleeves will appear,
 The youngest son will be tough.
 Money will be in form of a paper and coins will appear,
 A child [son] will be tougher than the father.
 There will be meetings every day,
 Those times will arrive soon.
 A *chapan* with short sleeves and hem will appear,
 The next son will be tough.
 A boat with two ends will appear,
 A woman who says “I manage my husband” will appear.⁴⁴

Qalyghul sought to prepare his people for the changes that awaited them with the coming of the Russians. For him, a social order in which a slave could become a *biy*, where the young lacked respect for the old, and in which women could rule their men was incomprehensible. Unlike the

⁴¹ Zaki Akhmetov, et al. *XIX ghasyrdaghy qazaq aqyndary* (Almaty: Ghylym, 1988).

⁴² Abdyl daev, *Muras*, 33-34.

⁴³ Idem., 22.

⁴⁴ Idem., 30.

aqyns of the late nineteenth century, Qalyghul did not offer any solution for these problems, but simply stated them as fact.

Arstanbek's *zamana* poems engaged in a more detailed analysis of the historical events of the second half of the nineteenth century. One of his longer poems, *Tar Zaman*, offered a powerful critique of Russian rule and the changes in Kyrgyz society. According to Tazabek Samanchin, a Kyrgyz literary scholar, Arstanbek composed *Tar Zaman* in the 1860s, and continued to recite it for audiences until his death.⁴⁵ The poem underwent many revisions during Arstanbek's lifetime, and was even further reworked by his disciples after his death.⁴⁶ *Tar Zaman* started with references to the past, to the stories which a young Arstanbek had heard from tribal elders (*qary*) about bygone days. These *qary* told of the arrival of "the blue-eyed and yellow-skinned" Russians and their methods of governing the Kyrgyz, they told about the changes in family hierarchies and relationships, the transformation of tribal governance, and new forms of communication and transportation.⁴⁷ Arstanbek's *qary* portrayed the changes attendant with the Russian conquest in vivid and unsettling terms:

When this Russian arrives, he will turn your lakes into roads.
 He will take stock of your land.
 You won't be able to run away, he will break your back.
 Oh, my people, if you are still alive,
 You will see sleds, a six month-old (*torpok*) and a one year-old (*tana*) calves.
 At the end you will guard a yellow field.
 You will give your sons to the army as soldiers.
 When the Russian comes, he will take away your wheat fields.
 He will take away a young foal born to a mare.
 He will take away the bravest of the heroes (*er*).
 He will bring much of the calamity to the people.
 This time is the time of sorrow.
 For those who are wealthy it is the time of abundance.

⁴⁵ Tazabek Samanchin, "Arstanbek," 162.

⁴⁶ Since Arstanbek's poetry was oral, and only recorded from the performances of his protégés after his death, we can assume that some distortions were introduced through that process, but we have no way of determining their precise extent or nature.

⁴⁷ Kebekova, *Arstanbek*, 22-26.

For the poor ones, it is the time of grief.⁴⁸

Arstanbek was nostalgic for the past: he sang of the days when Kyrgyz *baatyr*s “had blood on their swords and used to shoot their *barangs*,”⁴⁹ and roamed around carefree, the days when they wed graceful *baybiches*, and all the Kyrgyz girls wore beautiful clothes.⁵⁰ This way of life, according to Arstanbek, was destroyed with the arrival of Russians and the establishment of their rule over the Kyrgyz: the Russians built postal stations everywhere, they threatened the *bolush* and made them obedient slaves, they elected the *biys* and divided families (*on bölöktön üy chykty, on bashy degen bir chykty*).⁵¹ Arstanbek lamented that where once the lands had been scattered with Kyrgyz, now there was no land even for people to settle, let alone to graze their livestock.⁵² Arstanbek offered his people a possible means of escape from this desperate situation:

Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, why don't we gather and prey,
Why don't we choose the Baqdöölöt of Kashghar as our father (leader)?⁵³

Yet he was well aware that his solution was not feasible, for he used the particle *beim* to cast his words in a doubtful light. As he worked on his poem over the course of fifteen years, he must have understood that Russian power was there to stay, and seen that its grip over the nomads was only growing stronger with the passing of time. His plea illustrated clearly the hopelessness of the situation the Kyrgyz and Kazakh nomads found themselves in, and the desperate options they contemplated in seeking some way to evade Russian domination.

⁴⁸ Idem., 26.

⁴⁹ A type of pistol.

⁵⁰ Kebekova, *Arstanbek*, 28.

⁵¹ Idem., 29-30.

⁵² Idem., 29.

⁵³ Ibid.

Another poet from Isyk Kul, Aldash Zheenike uulu⁵⁴ (1876-1930) offered an even more acute criticism of the new Russian-dominated Kyrgyz society in his poem *Khal(i) Zaman* (*The State of Times*). As a youth, Aldash studied with several local *mullahs*, and then in 1905 entered a Tatar school in Przheval'sk.⁵⁵ Until the revolt of 1916 Aldash taught children in his village, and in 1916 he escaped to China along with many other Kyrgyz. Aldash was best known for his poems about the revolt, but his *Khal(i) Zaman* was also widely circulated among the northern Kyrgyz at that time. Aldash's *Khal(i) Zaman* was less complex than the comparable works of Qalyghul or Arstanbek. Aldash was more concerned with local affairs and his criticism was geared towards specific individuals who held particular influence in his society. He was not afraid to use their names and titles and to reveal their wrongdoings. Aldash criticized the transgressions of Russian imperial officials, who "distributed the land of the Kyrgyz poor for the Russian settlements, and drove the Kyrgyz out to the mountainsides, where they were unable to sow anything and had to starve."⁵⁶ Like other *zamana aqyns* before him, Aldash was nostalgic for the past. He sang of *shol zaman* (those times) when Kyrgyz lived in abundance and grazed their livestock in peace.⁵⁷ He lamented that the arrival of Russians resulted in poverty for many Kyrgyz, so that now they had to hire themselves out to the rich Dungans in the region, who took advantage of the Kyrgyz and sold them into slavery in Andijan and Ferghana.⁵⁸ Aldash's text is filled with Russian terms adjusted for Kyrgyz pronunciation, such as *qotur* (*khutor*), *köpösh* (*kupets*), *besir* (*pisar'*), *lesnichii*, *abienchik* (*ob'ezdchik*), *karshy* (*kartser*), indicating that he

⁵⁴ Also called Aldash Moldo. *Moldo* derives from the word *mullah*, but it does not carry a religious connotation. Among the Kyrgyz, anyone with a *maktab* or *medrese* education was called *moldo*. Examples include Aldash Moldo, Moldo Qylych, and Togolok Moldo, all of whom were educated literary figures.

⁵⁵ I discuss new-method schools in Chapter 4.

⁵⁶ Abdyl daev, *Muras*, 187-188.

⁵⁷ Akmat aliev, *Kyrgyz adabiatynyn tarykhy*, vol. 4, 323.

⁵⁸ Abdyl daev, *Muras*, 190.

composed it in the first decade of the twentieth century. This is also evident from Aldash's appeal to Ivanov, the head of Przheval'sk *uezd* during that time period:⁵⁹

You clenched your poisonous nails,
 Into the sleeping people.
 You made them miserable.
 In order to wake the sleeping people up,
 I disturbed their sleep and made them run.
 I called out for them,
 People, listen to my appeal,
 Don't close your eyes, don't sleep.⁶⁰

Aldash stood apart from other poets of the *zamana* genre for openly expressing his anger toward the behavior of particular imperial officials, and for advocating action against them. He warned these officials that if they continued to treat the Kyrgyz this way, they would be driven into *bunt* (here using the Russian word for "revolt").⁶¹ There is no evidence to indicate that these warnings, appeals and calls for change reached the ears of those for whom they were chiefly intended. Although the poems were widely circulated among the Kyrgyz, Russian officials and settlers remained ignorant of them due to the language barrier and the rigid separation between the native and Russian spheres.⁶² Moreover, since Aldash's poems were circulated only in oral and, occasionally, written forms, tsarist officials tended to dismiss them, focusing instead on what they considered to be more concrete and influential sources of agitation (*brozhenie*) in the minds of the natives, such as periodicals, print materials, and Muslim *mektebs* and *medreses*.

⁵⁹ As head of Przheval'sk *uezd*, Ivanov became known for the cruel measures he used against the Kyrgyz rebels during the revolt of 1916. See Chapter 5.

⁶⁰ Abdyldaev, *Muras*, 192.

⁶¹ *Idem.*, 188.

⁶² Russian administrative officials' ignorance of Muslim languages and cultures remained an impediment throughout the late imperial period. The state tried to organize and provide linguistic and cultural training for the administrative officials on such subjects as Arabic, Tatar, the Quran, and Islamic theology, but these courses were poorly attended and, moreover, were viewed suspiciously by the Muslim population. See Elena Campbell, *The Muslim Question and Russian Imperial Governance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 174-177.

Any discussion of the *zamana* genre would be incomplete without considering Moldo Qylych Shamyrgan uulu (1866-1917), a prominent *aqyn* from the influential northern Kyrgyz Sarybaghysh tribe, and his poem *Zar Zaman*. Qylych was a grandson of the legendary northern Kyrgyz *baatyr* Törögeldi, an influential manap of the Temirbolot branch of the Sarybaghysh tribe, and Ormon khan's close confidant.⁶³ Moldo Qylych composed *Zar Zaman* in the tradition of Bukhar zhyrau, Qalyghul and Arstanbek, singing about doomsday and prophesying about the future. Moldo Qylych's historical significance stems in part from the role his poetry played in opening up a new era in the development of Kyrgyz literature, marking the transition from oral to written literary culture. Therefore, before delving into *Zar Zaman*, it is necessary to pay particular attention to the historical circumstances under which Moldo Qylych came of age and gained prominence as a poet.

From Oral to Written Literature: Moldo Qylych Shamyrgan uulu

Moldo Qylych Shamyrgan uulu was born in 1866 in the village of Cholpon in Qochqor volost.⁶⁴ His father Shamyrgan died at a young age, leaving Qylych and his brothers in the care of his eldest son Rüstömbek.⁶⁵ Qylych's youth was marked by inter-tribal conflicts, the majority of which stemmed from the Russian presence in the region. Törögeldi's descendants earned a black mark in the eyes of Russian officials by their prolonged opposition to the Russian advance into the region. As a result, after the subjugation of the northern Kyrgyz, Russian officials treated

⁶³ Sardarbek Ryskulov, *Törögeldi baatyr: baian* (Bishkek: Turar, 1999).

⁶⁴ Several Kyrgyz scholars have written on life and works of Moldo Qylych. The most substantial research has been done by Tazabek Samanchin. His *Qylych – zhazuuchu akyn*, (Frunze: Kyrgyzmambas, 1948) was one of the first attempts at a systematic study of Qylych. Other sources on Qylych's life include: Mungduk Mamyrov, *Akyndardy el unutupait*, Ala-Too 1991 (11): 146-155; Sharshenbek Ümötaliyev, "Moldo Qylych Shamyrgan uulu," *Kyrgyzstan Madaniyaty* October 13, 1988:4-5.

⁶⁵ Samanchin, *Qylych*, 29-30.

Törögeldi's line with suspicion, and began to favor Balbaq, another northern Kyrgyz *manap* from the Nadyrbek branch of the Sarybaghysh tribe. Later, with the help of Russian officials, Balbaq became the first *bolush* of Qochqor *volost*.

At the end of the 1870s, in order to regain their influence over the Sarybaghysh, Törögeldi's grandchildren Ötömbay and Tabysh decided to hold a memorial feast for their grandfather. They did not spare any expense, and invited *manaps* from various northern Kyrgyz tribes, whom they hosted generously and rewarded with many gifts.⁶⁶ The event raised their popularity among the rest of the tribes, and Balbaq, fearing Ötömbay's and Tabysh's growing authority, informed on them to the Russian officials. He pointed to the fact that the tribes gathered for the memorial were the very ones that had fearlessly resisted the Russian advance in the mid-nineteenth century. Russian officials began to investigate the list of guests, as well as Ötömbay's and Tabysh's roles in the memorial. In retaliation, Ötömbay and Tabysh made an unsuccessful attempt on Balbaq's life, after which Tabysh and some twenty members of his family were exiled to Siberia, thus breaking the political power of Törögeldi's descendants in the region.⁶⁷

After his feud with Balbaq, Ötömbay dedicated himself to following a "righteous" path, sponsoring the construction of several mosques and *medreses* in the region. Ötömbay's attempt to compensate for his loss of political authority by investing in religious institutions was to have a decisive impact on Qylych's life – for he began his studies in one of Ötömbay's *medreses* under the local *mullah* Botoyan.⁶⁸ Although these studies lasted only a few years, Qylych

⁶⁶ Ryskulov, *Törögeldi Baatyr*, 70-74.

⁶⁷ Samanchin, *Qylych*, 30.

⁶⁸ Various sources refer to the mullah by two different names – Botoyan and Bayan. Not much is known about this period in Qylych's life, except that he only studied for two or three years at this *medrese*. It is likely that he followed

continued his education independently, using the religious books available at the time. A second turning point in Qylych's life was his move to the city of Toqmoq, in the Chui region, at the invitation of a distant relative, the *mullah* Mambetaaly. Qylych stayed in Chui for two years, and while at Mambetaaly's house acquainted himself with the works of Persian and Chaghatay poets and thinkers, such as Navoi, Firdawsi, Yasavi, Rabghuzi, and Bedil. Living in Toqmoq, the cultural hub of Pishpek *uezd*, Qylych doubtless had access to contemporary Tatar and Turki (Kazakh) language newspapers and journals published in various parts of the Russian empire. Through these periodicals, Qylych would have been exposed to new literary genres, and acquainted himself with the works of Tatar and Central Asian modernist intellectuals of the period. While in Toqmoq, Qylych also learned the techniques of *jadid*, or new-method, teaching from a famous Tatar *mullah* named Zakir, then serving as the director of the new-method Tatar *medrese* Iqbaliya. Qylych would use this knowledge when he returned to his village and started teaching at a village *medrese* according to this new-method.

Qylych was known as one of the first northern Kyrgyz poets to not only compose and perform his works in oral form, but also distribute them in writing. Qylych's career thus marked the moment of transition from oral to written literary culture among the Kyrgyz. Although none of Qylych's poems were preserved in his original hand, contemporaries recalled that Qylych would write out his poems, and distribute them among the reading public.⁶⁹ The reach of Qylych's verse was further extended by wealthy patrons - Kyrgyz tribal chieftains, *manaps*, and affluent *bays* - who hired scribes to copy the poems.⁷⁰

the traditional *medrese* curriculum which existed throughout Central Asia at the end of the nineteenth century. For additional information on *medrese* education see Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 19-40.

⁶⁹ Samanchin, *Qylych*, 80.

⁷⁰ Typical payment for transcribing a poem would be a sheep. See Khusein Karasaev, *Khusein Naama (bashtan ötköndör)* (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan, 2001), 15.

As he continued to develop his skill as a poet and *aqyn*, Qylych followed in the *zamana* tradition of Bukhar zhyrau, Qalyghul and Arstanbek. In *Zar Zamana*, Qylych, like these illustrious predecessors, sang about the downfall of Kyrgyz society and prophesied about the future. In time *Zar Zaman* was to become the most well-known and influential poem of the *zamana* genre, and late in his life Qylych made plans to publish it, although he was unable to bring them to fruition.⁷¹ In *Zar Zaman*, Qylych was critical of turn-of-the-century Kyrgyz society, but unlike the poets before him, he offered a solution to the degradation he perceived in Kyrgyz society. For Qylych the answer was to be found in religion, Islam, and in the choice to become a pious Muslim:

If you can, go to Mecca, a place like an honorable place of eight heavens.
 If you are named *azhy*⁷², it will be equal to the title of the Russian tsar.
 You will wander around heaven, as a person from this world.
 Your honor will be elevated among the people like that of a newly arrived *kelin*,⁷³
 If you do not transgress and stay on the righteous path,
 [you will be] like a new-washed shirt.
 Give alms from your harvest, in order to become *halal*.⁷⁴
 ...do not taint with *haram*, your possessions found by *halal* labor.⁷⁵

Such admonitions, which appeared frequently in *Zar Zaman*, represented a dramatic change from the *zamana* poems of Qalyghul and Arstanbek. Those authors, trained according to the earlier informal, apprentice-based methods, did not grant Islam a significant role in their poetry, and made few references to religion. Qylych, on the other hand, was a product of the *mekteb* education based strictly on religious texts, which had become wide-spread among the northern Kyrgyz by the end of the nineteenth century. Under its influence, Islam began to affect every

⁷¹ Mentioned on the back cover of the 1911 publication of Qylych's *Zelzeleh*.

⁷² *Hajji*, someone who went on pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina.

⁷³ A name for the daughter-in-law/bride.

⁷⁴ In Islamic law, a term used for permissible action or object as opposed to *haram*, a forbidden act.

⁷⁵ Abdyl daev, *Muras*, 47.

aspect of Kyrgyz society, making it unsurprising that Qylych's poetry would be deeply infused with religious sentiments.

Unlike Qalyghul and Arstanbek, who associated the arrival of the Russians with sorrow and misfortune for the Kyrgyz in unambiguous terms, Qylych was torn in his attitude towards Russians. Early in *Zar Zaman*, Qylych criticized the legal and political changes brought by Russian governance:

Look at the Russian rule that shook people up.
Where is this despot's help to the people?
He took taxes from *tenge*,⁷⁶ and conquered many nations.
He threatened many pious/religious commoners (*buqara*).
He took away your land and sowed wheat on it.⁷⁷

But later in the piece, Qylych also acknowledged positive aspects of Russian rule:

Through an interpreter, he announces laws to his people.
He doesn't resist your religion with his infidel ways.
He doesn't oppress your people just because he could.
Whatever the Kyrgyz say, he believes them.
...Even though they took your land, they made wheat cheap.
They settled your people, who were fighting with each other.⁷⁸

There are several possible explanations for Qylych's equivocation. One reason may stem from Qylych's parallel critique in *Zar Zaman* of the corruption of the Kyrgyz *biys* and *bolush*, and their unfair and cruel treatment of Kyrgyz commoners.⁷⁹ Qylych's shift toward praising the Russians may have been aimed at sharpening his condemnation of the behavior of the Kyrgyz ruling elite by contrast. Another possible explanation relates to the limitations of oral literature as a historical source. *Zar Zaman*, along with the works of other nineteenth-century poets, reached

⁷⁶ Currency.

⁷⁷ Abdyldaev, *Muras*, 59.

⁷⁸ *Idem.*, 60-61.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

the first decades of the twentieth century by way of oral transmission. It is possible that later informants remade parts of the poem to suit the demands of the early-Soviet period, by depicting Russian rule in a positive light. Finally, Qylych's ambivalence may have stemmed from the time in which he wrote. From the 1850s to the 1870s, when Qalyghul and Arstanbek composed their poems, Russian rule and Russian culture were still novelties in the region, leading those earlier poets to view them in simplified terms and respond to them with reflexively antagonistic attitudes. By the early twentieth century, Russians were no longer surrounded by a cloud of mystery: the high concentration of Slavic settlers in southern Semirech'e made Russian culture more tangible and three-dimensional, possessed of both positive and negative qualities, while the experience of decades of Russian rule allowed the Kyrgyz to imagine their own future within this polity in more realistic terms. This is the context that informed Qylych's critique of northern Kyrgyz society. Like earlier poets, he was disturbed by the behavior of the ruling elites, the *biys*, *bolush*, and *istarchyn*, and found the commoners lacking in values such as kindness, compassion, generosity, and the respect for elders. But unlike his predecessors, Qylych tried to analyze the social and political transformations in his society and culture, to find the underlying reasons for these changes. He held Russians and Russian rule partly responsible for these problems, but chiefly he blamed the people's deviation from Islam and its teachings for the coming of *zar zaman*, the "time of sorrow." Qylych would go on to expand on these ideas in *Qissa-i zelzeleh* (*A Story of an Earthquake*, referred to hereafter as *Zelzeleh*), which was published in Kazan in 1911.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Moldo Qylych Turekeldin, *Qissa-i zelzeleh* (Kazan: Ereemeev-Shashabrin, 1911) in Turki with Tatar elements, written using Arabic script. The discussion that follows is based on this publication. An edition was also published in 1991: Moldo Qylych, *Qazaldar* (Frunze: Adabiiat, 1991). The editors of this later edition state that they combined the 1911 edition with a version submitted by Belek Soltonoev.

Zelzeleh was a poem devoted to the 1910 earthquake in southern Semirech'e. The poem consisted of three parts. In the first part, Qylych described the earthquake; in the second part, he tried to explain why it happened, and in the third, he talked about the measures necessary to prevent the earthquake from happening again. The poem began with an invocation to God: "My first word is *bismillah*, if we were to speak, here are the words."⁸¹ The earthquake happened at dawn, while everybody was asleep. Qylych wrote about how the ground started shaking and everybody, including women and children, began to run in a panic. He wrote that a loud noise rang out, and at that "one could not think of anything else except death." Houses were destroyed in Chong Kemin of the Chui region, and nearly three hundred people died. Since the earthquake happened at dawn, it caught many people sleeping. But there were also miracles, as when, according to Qylych, a baby survived while his *beshik* (crib) was destroyed.

In the next part of *Zelzeleh*, Qylych outlined the reasons for the earthquake. He viewed the earthquake as a punishment for the people's transgressions and moral decline. Qylych directed particular criticism at people of religion, the *mullahs* and *khojas*:

Khojas wandered around, *mullahs* did not do their job.
All sorts of creatures (people), abused people's rights.
Deceitful deeds increased, of which only God knows.
Once a human being goes to the next world (*akhiret*), he/she will be judged.⁸²

Qylych blamed the impious behavior of the *mullahs* and *khojas* for the calamity. At the same time, he also condemned the wealthy for robbing the poor. Qylych viewed the earthquake as God's punishment for people's loss of trust in each other and their willingness to do anything to enrich themselves.

⁸¹ Turekeldin, *Zelzeleh*, 2.

⁸² Idem., 6.

Toward the end of his poem, Qylych talked about how to avoid the recurrence of such a disaster. He preached the necessity to accept one's destiny with humility and self-discipline. Qylych's views on repentance, justice, and the power of *Allah* were rooted in the ideas of Islamic mysticism.⁸³ Qylych called on people to be satisfied with what they had, for only then, in his opinion, would they find peace:

If you are satisfied with destiny, your faith will be in peace.
My Muslim fellows, my God who preserves us.⁸⁴

Let me tell you of the sign of the end of the world.
It is mentioned in the books, if you don't believe it, I will find it.
Those times will become like today, corruption will fill the earth.⁸⁵

Zar Zaman was Qylych's major work on the coming of the end-times, but clearly *Zelzeleh* also touched upon these themes. For Qylych the earthquake was a sign of the imminence of judgment day - if the people did not repent, praise *Allah*, and rely on his power, more disasters of this sort could be expected. Scholars have attributed Qylych's religious views to his exposure to Sufi teachings toward the end of his life. Tazabek Samanchin maintains that the religious elements in Qylych's works diminished significantly after the Revolution of 1905, but that the earthquake revived and further intensified his spiritual leanings. As a result, *Zelzeleh* was replete with references to Islam.⁸⁶ However this line of reasoning is hard to square with the source materials, since along with *Zelzeleh*, most of Qylych's earlier poems also urged the invocation of God, the acceptance of one's weakness before God, and necessity for utter dependence on God's will. This is certainly true of *Zar Zaman*, which, as we have seen, he began composing much earlier

⁸³ On Sufism see Annemarie Schimmel *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975).

⁸⁴ Turekeldin, *Zelzeleh*, 7.

⁸⁵ Idem., 15.

⁸⁶ Samanchin, *Qylych*, 107.

than *Zelzeleh*.⁸⁷ The centrality of Islam, *Allah*, and eschatological motifs in Qylych's poems can be seen as simply a natural outcome of his religious education and the historical circumstances in which he wrote.

Zelzeleh was Moldo Qylych's response to a disastrous event in the history of Central Asia. Through his poem, Qylych sought to explain the earthquake in terms that were familiar and accessible to him, viewing it through the prism of religion. Even though the earthquake was a natural disaster, Qylych used it to grapple with a much bigger and more human problem: the crisis besetting Kyrgyz society. Qylych believed that the same things that had debased the Kyrgyz had caused the earthquake: the *mullahs*' and *khojas*' departure from the virtuous path, the injustice and corruption of the ruling elite, and the greed and moral transgressions of the commoners. And similarly the earthquake itself formed a powerful metaphor for the social unrest to come, with religion being the only way to avert it. Later in his life Qylych planned to write a poem on the 1916 revolt in Central Asia, which he witnessed first-hand, but he died in 1917 before he could fulfill this desire.

Zelzeleh opened a new phase in the history of Kyrgyz literary culture of the early twentieth century. It was the first book published by this celebrated northern Kyrgyz *aqyn*, marking the crucial moment of transition from oral to written literature. The history of its publication, however, is also significant to this study, for it connects us with the emerging milieu of the first Kyrgyz intellectuals and one of their most prominent representatives, Ishenaaly Arabaev, whose story is the topic of the next chapter.

⁸⁷ According to some sources, Moldo Qylych began to compose *Zar Zaman* in the 1890s and worked on it until his death. Samanchin, *Qylych*, 74.

Conclusion

In the nineteenth century, *zhomoqchus* and *aqyns* dominated the cultural life of Kyrgyz society. They created vast catalogs of oral poetry which memorialized the past, reflected on the present, and expressed their concerns for the future of their people. Many of their names and poems were lost to posterity due to the oral nature of their craft, and those poets whose works reached the end of the nineteenth century did so owing to the mastery and memory of the next generation of *aqyns*. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, the poems of Qalyghul, Arstanbek and many other Kyrgyz oral poets served to entertain, educate, and admonish. They served as a moral compass, and helped the Kyrgyz to navigate the complexities of life. This oral dimension of Kyrgyz literary culture was to change by the end of the nineteenth century, due to the social and cultural transformations in the region brought by the Russian conquest. The *zamana* genre emerged to reflect the discontent many *aqyns* felt toward these transformations. And, although their poems frequently criticized Russian rule, the essential question at the center of their poetry was the changing Kyrgyz way of life. They were dedicated to preserving a vision of their community that was based on the freedom and strength of the idealized nomadic warrior, and on qualities such as generosity, hospitality, and kindness which they considered to be traditionally Kyrgyz. Some of these poets believed the solution lay in embracing Islam, while others called for their people to awaken from deep “sleep” and challenge imperial rule. Literary culture at the turn of the twentieth century was characterized by the development of written literature and the emergence of a new type of *aqyn* who composed and distributed his works in written form. Moldo Qylych and his works symbolized this transition from oral to written literary tradition in Kyrgyz cultural history.

The end of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of the modernizing Kyrgyz intellectuals, who were well-versed in the oral tradition of their ancestors, but also exposed to concepts and attitudes of modernity through travel, and through education in the reformed Muslim religious institutions of the Russian and Ottoman empires. Although they were limited in number, their activities spurred further development of the notions of Kyrgyzness. In his study of the Muslim reformist movement in the Volga-Ural region, Mustafa Tuna rightfully notes that not all of Russia's Muslim reformers were public figures, and that many of them "did not write in periodicals, publish books, or speak publicly."⁸⁸ This was certainly the case with the Kyrgyz intellectuals of the early-twentieth century: few of them had a strong public presence, engaged in debates in the pages of contemporary periodicals, or wrote and published books. Ishenaaly Arabaev distinguished himself among the early northern Kyrgyz modernist intellectuals by his energetic and wide-ranging activities as writer, educator, and publisher. Arabaev worked closely with two other well-known early Kyrgyz intellectuals, Osmonaaly Sydykov and Belek Soltonoev, to teach, and to write and publish works on Kyrgyz history. The next chapter will focus on their career paths, and on the broader intellectual milieu of southern Semirech'e region in which they operated, and which was to make significant contributions to further crystallization of the notions of Kyrgyzness.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Mustafa Tuna, "Imperial Russia's Muslims: Inroads to Modernity," (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2009), 188.

⁸⁹ This led to the conclusion that these modernist intellectuals had a "very tenuous existence" among the Kyrgyz before 1917. See Prior, "Heroes, Chieftains." Post-Soviet Kyrgyz historiography has often gone to the opposite extreme by overemphasizing the role of the Kyrgyz intellectuals prior to 1917, and projecting modern nationalist views onto the imperial period in Central Asia. See Aida Kubatova, *Kyrgyzstandagy zhadidchilik kyimyly (1900-1916)* (Bishkek: Kyrgyz respublikasynyn uluttuk ilimler akademiiasy, 2012). A more productive approach, which this study takes, would be to examine the activities of these intellectuals within the imperial context, as part of the empire. Territorially, they lived mainly in Pishpek and Przheval'sk *uezds* of Semirech'e region. Culturally, they felt a close affinity with Kazakhs.

Chapter Four

The Northern Kyrgyz Intellectuals: First Attempts at Defining the Nation

...There was nobody among us, the Kyrgyz, who had seen a publishing house. When we were among the people and when we heard Moldo Qylych's songs, we would become a bit happier and we would imagine things that happened around the world. I would think, alas, if God almighty lets us see the outside world, I would want to publish Qylych's *Zar Zaman* and distribute it among our people...¹

Ishenaaly Arabaev (1881 – 1933)

Introduction

The foreword to Moldo Qylych's *Zelzeleh*, published in 1911 in Kazan, opened with the following statement: "A famous *aqyn*, Moldo Qylych, who came from the Sarybaghysh clan, from the depth of the purest language, and from the place of Qara Qochqor, composed many *ghazals* during the past twenty years. He could not print these old books, since printing houses were far away, and he could not publish any of them so he used to write them by hand and recite them orally and distribute them among the people."² The author of the foreword and publisher of Qylych's work was Ishenaaly Arabaev (1881-1933), then thirty years old, and studying at a *medrese* in Ufa. In 1913, another Kyrgyz intellectual and student at the same *medrese*, Osmonaaly Sydykov, published his works on Kyrgyz history. This period between 1910 and 1914 marked a critical transition in the history of northern Kyrgyz literary culture, when the traditional system of knowledge based on orality gave way to new modes of learning. It witnessed a rise in the number of educated Kyrgyz, who later, during the early-Soviet period, came to dominate the political, cultural, and literary scene. Who were those people and what was

¹ Ishenaaly Arabaev, "Alghı sūz" (Foreword) in Moldo Qylych Turekeldin *Qissa-i Zelzeleh* (Kazan: Ereemeev-Shashabrin, 1911), 2.

² Turekeldin, *Zelzeleh*, 2.

their path? Specifically, how did these men from the predominantly oral culture of the northern Kyrgyz, from the remote villages of Pishpek *uezd* in southern Semirech'e region, end up in the Muslim cultural centers of the Russian Empire in the early-twentieth century, at the time when very few young men of their generation had an opportunity to study within Central Asia, let alone outside of it?³ What factors facilitated their intellectual growth and affected their views of Kyrgyzness? How did their self-identification as Kyrgyz develop? Finally, what did the relationship between the traditional custodians of Kyrgyz culture, the *aqyns* and *zhomoqchus*, and the first Kyrgyz intellectuals reveal about this transitional period in the literary history of the northern Kyrgyz? Through the analysis of “the network of genres” in northern Kyrgyz literary culture and “the network of people,” consisting of the poets, tribal leaders, and emerging modernist intellectuals, this chapter highlights the continuities and changes in the northern Kyrgyz literary tradition.⁴ By emphasizing important moments in the lives and intellectual development of Ishenaaly Arabaev, Osmonaaly Sydykov, and Belek Soltonoev, it will show that in their modernizing efforts, the Kyrgyz reformist intellectuals of the early-twentieth century did not make a complete break from the tradition of their predecessors, and that there were many more commonalities than differences in how Kyrgyz *aqyns* and intellectuals viewed their community.⁵

³ There were 117 students in the new-method *medrese* Iqbaliya in Toqmoq in 1906. Of them only thirteen were listed as “Kirghiz”. The rest were Tatars (33), Sarts (48), Kashgarian Sarts (4), and Dungans (19). TsGA RK, f. 44, op. 1, d. 15893, l. 66 ob.

⁴ I borrow the expression “network of genres” from Daniel Prior, who used it to highlight the variety of genres that informed northern Kyrgyz views of the past. Prior introduced this concept in his study of how the traditional epic genre was appropriated to celebrate the deeds of the northern Kyrgyz *manap* Shabdan. Prior, *Codex*, 52.

⁵ Ishenaaly Arabaev's life and intellectual pursuits resemble those of the other Kyrgyz intellectuals who were born in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Osmonaaly Sydykov and Belek Soltonoev belonged to Arabaev's generation and their activities will be discussed later in this chapter. However history prepared a different path for the generation of Kyrgyz intellectuals born around 1900s – their youth was marked by the disintegration of the Tsarist state in 1917 and the political turmoil that followed. Most of them studied in Russian-native schools and became involved in the politics of the 1920s and 30s. Among them were Kasym Tynystanov, Zhushup Abdyrakhmanov, Törökul Aitmatov and Adbykerim Sydykov.

Ishenaaly Arabaev and His Intellectual Pursuits

Ishenaaly Arabay uulu (Ishenaaly Arabaev) was born in 1881 in Qyzyl Tuu *volost* of Pishpek *uezd*. He lost his father when he was two years old, and was raised by his mother. At the age of ten, Arabaev hired himself out to a Kyrgyz *bay* for a period of two years. Subsequently, he worked until he was eighteen for a local *mullah*, with whom he learned to read and write. The process of knowledge acquisition among the nomadic northern Kyrgyz is poorly recorded until the second half of the nineteenth century. Apart from a selection of texts located at the Manuscripts Collection of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences that were collected from the territory of the present-day Kyrgyz Republic and date back to the early nineteenth century, which document the circulation of religious texts at that time, there are few sources that shed light on the methods of learning and knowledge transmission among the Kyrgyz nomads.⁶ Reading, and especially writing, were privileges restricted to only a few individuals from the higher strata of nomadic society. Among those rare Kyrgyz who came from noble families and had leisure to devote to literary pursuits were the Kyrgyz *aqyns* Qalyghul, Arstanbek, and later Moldo Qylych. All of them also studied with *mullahs*, a fact that would have a lasting impact in popular memory. By the end of the nineteenth century, lessons with a hired *mullah* were becoming common among the Kyrgyz nomads, and the majority of the first generation of Kyrgyz intellectuals had a basic *mekteb* training, as well as exposure to the informal learning networks of the *aqyns* and *zhomoqchus*.

One of Arabaev's contemporaries, Khusein Karasaev (b.1901), a prominent Kyrgyz linguist, left a detailed description of his education with a *mullah* in his memoir, *Khusein*

⁶ The Manuscripts Collection of the Kyrgyz State National Academy of Sciences houses a large collection of print and manuscript texts written in Arabic, Persian, Chagatay, and other languages dating from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Naama.⁷ At the age of ten, Khusein's father brought him to the yurt of a local *bay* who hired a *mullah* to teach his own children.⁸ The learning process began with the alphabet, and proceeded to memorizing excerpts from *Apteek (Haftyak)*.⁹ Khusein confessed that he did not understand a single word of *Haftyak*, but nevertheless he was able to memorize and recite the passages, to the delight of his father. After memorizing texts derived from the Quran, Khuseyin started in on *Chār Kitāb*.¹⁰ He still did not understand a single word of the *suras*, yet he was required to remember 4-5 lines from *Chār Kitāb* and recite them when prompted. Writing was not taught, but rather learned by copying letters from the books. One of the primary reasons children were sent to study with a *mullah* was so that they could recite the Quran at their parents' funerals. It normally took four years to acquire the necessary basic skills, after which children were taken out of school.

Karasaev's experience of education within a nomadic society can be set against that of Sadriddin Aini, a prominent Tajik writer born and educated in the sedentary society of Bukhara in 1878.¹¹ In general the content and curriculum of education in these two Central Asia cultural traditions was quite comparable, with both taking *Haftyak* and *Chār Kitāb* as their standard works. In sedentary areas students augmented these fundamentals with Persian and Turkic poetry, whereas Kyrgyz children added samples of Kazakh oral poetry, prized for their "interesting plot and elevated language."¹² In order to be considered a learned man in either society, one did not need to know how to write; the important thing was to be able to read and

⁷ Khusein Karasaev, *Khusein Naama (bashtan ötköndör)* (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan, 2001). This would generally be followed by the father telling the mullah "The flesh is yours, the bones are mine," (*eti seniki, söögü meniki*), meaning that the child was fully at *mullah's* disposal.

⁸ Karasaev, *Khusein Naama*, 8.

⁹ A collection of selected verses from the Quran. See Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 23.

¹⁰ An anthology providing basic information about Islamic ritual. Ibid.

¹¹ Idem., 22-25.

¹² Karasaev, *Khusein Naama*, 28.

interpret texts. *Mektebs* throughout the region therefore stressed the importance of reading over writing.¹³

As long as the northern Kyrgyz tribes continued to migrate seasonally, it was impossible for them to maintain a *mekteb* building. Typically a wealthy man from the tribe would hire a *mullah* from among the learned Uzbeks or Kyrgyz to travel with a nomadic community and teach its children. This made it difficult to estimate the number of *mektebs* in the areas with the nomadic population. In 1913, however, when the Kyrgyz had begun to settle, there were fifty nine *mektebs* training 1,182 boys and 131 girls in Pishpek *uezd*, out of a population of 109,000.¹⁴ Among the wealthier northern Kyrgyz, *manaps* such as Dür Soorombaev, Shabdan Zhantaev and Qanat Ybyke uulu built and maintained *mektebs* and *medreses* for the people of their *volosts*.

By the beginning of the twentieth century however, knowledge based on oral transmission and pure memorization was not enough to keep up with the demands of a changing society. Arabaev and many of his contemporaries understood this well. They grew dissatisfied with the quality of education provided by the local *mullahs*; and those who could afford it moved to *uezd* centers such as Toqmoq and Przheval'sk, which contained large communities of Muslims from Russia and Central Asia, including many Tatars, as well as Kazakhs and Sarts. Arabaev, for instance, continued his studies at a new-method (*jadid*) *mekteb* in Przheval'sk, under the supervision of a Tatar mullah.¹⁵

¹³Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 25. Karasaev also recalled that those with means would offer a mullah a sheep in order to copy Qylych's *Zar zaman*, particularly when their children studied with that *mullah*. As a result of repeated readings, some people would learn it by heart and recite it at gatherings. Karasaev learned Qylych's *Zar zaman* in this way, and later, in the 1930s, submitted it to the Academy of Sciences.

¹⁴Duishe Aitmambetov, *Dorevoliutsionnye shkoly v Kirgizii* (Frunze: Izdatelstvo AN Kirgizskoi SSR, 1961), 11.

¹⁵TsGA PD KR, f. 10, op. 15, d. 188.

The Tatar presence in the Kazakh steppe and Central Asia dates back to the eighteenth century, with the incorporation of the Kazakhs of the Little Horde into the Russian Empire.¹⁶ Tatars and Bashkirs served the empire as interpreters, clerks, and translators, and had a privileged position as intermediaries between the empire and the native residents of Central Asia.¹⁷ Tatar merchants also travelled to and from Central Asia, providing the empire with much-needed information about the population and landscape prior to the Russian advance into the region. The Kazakh steppe and Central Asian khanates also witnessed the proselytizing efforts of Tatar *mullahs*.¹⁸ By the middle of the nineteenth century the government had begun trying to curtail their activities.¹⁹ Tatars were also blamed for the growing popularity of the new-method, (*jadid*) schools.

New-method schools, as they came to be known among the public, emerged as an answer to the perceived cultural backwardness of the Muslims of the Russian empire. These schools were organized on the model established by the Crimean Tatar intellectual Ismail Gasprinskii (1851-1914), who was an ardent advocate of modern education.²⁰ The term “jadidism” itself

¹⁶ However the Tatar and Bashkir trading presence in Central Asia dates back to the period before the Russian conquest, when Tatar merchants were documented bringing Bukharan and Oirat goods into Russia. See Allen J. Frank, *Bukhara and the Muslims of Russia: Sufism, Education, and the Paradox of Islamic Prestige* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012), 80.

¹⁷ For the shift in imperial views on the Tatars see G. Sultangalieva, “The Intermediary Role of Tatars in Kazakhstan,” in *Asiatic Russia: Imperial Power in Regional and International Contexts*, ed. Tomohiko Uyama, (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 52-79.

¹⁸ Sultangalieva (“Intermediary Role,” 53) points out that Russian authorities considered any Muslim Turkic-speaker from the Volga-Ural region a “Tatar.” In reality they might be Mishar, Teptiar, Bashkir, or Tatar. The northern Kyrgyz did not draw such distinctions either – the works of Kyrgyz *aqyns* referred to such peoples as “Noghoy.”

¹⁹ One of those who opposed Tatar influences in education was Ostroumov, who served as director of the Turkestan Teachers’ College and later as director of Tashkent’s men’s gymnasium. He also edited the official newspaper *Turkestanskii Vedomosti* until 1917. See Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 87. Regarding Russian imperial discourse on the role of Islam and the Tatars among the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs of eastern Russia and Turkestan, see Elena Campbell, “Russkie ili Tatary: Imperskii vzgliad na problemu kul’turnogo dominirovaniia v vostochnykh oblastiakh Rossii (vtoraia polovina XIX – nachalo XX v.)” in *Stranitsy Rossiiskoi istorii: problemy, sobytia, liudi*, ed. V. M. Paneiakh, (Sankt-Peterburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2003), 85-94.

²⁰ On Gasprinskii’s life and intellectual pursuits see Edward Lazzerini, *Ismail Bey Gasprinskii and Muslim Modernism in Russia (1878-1914)* (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1973); idem, “Jadidism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” *Cahiers Du Monde Russe et Sovietique*. 16 (2): 245-277. For Gasprinskii’s activities in a trans-

came from the new phonetic method (*usul-i jadid*) of teaching the Arabic alphabet in the 1880s.²¹ By the late nineteenth century, Gasprinskii's method spread widely among the Tatars of the Volga and the Crimea regions, and in the early twentieth century it became a popular way of teaching among the northern Kyrgyz nomads. The method itself, however, was not limited to teaching Arabic by using this new method. It also involved the introduction of secular subjects into *mekteb* and *medrese* curricula, and transforming traditional ways of teaching by organizing the educational process according to modern methods of instruction.²²

Russian officials feared the long-term consequences of the spread of new-method schools in the region. By the end of the nineteenth century, spurred by the Andijan revolt of 1898, the imperial government was increasingly concerned about the "direction of the minds of the Muslim population" (*napravlenie umov musul'manskogo naseleniia*) of Central Asia, and sought for the slightest shreds of evidence as to how these "new currents" were running.²³ Government officials were aware of the competing *qadim* (old-method) and *jadid* (new-method) educational systems within the Muslim community, and watched the ongoing debate between the *starotatarshchina* (as they called the representatives of the old-method learning), and the *progressisty* (the jadids) with keen interest.²⁴ The state viewed knowledge as a remedy for what they perceived as religious fanaticism, but only when that knowledge remained under strict

imperial context see James H. Meyer, *Turks Across Empires: Marketing Muslim Identity in the Russian-Ottoman Borderlands, 1856-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²¹ Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 89.

²² Idem., 160-172. Gasprinskii travelled extensively throughout Russia, Europe, and the Ottoman Empire.

²³ TsGA RK, f. 44, op. 1, d. 20752, l. 96, 26. Note that imperial officials were also suspicious of "Muslim" language publications, which were reviewed by the *Vremennyi komitet po delam pechati* [Temporary Committee for Print Affairs]. The censor for "Muslim" language books was Nikolai Katanov. Qylych's *Zelzeleh* was among the many publications that passed through the *Otdel* in 1911.

²⁴ TsGA RK, f. 44, op. 1, d. 20752, l. 26.

official control. In the absence of such control, they feared that Muslim reformers might wield modern education as a weapon to encourage political separatism.²⁵

Despite the government's anxieties, the number of *jadid* schools with Tatar instructors continued to grow in southern Semirech'e. Government reports indicated a major jump in the number of schools in Przheval'sk and Pishpek *uezds* between 1900 and 1913, and the tone of the reports changed accordingly. Thus in 1901, the *pristav* of Przheval'sk reported to the head of Przheval'sk *uezd* that only one person, Gainutdin Ishmukhamedov, was teaching using the new method, and that he had only two students. The *pristav* added that the mindset of the local population remained unchanged.²⁶ But in 1913, in a letter to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Semirech'e *oblast* administration [*pravlenie*] reported that "many new-method schools had appeared [*poiavilos' mnogo novometodnykh shkol*]," and went on to list the changes in the disposition of Semirech'e's Muslims, and the measures planned to prevent the further spread of ideas of Muslim unity.²⁷

The largest Tatar communities were located in Przheval'sk and Toqmoq, and as a result, these cities also contained a number of *mektebs* and *medreses*. Sabir Gabdelmanov, Ghali Rafiki, Zakir Vagapov, Nurali Mamin and Shakir Muzhabirov were among the teachers at these Tatar *medreses* who touched the lives of the handful of Kyrgyz students who studied there. Sabir Gabdelmanov (1879-1917) moved to Przheval'sk in 1902, and in 1908 began teaching at the Iqbaliya *medrese* in Toqmoq.²⁸ Gabdelmanov was also an active member of the Tatar Muslim

²⁵ TsGA RK, f. 44, op. 1, d. 15893, l. 2 ob.; Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 180.

²⁶ TsGA RK, f. 44, op. 1, d. 20752, l. 41 ob. Documents from the same year from Pishpek *uezd* display similar calm attitude: "...propoveduiushchikh novoe myshlenie v Pishpekskom uezde ne okazalos... mezhdru kirgizami, sartami, dunganami i tatarami nikakikh izmenenii v oborote mysli i obraze zhizni ne zamecheno." TsGA RK, f. 44, op. 1, d. 20752, l. 77 ob.

²⁷ TsGA RK, f. 44, op. 1, d. 15893, l. 1; 2 ob.; 3 ob.

²⁸ Marsel Akhmetzhanov, "Tatar edebiiaty tarikhyna ianga isemner," F. K. Beshirov ed. *Meghrifat hem azatlyk ochen koresh (XX – ioz bashy tatar edebiiaty tarikhynnan)* (Kazan: SSSR fenner akademiiese, 1987), 76-79.

community in Przheval'sk. When he was not teaching, Gabdelmanov spent his time writing poetry and prose. In 1908, his collection of poems, *Feriyadlar*, was published in Kazan, with the help of the Kyrgyz-Tatar community.²⁹ Later that year it was banned by the Temporary Committee for Print Affairs, for its criticism of European and Russian treatment of the “people of the East,” and its calls for education and enlightenment as the means to overcome foreign oppression.³⁰ Gabdelmanov published several essays on the lifestyle, customs, and beliefs of the Kyrgyz on the pages of the Tatar language newspapers *Shuro* and *Qoyash* published in Kazan.³¹ Another Tatar teacher, Ghali Rafiki (1890-1944), came to Pishpek after his studies at the Ghaliya *medrese*, and taught natural sciences and geography at the Izhtihad *medrese* from 1909 to 1912.³² Like Gabdelmanov, Rafiki also published essays in the Kazan Muslim newspapers *Ang* and *Shuro*, which explored aspects of Kyrgyz society and culture.³³

By 1910, there were 206 students in the Iqbaliya *medrese* in Toqmoq, including 150 Kyrgyz and Kazakhs. The director of the school was Zakir Vagapov, a Tatar from Volga region.³⁴ Students normally studied in new-method *medreses* for a period of four years. In addition to religious subjects, such as Islamic law, the lives of Muslim saints, the history of Islam, and the Quran, they also studied Arabic calligraphy, language and literature, basic math

²⁹ NART, f. 420, op. 1, d. 155, ll. 48-48 ob. N. Katanov provided a detailed review and translation of *Feriyadlar* (NART, f. 420, op. 1, d. 155, ll. 34-34 ob.). Based on this review, Gabdelmanov was sentenced to one month imprisonment and his collection of poems was ordered to be destroyed. The *Sharaf* publishing house was also temporarily shut down.

³⁰ Sabir Gabdelmanov, *Fariyadlar* (Kazan: Elektro-tipografiia Sharaf, 1908), 29.

³¹ S. Gabdelmanov, “Tian-Shan tavining tereng chuqurlarindan,” *Shuro*, 1913, January 15, February 15, March 1; S. Gabdelmanov, “Tian-Shan tavinda bir kechak seyahet,” *Qoyash*, 1914, August 23. Gabdelmanov's first article, “From the Deep Valleys of the Tian Shan Mountains,” is dedicated to Shabdan's funeral and memorial feast. It offers harsh criticism of the way the northern Kyrgyz spent their money: while other people devoted their wealth to acquiring “skills [*hunar*] and science [*ilm*],” Gabdelmanov claimed, the Kyrgyz spent on unnecessary extravagances like “wedding and circumcision celebrations [*sünnöt toi*] and memorial feasts.”

³² TsGIA RB, f. R 4767, op. 1, d. 2, l. 292.

³³ Ghali Rafiki, “Alatau builarında,” *Ang*, 1913, no. 12; Gali Rafiki, “Vaqtli nikāh,” *Ang*, 1913, no. 19.

³⁴ K. E. Bendrikov, *Ocherki po istorii narodnogo obrazovaniia v Turkestane, 1865-1924* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo akademii pedagogicheskikh nauk RSFSR, 1960), 258.

operations, geography, geometry, and science.³⁵ Upon graduation, these students returned to their own villages and to teach the children there. Moldo Qylych and Ishenaaly Arabaev were among the *medrese* students who followed this path. Another poet, Aldash Moldo (1874-1930), also known as Aldash Zheenike uulu, studied with a *mullah* named Shakir in Przheval'sk, and went on to open a “mobile” school in the summer pasturelands, teaching children “geography and math, in addition to religious subjects.”³⁶ Moldo Qylych, Ishenaaly Arabaev, Aldash Moldo, Talyp Moldo and many other *medrese* graduates saw it as their duty to pass along the knowledge and ideas they had received in these schools. For many it became a life-long goal to enlighten their people, whom they considered to be in a “deep sleep.” These enlighteners often participated in larger networks of intellectual exchange, and gave their students access to those networks as well. The Kyrgyz teacher Urdöölötov Jeerenbay, for instance, conducted regular correspondence with the Kazakh intellectual Akhmet Baitursynov on topics related to education. Urdöölötov would go on to incorporate the textbooks, newspapers, and literary works that Baitursynov sent into his own teaching.³⁷

The majority of the Tatar families in Semirech'e were engaged in commerce and craftwork, and tended to be financially well off. As a result, they exerted great influence on socio-economic and political affairs in the region.³⁸ They also viewed their children's intellectual

³⁵ For a detailed curriculum from the Iqbaliya *medrese* see: A. E. Kubatova, *Kyrgyzstandagy zhadidchilik kyimyly (1900-1916)* (Bishkek: Tarykh zhana madanii muras institutu, 2012), 146.

³⁶ Manuscripts Collection of the State National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic (RF NAN KR), d. 754, ll. 5-8.

³⁷ Aitmambetov, *Kul'tura kirgizskogo naroda*, 269.

³⁸ S. Mamytov, *Kyrgyzsko-tatarskie literaturnye svyazi vtoroi poloviny XIX- nachala XX vekov* (Bishkek: Muras, 1999), 49-50. One of them was Chingiz Aitmatov's maternal grandfather, the Tatar merchant Khamza Abduvaliev, who moved to Semirech'e from Kazan at the end of the nineteenth century and settled there with his family. See Roza Aitmatova, *Tarykhtyn aktai baraktary* (Bishkek: Biiktik, 2007), 101-120.

pursuits favorably, and had the financial means to support them.³⁹ They regularly contributed to support *mektebs* and *medreses*, and their benevolent societies frequently sponsored students who wished to continue their education in the *medreses* of the Volga-Ural region.⁴⁰ Thus, in Przheval'sk, when Arabaev was studying with the Tatar teacher Zoir Tairov at a *jadid* school, Tairov helped him secure funding from one such benevolent society to go to Orenburg for further education.⁴¹

In Arabaev's case, the road to Orenburg was circuitous. Initially he failed the entrance exams to the *medrese* in Orenburg, and instead entered a Turkish gymnasium in Istanbul. After six months of study there, Arabaev travelled for a year and a half around the Middle East. Little is known about this period of his life. In a "personal file" [*lichnoe delo*] he mentioned having visited Izmir, Beirut, Mecca, and Medina during this time, but his writings contain no description of the cities or account of his experiences there.⁴² This biographical gap is curious, but it seems most likely that he went on a *hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, via Izmir and Beirut. Upon returning to Istanbul, in Arabaev's words, he began to "attract the attention of Ottoman government officials" for receiving newspapers containing revolutionary content from Saint-Petersburg, so he decided to return to Orenburg.⁴³ In Orenburg, Arabaev entered the Huseyniye *medrese*, and after a summer of teaching, was able to save up the money to continue his studies at the Ghaliya *medrese* in Ufa.

³⁹ In her memoir, Roza Aitmatova (Chingiz Aitmatov's sister) talks about her maternal grandparents, Tatar Muslims living in Przheval'sk, and their active involvement with their children's education. Aitmatova, *Tarykhtyn aktai baraktary*.

⁴⁰ One such society was the "Tatar-Kyrgyz society" in Przheval'sk, which had its own library and whose membership consisted of Kyrgyz from eleven different *volosts* in Przheval'sk *uezd*, along with Tatar teachers and merchants. See Mamytov, *Kyrgyzsko-tatarskie literaturnye sviazi*, 77.

⁴¹ TsGA PD KR, f. 10, op. 15, d. 188.

⁴² TsGA PD KR, f. 10, op. 15, d. 188.

⁴³ TsGA PD KR, f. 10, op. 15, d. 188, ll. 8-10.

Ghaliya had been founded by Ziya Kamali (1873-1942), a prominent Tatar thinker, intellectual, and educator, and was famous for its progressive educational content and methods.⁴⁴ From the end of the nineteenth century, reformed *medreses* like Ghaliya had begun to open in the Volga-Ural region, supported by wealthy Muslim merchants and intellectuals from the area. They differed from the old-style *medreses* mainly in their curriculum, which, along with religious studies, included such subjects as psychology, pedagogy, chemistry, history, and Russian. The revised curriculum in these reformed *medreses* also allowed students to complete their training more quickly, usually over a period of ten to fifteen years. Besides Ghaliya, some of the most prominent reformed *medreses* were Bubiy, Hüseyiniye, Usmaniye and Mukhammediye.⁴⁵ These *medreses*, and particularly Ghaliya, would go on to host many Kazakh and Kyrgyz students.

Ziya Kamali founded the Ghaliya *medrese* in 1906, with the help of Ufa's Muslim community.⁴⁶ It quickly gained fame as one of the most progressive *medreses* of the time, teaching science along with social sciences and humanities, and also various languages, including Russian. Formal schooling there lasted for six years, half devoted to the core subjects and half to pedagogical training. The *medrese* did not have any age restrictions – men from 15 to 45 years of age came there to further their education.⁴⁷ In addition to the Tatar Muslim scholar Rizaetdin bin Fakhretdin, who was known primarily for his teaching at Ghaliya, the school's

⁴⁴ TsGA PD KR, f. 10, op. 15, d. 188, l. 10. On Ziya Kamali see T.R. Kamalov, "Zyiaetdin Kamali – myslitel', prosvetitel' i religiozniy deiatel' (biograficheskii ocherk) in Zyiaetdin Kamali, *Filosofiaislama*, eds. R. S. Khakimov et al. (Kazan: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2010), 9-57.

⁴⁵ Tuna, "Inroads to Modernity," 204-205; on Bubiy *medrese* see R. Merdanov, et al. eds. *Ber Tugan Bubyilar hem Izh Bubyi medresese* (Kazan: Rukhiyat neshriety, 1999).

⁴⁶ Ziya Kamali studied in the Usmaniya *medrese* until 1906. He was sent by the Tatar Muslim benevolent society *Zhamiyat-i Khapriya* to Al Azhar *medrese* in Egypt to further his studies. Upon his return, Kamali worked at Usmaniya as an instructor, and began to think of opening his own reformed *medrese*. Finally, he reached an agreement with *mullah* Zarif Galikeev, to open a new *medrese* associated with Galikeev's mosque. TsGIA RB, f. R-4767, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 3-5.

⁴⁷ TsGIA RB, f. R-4767, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 9-10.

instructors and students also included a number of prominent Tatar and Bashkir writers and intellectuals, including Ghalymzhan Ibragimov, Seifi Kudash, Zeki Velidi, Mazhit Gafuri and others. Among the small group of Kyrgyz students who received their education in Ghaliya, along with Arabaev and Sydykov, were the children of northern Kyrgyz tribal leaders and *manaps*, such as Kemel Shabdanov, Iskhak Qanatov and Narynqul Azhy uulu.⁴⁸

Arabaev came to Ghaliya in 1909 and studied there for three years.⁴⁹ His social and political views were formed during his years in Ghaliya, through his interactions with teachers and students of the *medrese*, and exposure to their varied ethnic and social backgrounds. In addition to the official subjects in the *medrese* curriculum, students participated in a rich extracurricular program. The majority of the students of the *medrese* wrote poetry, which was encouraged by the teachers, and many graduates went on to contribute to the development of the print media in the region as poets, writers or journalists.⁵⁰ Students of Ghaliya *medrese* also put together plays and published their works in *medrese* newspapers.

It is likely that Arabaev began to think of his community as a distinct nation during his studies in Ghaliya, aided by his membership in the Kazakh-Kyrgyz student association and participation in the amateur *medrese* newspaper *Sadaq*.⁵¹ Arabaev's time in Ufa and Kazan coincided with the period following the revolution of 1905 in the Russian empire, a time marked

⁴⁸ Kemel Shabdanov was Shabdan's son and Iskhak Qanat uulu was Qanat's son. Qanat Ybyke uulu (1860-1917), called Qanat *khan* or Qanat Abukin in some sources, was a *manap* of the Sarybaghysh tribe. He earned fame for leading the Kyrgyz of Abaiylda *volost* during the revolt of 1916. He was executed in Vernyi in 1917. More on him in Chapter 5.

⁴⁹ Neither Arabaev's, nor any of the other known "Kyrgyz" *shagirds* [students'] names are mentioned in the lists of Ghaliya *medrese* in the file pertaining to Ghaliya at TsGIA RB.

⁵⁰ Fond of the *medrese* Ghaliya in the Bashkir State Archive in Ufa contains a wealth of information about the *medrese* graduates' future paths. TsGIA RB, f. R-4767, op. 1, d. 1.

⁵¹ The Tatar-Bashkir student association also published a newspaper, *Parlaq*. See Tursynbek Kekishev, *Sadaq* (Almaty: Zhaly, 1986), 58.

by heightened national sentiment among the empire's non-Russian population, and greater activity by national movements in the imperial borderlands.⁵²

The revolution of 1905 was sparked off by the events of "Bloody Sunday" of January 9 in St. Petersburg. Social and economic problems which spilled over into the unrest of the workers and peasants were the underlying causes of the revolution.⁵³ The revolution resulted in the October Manifesto which limited the tsar's autocratic powers, guaranteed the population of the empire civil rights, allowed for the election of the legislative assembly, and granted freedom of religion, speech, and association to the population of Russia.⁵⁴ Muslims of the Russian empire used 1905 concessions to start their own political movements. The first All-Russian Muslim congress met illegally in August of 1905 in Nizhnii Novgorod on a boat on the Oka River, and it was attended by such Tatar and Azeri intellectuals as I. Gasprinskii, Iu. Akchura, Gh. Ibragimov, and A. Topchibashev.⁵⁵ The idea of creating the *Ittifaq* [Union of the Muslims of Russia] party was brought up by Gasprinskii during that congress.⁵⁶ The party pursued cultural, political, and economic unification of Russian Muslims, freedom of press and publishing, development of Muslim schools, and legal equality for Muslims and Russians.⁵⁷ The period of 1905-1907 saw an increase in the number of newspapers and magazines in Turkic and Persian languages written in

⁵² Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, 328-369. On participation of Muslims in the first Duma see Diliara Usmanova, *Musul'manskie predstaviteli v Rossiiskom parlamente: 1906-1916* (Kazan: FAN, Akademiia Nauk RT, 2005).

⁵³ Severe famines in 1891-92, and again in 1897-98, in the Russian countryside dispelled Russian peasants' illusions about the state's ability to alleviate their problems. The peasants' main demand under these circumstances was land, universal free education, and fair taxation. Russia's rapid embrace of industrialization at the end of the 1880s, reflected poorly on the workers' conditions. They demanded betterment of working conditions, shorter work hours, and greater participation in the affairs of the state. See Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 157-186; Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 402-423.

⁵⁴ Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, 338.

⁵⁵ Salavat Iskhakov, *Pervaia russkaia revoliutsiia i musul'mane Rossiiskoi imperii* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Sotsial'no-politicheskaia MYSL," 2007), 163.

⁵⁶ Idem., 169.

⁵⁷ Azade-Ayse Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars: A Profile in National Resilience* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 111.

Arabic script.⁵⁸ These contemporary periodicals witnessed intense debates among Tatar, Kazakh, Azeri, and Central Asian intellectuals, regarding the future of their nation and their place within the empire.⁵⁹ Newspapers published in Kazan, Astrakhan and Orenburg, such as *Tarjuman* [Translator], *Yulduz* [The Star], *Bayanul-khaq* [Messenger of Justice], *Idel* [Volga] and *Shuro* [Council] provided a public forum in which Tatar and Central Asian intellectuals could share and spread their political views among the population.⁶⁰

Tatar intellectuals' efforts to unite the Muslims of the empire under the banner of Islam and to further advance the cultural unification of the Turkic people of the empire did not resonate with the Kazakh and Turkestani intellectuals, whose vision of the national development was based on territorial unity, and who opposed the cultural hegemony of Tatars.⁶¹ Although none of the northern Kyrgyz participated in the All-Russian Muslim congresses organized by Tatar intellectuals of the Volga and Crimea regions, following the concessions they did petition the state on the "needs of the Kirghiz and Kara Kirghiz of Semirech'e *oblast* on the questions of confession, education, and land."⁶² They designated Shabdan, the *manap* of the Sarybaghysh *volost*, to petition on their behalf in St. Petersburg. They requested several things in their petition including the establishment of the Muslim Spiritual Administration for the "Muslim Kara Kirghiz of Turkestan region and Kirghiz-Kaisaks of Semirech'e *oblast*." In addition, they asked for permission to build mosques, *mektebs* and *medreses*, and professional schools which would be directly subordinated to the Spiritual Administration; they requested the state's permission to

⁵⁸ Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, 338.

⁵⁹ Steven Sabol, *Russian Colonization and the Genesis of Kazakh National Consciousness* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*.

⁶⁰ Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 79.

⁶¹ Rottier, "Creating the Kazakh Nation," 121.

⁶² Zh. Adbyldabek kyzy, *Shabdan baatyr: epokha i lichnost'*, 109-117.

establish *waqfs*;⁶³ and asked to allow printing and free distribution of newspapers and journals in Kirghiz and Tatar languages within the empire.⁶⁴

It is under these historical circumstances that Arabaev wrote his foreword to Qylych's *Zelzeleh*, and perhaps aided in its publication. This foreword is Arabaev's first known writing; and although it is brief, it tells much about his sorrows and aspirations. The foreword is a celebration of the accomplishments of the "Kyrgyz" poet, but also reads as a lament. In it, Arabaev recalled that Moldo Qylych had been writing poetry for the past twenty years, and that Qylych himself had worked actively to distribute his poems by copying and reciting them. This was necessary, Arabaev wrote, because none of "our Kyrgyz" [*bizdin qirgizdan*] had ever seen a publishing house; and he expressed his wish that if God almighty [*quday taala*] ever let him see the outside world, he would print Qylych's *Zar zaman* and spread it among the people. He also touched upon the problem of education. The prevailing learning method, which involved memorizing Arabic without comprehension, left Arabaev unable to explain the meaning of some of the words to children. For this reason, he wrote, he deeply regretted the lack of books in his "own language [*öz tilibizde*]" which children could not only read, but also understand. At the end of the foreword, Arabaev expressed his gratitude to the Kyrgyz⁶⁵ students of the Ghaliya *medrese*, for making the dream of publishing Qylych's work a reality. Moldo Qylych had heard of their efforts, he added, and had written a poem, *Qissa-i Zelzeleh*, documenting the occasion, so that the event he had seen with his own eyes would become a part of history. It is not entirely clear why *Zelzeleh* was published in preference to *Zar zaman*, which was a more complex and

⁶³ An endowment, in the form of cash, building, or a plot of land, made to a Muslim charitable cause.

⁶⁴ "Petitsiia ot kirgizskogo i kazakhskogo naseleniia Semirechenskoi oblasti v Komitet ministrov o ego nuzhdakh v voprosakh very, obrazovaniia, zemledeliia i dr." 6 iunია, 1905. Idem., 109-111. The Decree on Religious Toleration was signed by the tsar already in April of 1905, before the October Manifesto. Hence the date of the petitions as June, 1905. See Campbell, *Muslim Question*, 145.

⁶⁵ Qyrghyz (Qazaq) – in the text.

potentially more significant work. It may have been because the earthquake of 1911, recounted in *Zelzeleh*, was a recent event of such great local importance and public interest. Or perhaps it was because *Zar zaman* was highly critical of tsarist policies, and therefore unlikely to pass the watchful eyes of the state censors.⁶⁶

Like other reform-minded Central Asian intellectuals of the period, Arabaev was greatly concerned about the inadequacies of the educational opportunities available to his people, and about how these hindered their development. In his foreword to *Zelzeleh*, he not only decried the common practice of rote memorization, but also advocated strongly for the modernized *medrese* education, in which children learned Russian, as well as science and Arabic comprehension. Arabaev feared especially for the plight of Kazakh and Kyrgyz children from poor families that could not afford to school them. He begged his “Kazakh and Kyrgyz brothers and sisters [*qaryndas*, or siblings]” to give their children to *medreses* so that they would become a “shining candle when they go on to the next world.”⁶⁷ These concerns spurred him to publish two primers for school children. In Ufa in 1911 he published the primer *Alifbā yāki tote oqu*, which he had co-authored with a fellow Kazakh student of the Ghaliya *medrese*, Khafiz Sarsekeev, and then in Orenburg in 1912 he published his own *Jazu ornekteri*.⁶⁸ Both books were designed for teaching grammar to Kazakh and Kyrgyz children, and were written in Kazakh-Kyrgyz hybrid language. *Tote oqu* consists of seventy-four lessons, thirty-five devoted to the alphabet and the rest to simple words pertaining to Kazakh and Kyrgyz life, short stories of a didactic nature (*jalqoo bala*

⁶⁶ Moldo Qylych’s *Zelzeleh* is listed in the censorship journals for 1912, among the books that were allowed for publication. NA RT, f. 420, op. 1, d. 195, l. 77. It is in the files of the *Vremennoi Komitet po delam pechaty*, which included M. N. Pinegin (Head), A. V. Frolov (inspector of the Russian language publications), N. I. Ashmarin and N. F. Katanov (inspectors of *inorodcheskii* publications). Sydykov’s *Mukhtasar-i tārikh-i qirghiziya* was reviewed in 1913. NA RT, f. 420, op. 1, d. 229, l. 83.

⁶⁷ *Aiqap*, 1912, p. 17.

⁶⁸ I. Arabaev, Kh. Sarsekeev, *Alifbā yāki tote oqu* (Ufa: Sharq basmasy, 1911).

menen isker bala, jaksy bala, jaman bala, etc), folktales, and texts explaining the meaning of religious terms. Arabaev built *Jazu ornekteri* on his *Tote oqu* by adding readings of greater complexity.⁶⁹ After his graduation from the Ghaliya *medrese* in 1912, Arabaev returned to southern Semirech'e and continued to educate children until the revolt of 1916. He escaped to China during the revolt, and returned in 1917 to become a leader in the region's political and cultural affairs. He would continue to retain this influence after the establishment of the Kara Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast in 1924.

During his time in Ufa, Arabaev worked closely with Kazakh intellectuals. Because of the strong cultural, historical, and linguistic connections between the two people, the cultural and literary activities of northern Kyrgyz intellectuals in the early twentieth century were interwoven with those of their Kazakh counterparts. The Kazakhs had been exposed to Russian-native education much earlier than the Kyrgyz, as a result of their earlier incorporation into the Russian empire. From the middle of the nineteenth century the Russian state had begun to accept and train Kazakh children for service as scribes, translators and guides.⁷⁰ The members of the first generation of modern Kazakh intellectuals, such as Chokan Valikhanov, Ibrai Altinsarin, and Abai Kunanbaev, were the product of this imperial policy, and they not only learned to speak the language of the empire, but also came to enjoy privileges, titles and a certain degree of status

⁶⁹ Scholars of modern Kyrgyz, informed by present-day nationalist perspectives, have criticized Arabaev's language for imprecise adherence to Kyrgyz phonetics and grammar and for the use of Kazakh and Tatar words. D. Maanaev and A. Osmonkulov, *E. Arabaev – Kyrgyz elinin algachky agartuuchu-okumushtuusu jana saiasii-koomduk ishmeri* (Bishkek: BGU, 2002), 85-86.

⁷⁰ One such student was Chokan Valikhanov, who graduated from the Cadet Corps in Omsk (established in 1846). See Sabol, *Genesis of Kazakh National Consciousness*, 56. In addition to the Omsk Cadet Corps, a Russian-Kazakh school was opened in Orenburg in 1850. By contrast, the first Russian-native school in the territories of the northern Kyrgyz opened in the village of Karakonguz in Toqmoq *uezd* in 1884. Twenty Dungans and a mere three Kyrgyz students attended it. See Sovetbek Baighaziev, *Ala-Toodogu agartuunun tarykhynyn kyskacha ocherkteri, XVII kylymdan 1917-zhylga chein* (Bishkek: Erkin Too, 2005), 24. Russian-native schools were to gain popularity among the Kyrgyz only in the first decade of the twentieth century.

within imperial circles.⁷¹ They were ardent advocates of Russian culture and education, and believed that in order for their own Kazakh society to advance, it had to embrace a sedentary lifestyle and secular education. By the early twentieth century, a new generation of politically active Kazakh intellectuals emerged to voice their criticism of the state's treatment of its non-Russian population in the pages of contemporary Kazakh-language periodicals. Among them were Alikhan Bokeikhanov, Akhmet Baitursynov, Mirzhaqyp Dulatov and Mukhametzhan Seralin. In 1911 they began to publish the first Kazakh-language journal, *Aiqap*, in Troitsk.⁷² Mukhametzhan Seralin served as the journal's editor, and the majority of its contributors were Kazakh intellectuals. Published monthly, it included foreign news, essays pertaining to Islam, literary works, letters to the editor, issues concerning Muslim education, history and language, and book reviews.⁷³

Arabaev, whose interests also spanned history, literature and education, was a regular reader and contributor of *Aiqap*. In 1911, he published a short appeal to “those Kyrgyz who came and stayed among the Kazakhs,” to write and let him know when they had settled among the Kazakhs and which clan [*uruq*] they came from.⁷⁴ He wrote with an eye toward publishing the *shezhire*, or genealogy [*sanzhyra* in Kyrgyz], of the Kyrgyz. He had already collected the *shezhire* of “our own Kyrgyz,” and now needed material about those who lived among Kazakhs. In 1912 Arabaev published one of his longest essays for *Aiqap*, entitled *Orinburdan Tashkengacha* [*From Orenburg to Tashkent*]. In this piece, he wrote about his visit with Kazakh intellectual Alikhan Bokeikhanov, while at the same time highlighting his own interest in Kyrgyz

⁷¹ Peter Rottier, “Creating the Kazakh Nation,” 48-108

⁷² The journal was published as a separate collection. See U. Subkhanberdina, et al. eds. *Aiqap*. (Almaty: Kazak entsiklopediiasy bas redakttsiiasy, 1995)

⁷³ Subkhanberdina, *Aiqap*, 24-44.

⁷⁴ *Aiqap*, 1911, no. 12.

and Kazakh history.⁷⁵ Alikhan Bokeikhanov was a prominent thinker, political activist, and educator, who made significant contributions to the history and culture of the Kazakh people.⁷⁶ Arabaev was captivated by the depth of Bokeikhanov's knowledge, and spent many hours discussing topics with him which ranged across religion, mathematics, history, and philosophy.⁷⁷ The visit was prompted in large part by the urgings of Arabaev's fellow Kazakh and Kyrgyz students, who wished to find out whether Bokeikhanov was planning to write a Kazakh *shezhire*. Bokeikhanov expressed his willingness to assist in such a project, but given his busy schedule he suggested the students take up the task of writing the *shezhire* themselves. Despite his preparatory work, Arabaev did not ultimately publish a history and genealogy of the Kyrgyz. But in 1913, Osmonaaly Sydykov, another Kyrgyz from the Sarybaghysh tribe who studied at the Ghaliya *medrese* at the same time as Arabaev, did publish a small booklet, *Mukhtasar-i tārikh-i qirghiziya* [*A Brief History of the Kyrgyz*], which traced the genealogy of the Kyrgyz tribes. It is very likely that Arabaev contributed to Sydykov's work by sharing the genealogical information he had collected.

Ishenaaly Arabaev's life, intellectual pursuits, and personal decisions were shaped by the historical conditions in Central Asia at the end of the nineteenth century. Socio-economic changes introduced into the region by Russian imperial expansion made it possible for Arabaev to study in the centers of Islamic learning in the Russian empire. His interactions with the empire's Muslim intellectuals, and his exposure to the ideas of Muslim cultural reform through

⁷⁵ I. Arabaev, "Orınburdan Tashkengacha" *Aiqap*, no. 1-2, 1912. This essay was published in the first two issues of *Aiqap* in 1912. My discussion is based on the first part of the essay and the first page of the second part (p.26). The second issue of *Aiqap* was missing pages 27 through 30, and I was not able to locate it anywhere. All issues of *Aiqap* are stored in the Rare Books Collection of the National Library of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Almaty.

⁷⁶ Membet Qoigeldiev, "Alikhan Bokeikhanov" in M. Qoideldiev, ed. *Alikhan Bokeikhanov: Shygharmalar* (Almaty: Kazakhstan, 1994), 5-94.

⁷⁷ *Aiqap*, 1912, p. 18.

medrese study and the print media, made him aware of the plight of his “own” people, the Kyrgyz, and allowed him to conceive of his community as extending beyond his Sarybaghysh tribe. Arabaev was born into and raised in a culture with a strong oral tradition. He was familiar with the poetic repertoire of the *aqyns* and *zhomoqchus*; he valued their art highly and it had a tremendous influence on how he came to imagine being Kyrgyz.⁷⁸ But, as Adeeb Khalid points out, there were many ways to imagine the nation in the ethnically, confessionally, linguistically, and culturally diverse landscape of early-twentieth century Central Asia. Throughout his career, Arabaev had tried to navigate and reconcile these various identities. In his village, he was a Sarybaghysh from Qochqor *volost*; in Ufa, he was a Kyrgyz from southern Semirech’e region; and while travelling the Middle East, he was a Muslim from Turkestan. His close collaboration with Kazakh intellectuals and his tendency to intermingle Kyrgyz and Kazakh affairs added yet another dimension to his identity. In fact, as the next chapter will show, his cultural alliances with Kazakh intellectuals during the late-imperial period would later lead to political alliances that would play an integral role in shaping the choices he made after the demise of the Russian empire. For now, however, we turn to Osmonaaly Sydykov, another Kyrgyz intellectual and Arabaev’s contemporary, whose activities also highlighted the connections between oral and written literature during this transitional period in Kyrgyz literary history.

Writing a “Kyrgyz” History: Osmonaaly Sydykov and His *Tarikhs*

Osmonaaly Sydykov [Sidiq uulu] published *Mukhtasar-i tārikh-i Qirghīziya* [*Compendium of the History of the Qirghīz*] in 1913. In it he wrote: “Every nation has a history.

⁷⁸ Later, in the 1920s, Arabaev would help launch the effort to record the *Manas* epic.

Since no one among the Qırghız wrote history, they said that the Qırghız came from ‘forty girls’ [qyrq qyz] and cited many tales of *Shaykh Mansur*.⁷⁹ Sydykov recalled being ashamed and embittered by the comments of those who claimed the Kyrgyz had no history, who doubted the noble origins of the Kyrgyz, and ridiculed the fact they did not have a history that was published, or even written down. For fifteen years, he continued, he had “excavated” that history and “checked” it for accuracy, and was now able to tell the stories of the ancestors of the Kyrgyz people.⁸⁰

Sydykov’s *Qırghızıya* was the first published source dedicated to the history of the northern Kyrgyz tribes. Until the early twentieth century, the Kyrgyz preserved their history in the form of *sanzhyra* genealogies. *Aqyns*, *aq saqals*,⁸¹ tribal elders and eloquent commoners all recited the *sanzhyra* and ensured its transmission from generation to generation.⁸² As shown in the previous chapter, Kyrgyz *aqyns* and *zhomoqchus* preserved the culture and history of their people through oral poetry; and despite their embellishment and exaggeration, oral epics and heroic poems often did incorporate recognizable historical facts. These creative histories never aspired to accurately portray the past, however, but rather served as admonitions, didactic tools and diversions.

The emergence of works like *Qırghızıya* at the beginning of the twentieth century pointed to a new way of telling history. The creators of these works were informed by the rich oral

⁷⁹ Osmonali Sidiq ugli, *Mukhtasar-i tārikh-i Qırghızıya* (Ufa: Elektro-Tipografiia Tovarishchestva “Karimov, Husainov i K,” 1913), 10.

⁸⁰ Sidiq ugli, *Qırghızıya*, 10.

⁸¹ *Aq saqal* means “white beard,” referring to older Kyrgyz men and the wisdom they had acquired with age.

⁸² Recent scholarship has questioned the dominant views of the nomadic societies as structured around tribes. Scholars stressed the “aristocratic” nature of genealogies and viewed that tribal and clan structure of the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz as something that was reinforced by Russian colonial administration. David Sneath went as far as to say that tribal genealogies were Russian colonial constructs. See David Sneath, *The Headless State: Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, and Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), esp. chapter III.

tradition of their ancestors, but they had also been educated in the reformed *mektebs* and *medreses*, and exposed to the debates on the *millat* [nation] then current in intellectual circles and contemporary periodicals. Discussions of the *millat* and its fate within the empire increased among Russia's Muslims after the 1905 revolution. Although the revolution began in the capital, its aftermath was felt throughout the empire, including the imperial borderlands.⁸³ The state concessions which followed the revolution provided the empire's Muslim intellectuals with an opportunity to advance their political and cultural goals.⁸⁴ These dynamics were most evident in the print media, which witnessed heated debates on the future of Russia's Muslims, leavened by the acknowledgment of their cultural and linguistic diversity.⁸⁵ These discussions were led by Muslim cultural elites, and began with high-level questions concerning progress and enlightenment, but gradually shifted to address more immediate issues such as territorial claims, historical authenticity and language. Poems and editorials calling for people to wake up from their deep sleep, take up skills and embrace "worldly" knowledge were widely circulated.⁸⁶ The debate highlighted the fact that Russia's Muslims were far from a homogenous unit. Turkestani Muslims championed the "language of Turkestan (Chaghatay)" and opposed the use of Turkish and Tatar in the Turkestani press.⁸⁷ Kazakhs refused to use Tatar in their schools and publications as well, asserting that Tatar and Kazakh were two different languages. Furthermore,

⁸³ L. M. Ivanova, et al. eds. *Revoliutsiia 1905-1907 gg. v natsional'nykh raionakh Rossii* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1955) gives an overview of the revolution of 1905 in the imperial borderlands, which emphasizes its economic and political causes. See in particular chapters on Turkestan and Kazakhstan, 567-714.

⁸⁴ Kappeler, *Russian Empire*, 337-338.

⁸⁵ For a discussion on the concept of the *millat* in the Turkestani press, see Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 184-228.

⁸⁶ Kazakh intellectual, poet, and *Qazaq*'s editor Mirzhaqyp Duulatov's, *Oyan Qazaq!* (Wake up, Kazakh!) was published in 1907; Hajji Muin b. Shukrullah, *Eski mekteb, yangi mekteb* (Samarkand, 1916), as cited in Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 191.

⁸⁷ "Matbuat alami, yaki sabab-i ta'sis-i ghazata-yi 'Tojjar'," *Tojjar*, 21 August 1907, as cited in Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 190-191.

they demanded that the histories of the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz be kept strictly separate,⁸⁸ while the Kyrgyz asked that a published Kazakh history include 600,000 Kyrgyz “relatives” from Ala-Tau who spoke a common “Kazakh-Kyrgyz” language.⁸⁹ Kazakh and Turkestan Muslims united, however, to take issue with the Tatar hegemony in the region’s political and cultural affairs. After 1907 the Muslim fraction of the State Duma was made up entirely of Tatar Muslims, a fact strongly opposed by Kazakh intellectuals like A. Baitursynov and M. Dulatov, who cited the Tatars’ unfamiliarity with the nomadic lifestyle of the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, and with the land deficits they faced.⁹⁰

Yet although these exchanges demonstrated the wide variety of goals, desires and identities possessed by Russia’s Muslims, they also served to reinforce the sense that a larger Russian Muslim community did exist. The debate took place across the breadth of that diverse community, in the pages of a Muslim press that was circulated and discussed in every ethnic and linguistic corner of Russia’s Muslim sphere. And through this process, the Kyrgyz increasingly saw a particular place for themselves within that larger Muslim community. They used periodicals like *Aiqap*, *Qazaq* and *Shuro* as platforms through which to raise their own concerns and assert their own perspectives. Osmonaaly Sydykov’s works on Kyrgyz history must be

⁸⁸ Students of the Ghaliya *medrese* refused to use Tatar language textbooks, claiming that the two languages were completely different. The dispute was resolved by Ghalymzhan Ibrahimov, a Tatar intellectual and a teacher at the *medrese* at that time. See Tursynbek Kekishev, *Sadaq* (Almaty: Zhaly, 1986), 26. In a short essay on languages, the author advocated that the Kazakh and Noghoi (Tatar) languages be separated for the time being, allowing both literary traditions to become firmly established, but expressed the hope that later they would develop into one “common” [*ortoq*] language. See M. Esengeldin, “Til tuurasında,” *Aiqap*, July 1912, 160. Turik balasy (son of Turk, pseudonym of a frequent contributor of the newspaper *Qazaq*) often contributed pieces on Kazakh history. In one of his articles, entitled “Qazaqtyng tarikhy” Turik balasy insists: “The mistake of many books on history is that they do not differentiate between the Kazakhs and the Kyrgyz. Kazakh is Kazakh! Kyrgyz is Kyrgyz of its own. Just as the Bashkyr and Turkmen are different peoples, so the Kazakh and Kyrgyz are also different peoples.” See Turik balasy, “Qazaqtyng tarikhy,” *Qazaq*, 1913, in U. Subkhanberdina, et al. eds. *Qazaq gazeti* (Almaty: “Kazak entsiklopediiasy” bas redaksiiasy, 1998), 19-20.

⁸⁹ Letter to the editors of *Aiqap* from Nuraldin Moldoghazin upon the request of Kemaldin the son of Shabdan and the Chui Qyrghyz. *Aiqap*, 1912, no. 4, p. 90.

⁹⁰ On Kazakh participation in the State Duma see Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1987), 109-118.

interpreted in light of both the socio-economic developments after the Russian conquest, and this early-twentieth century Muslim cultural discourse on modernity. This section will look briefly at Sydykov's biography, and then turn to analyze the ideas that informed Sydykov's work. It will explore how Sydykov viewed his "Qirghiz" community, and the concepts he used to define it. It will weigh Sydykov's intentions in writing the history of what he considered to be his people and land, "Qirghiziya."⁹¹ Finally, it will examine how and why Sydykov employed various concepts that are closely associated with modernity, concepts such as progress, education and technology.

Osmonaaly Sydykov was born in 1877⁹² in the village of Temirbolot, in Pishpek *uezd* of Semirech'e *oblast*. He was a descendant of Abayilda, an influential *manap* of the Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz. Osmonaaly's mother died when he was young, leaving him and his seven siblings to the care of his father. Osmonaaly was later adopted by his paternal uncle, Qanat. While in Qanat's house, and aided by Qanat's wife Qubat, Sydykov began his education with a visiting *mullah*.⁹³ When Osmonaaly turned thirteen, he ran away to Toqmoq, where he studied with *mullah* Shakir for five years. Shakir was a Tatar *mullah*, famous for his knowledge of secular subjects as well as the teachings of Islam.⁹⁴ In 1895, after completing his studies with Shakir, Osmonaaly returned to his village of Temirbolot, and began teaching local children in hopes of earning enough money to study abroad. Osmonaaly was likely hired to teach the children of a wealthy Kyrgyz *bay*, since sources indicate that an official school was not built in Temirbolot until 1909.⁹⁵ In 1899, Osmonaaly traveled to Kashgar to further his studies. After a year, however, an earthquake cut his stay in Kashgar short, and Osmonaaly was forced to return to his village and

⁹¹ The same concept is used by Belek Soltonoev, another historian from the northern Kyrgyz Solto tribe.

⁹² Stated as 1875 in some sources.

⁹³ RF NAN KR), d. 102, l. 2. (October 6, 1945)

⁹⁴ RF NAN KR, f. 102, l. 3.

⁹⁵ Duishe Aitmambetov, *Dorevoliutsionnye shkoly v Kirgizii* (Frunze: Izdatel'stvo AN Kirgizskoi SSR, 1961), 13.

resume teaching. The following year, Osmonaaly went to Bukhara. He soon learned that Shabdan, *manap* of the Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz, had hired a mullah from Ufa, and Osmonaaly decided to study with him. Late in his life, Shabdan had become a devout Muslim, and patron to many religious projects including educational institutions, *hajj* groups and the construction of mosques.⁹⁶ In 1909 Shabdan built the Shadmaniya *medrese*, and hired two Orenburg *medrese* graduates as instructors, paying them a salary of five hundred rubles per month to teach local children.⁹⁷ It is not clear whether Osmonaaly studied or taught at that particular *medrese* during his stay with Shabdan in Kemin, but Osmonaaly did serve as Shabdan's scribe [*pisar*'], and the two became very close.⁹⁸ In 1911, Osmonaaly set out once more, to study at the Ghaliya *medrese* at Ufa. Upon graduation, he received a special certificate which allowed him to teach more advanced students.⁹⁹

Osmonaaly started documenting the history of the Kyrgyz tribes when he was fifteen years old.¹⁰⁰ It is not known whether he recorded the information as he collected it, or wrote everything down later from memory, but by 1905 he had a small collection of Kyrgyz genealogies entitled *Tārikh-i Qirghīziya* [*Qirghīz History*].¹⁰¹ While studying in Ufa, Osmonaaly shared his collection with other intellectuals there.¹⁰² They recognized the importance of his work and suggested that he publish it, while at the same time warning him that this would be a

⁹⁶ In 1904 Shabdan went on a pilgrimage to Mecca along with twenty people, and paid for their expenses. In Mecca, he pledged 2,000 rubles for the construction of the railroad between Istanbul and Mecca and Medina. See Zh. Abdylidabek kyzy, ed. *Shabdan: epokha i lichnost*, 254-255.

⁹⁷ Idem., 254.

⁹⁸ Sardarbek Ryskulov, *Saiapker: povestter, anggemeler* (Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1981), 101.

⁹⁹ RF NAN KR, f. 102, l. 5.

¹⁰⁰ RF NAN KR, f. 102, l. 4; *Qirghīziya*, 2.

¹⁰¹ RF NAN KR, f. 102, l. 4.

¹⁰² There is no definite information as to who those people were; but based on Mamytov's study, it seems possible they included other young students studying at the Ghaliya *medrese*, such as Ishenaaly Arabaev, Toktonaly Chyngyshev, and Iskhak Qanatov. See Mamytov, *Kyrgyzsko-Tatarskie literaturnye sviazi*, 71.

costly undertaking.¹⁰³ Osmonaaly decided to sell his belongings to finance the publication of *Qirghiziya*, which was issued in 1913.¹⁰⁴ Since the publishing business was still very new to Central Asia, and few there could afford to buy books, Osmonaaly was not able to recover his publishing costs.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, however, in 1911, the sons of *manap* Shabdan had offered to sponsor Osmonaaly's second book, *Tārikh-i Qirghiz-i Shādmāniya* [*The History of the Shabdan Qirghiz*] which was published in Ufa in 1914.¹⁰⁶ This book reprised some of the genealogical material from his previous work, but added significant sections devoted to the genealogy of Shabdan and his Tynai branch of the Sarybaghysh tribe, delivered in panegyric style.

Both of Sydykov's published works comprise a mixture of prose and poetry, written in the Chaghatay language with Tatar and Kyrgyz characteristics, using Arabic script.¹⁰⁷ They follow the model of Islamic general history, and begin with the story of Adam.¹⁰⁸ Sydykov made no other known contributions to Kyrgyz print or manuscript literature. After the establishment of

¹⁰³ RF NAN KR, f. 102, l. 4.

¹⁰⁴ Osmonali Sidiq ugli, *Mukhtasar-i tārikh-i Qirghiziya* (Ufa: Elektro-Tipografiia Tovarishchestva "Karimov, Husainov i K.," 1913).

¹⁰⁵ There were no printing presses in Central Asia at the time of the Russian conquest. After the conquest they only emerged in major cultural centers such as Bukhara and Tashkent, and most were owned by Russians. For an excellent survey of the topic with respect to Turkestan, see Adeeb Khalid, "Printing, Publishing and Reform in Tsarist Central Asia," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26 (1994): 187-200. Little exists on the history of printing in other parts of Central Asia. Aitmambetov's *Kul'tura* discusses the development of print in the area of the present day Kyrgyzstan; however, he lists mostly works that were either published in Russian, or published in native languages by Russian colonial authorities. See Duishe Aitmambetov, *Kul'tura Kirgizskogo naroda*. On Tatar print and publishing see Abrar Karimullin, *Tatarskaia kniga nachala XX veka* (Kazan: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1974).

¹⁰⁶ Osmonali Sidiq ugli Abayilda neberesi (the grandson of Abayilda), *Tārikh-i Qirghiz-i Shādmāniya* (Ufa: Elektro-tipografiia "Vostochnaia Pechat'," 1914).

¹⁰⁷ A copy of *Tārikh-i Qirghiz-i Shādmāniya* is located in the Manuscripts Collection of the National Academy of Sciences in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan in folder 1589. The folder notes indicate that two books by Sydykov were brought to the Academy (then the Institute of Languages, Literature and History) by seventy-nine year old Akmatally Abdrakhmanov in 1954. The notes state that the "it was impossible to discuss the books in the department, since the majority there do not read Arabic script." However, Igor Batmanov, Director of the Institute, indicated that the works had historical as well as linguistic value, and asked his staff to buy the books for the smallest possible sum. Ultimately, Abdrakhmanov agreed to sell only one of the books, saying that the second did not belong to him. He offered to make a copy of the second book for a payment of 300 rubles. *Mukhtasar-i tārikh-i Qirghiziya* is held at the rare books section of the Kyrgyz State National library in Bishkek, but it is not clear whether or not it is Abdrakhmanov's copy.

¹⁰⁸ Prior, "Heroes, Chieftains," 73.

Soviet rule in Central Asia, Sydykov became a member of *Shura-i Islamiya* party.¹⁰⁹ From 1920 to 1928 he served as a teacher at the Tatar school in Pishpek.¹¹⁰ He was imprisoned in 1931, first in Pishpek and later in Tashkent.¹¹¹ Sydykov was able to escape from prison in 1933 and flee to Qulzha, China, where he died in 1942 after several years of teaching.¹¹²

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Sydykov was not alone in attempting to write a new national history. As he did so, Sydykov was influenced by both the classical Persian and Arabic historical traditions, and the modern Tatar literary culture that had much currency among Russian Muslims. But Sydykov also came from a culture with rich oral traditions of its own, and he skillfully wove these into his writings as well. Thus, his works had a style that was striking and varied, sometimes resembling a novel, a genre then little-known in Central Asian literary circles, and at other times resembling the oral poetry composed by Kyrgyz and Kazakh *aqyns* and *zhyns*.

According to Sydykov, *Qirghiziya* was written “for the Qirghiz, so that other people become aware of the Qirghiz.”¹¹³ In the preface he defines “Qirghiz” as referring to the ancestors of the Sarybaghysh, Sayaq, Bughu, Solto, Azyq, and Cherek tribes residing around Lake Isyk Kul

¹⁰⁹ A political party in Turkestan consisting of mostly *jadids*, which came into being in the aftermath of the February revolution in 1917 in Central Asia. See Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca: the Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 32-33.

¹¹⁰ RF NAN KR, f. 102, l. 6.

¹¹¹ Sydykov's file at the Academy of Sciences provides no explanation for why he was imprisoned. However, in the Introduction to the 1990 edition of *Tarikh*, Karasaev notes that Sydykov was able to escape to China, where he died. See Osmonaaly Sydykov, *Tarikh Kyrgyz Shadmaniia, kyrgyz sanzhyrasy* (Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1990), 5.

¹¹² When he fled to China in the 1930s, Sydykov left his wife and three daughters in his village of Temirbolot and they were never able to reunite. He remarried in Qulzha, and had a son and a daughter from his second marriage. I was able to interview Osmonaaly's daughter from his second marriage, Bübüsh Osmonaaly kyzy, in Kyrgyzstan in 2011. Bübüsh was born in 1939, and was only three years old when her father died. After Osmonaaly's rehabilitation in 1956, his family was able to move to Kyrgyzstan and settle in Isyk Kul. Since the 1990s, Bübüsh's mission has been to resurrect the memory of her father and his work. With the help of other historians and linguists, Bübüsh has published her father's works, given interviews, written a memoir, and solicited reminiscences about her father from those who knew him. See Bübüsh Osmonaaly kyzy, interviewed by J. Duishembieva, village of Orghochor, Isyk Kul region, 7 August, 2011.

¹¹³ Sidiq ugli, *Qirghiziya*, 3.

and in the Tian-Shan mountains.¹¹⁴ All of these belonged to the “right wing” Kyrgyz. Sydykov himself, as a member of the Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz of the Taghay lineage, identified with these “right wing” tribes, and it was their *tarikh* [history] and *sanzhyra* [genealogy] that he sought to relate. But although Sydykov had his own specific classificatory principles, it is clear that he was using the term “Qirghiziya” in his title and in the text¹¹⁵ to refer to the Kyrgyz people as a group, in a way that deemphasized tribal divisions.¹¹⁶ Sydykov built upon *Qirghiziya* when writing *Tārikh-i Qirghiz-i Shādmāniya*. He expanded the initial poetry section, sharpening his critique of both Kazakh and Kyrgyz society. He enlarged the section on the Tynai Sarybaghysh, including reminiscences about Shabdan, as well as a lengthy ode to Shabdan written in the form of *qazal* [ghazal] genre of panegyric poetry.¹¹⁷ Finally, he added a section [fast] devoted to the history of the Kazakhs and Dungsans.

Sydykov opened *Qirghiziya* by asking why it is important to know history, to which he answered:

This history will let us know of our fathers,
Many fathers who passed away.
Do you know, my relatives, of histories
Stories of many souls who passed away?
Histories of Kazakh, Qirghiz, Noghoi, Sarts
From which race, from which tribe they come.¹¹⁸

Sydykov added that to know history meant to know the events of the past, the places of ancestors and saints, and the deeds of the prophets. He compared a person who knew history to a person who had traveled and seen the world. Both were set in opposition to the person who had

¹¹⁴ Idem., 2.

¹¹⁵ Idem., 4.

¹¹⁶ After the analysis of Sydykov’s as well as Soltonev’s use of the term, I came to the conclusion that “*Qirghiziya*” is used toward a group of people, and in Soltonev’s case toward the northern Kyrgyz (*tiin Qirghiziya*).

¹¹⁷ On panegyric poetry see Jocelyn Sharlet, *Patronage and Poetry in the Islamic World: Social Mobility and Status in the Medieval Middle East and Central Asia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011).

¹¹⁸ Sidiq ugli, *Qirghiziya*, 4.

never seen anything, who was ignorant and illiterate, who stayed in one place and by his own will confined himself to *zindān* [prison]. Sydykov extended this line of enquiry in the prose portion of his work, engaging with three related topics: why one should know history, the value that knowing history brings the individual, and which history one should study first.¹¹⁹ In Sydykov's view history's moral significance lay in the fact that represented a form of conscience, by instilling in people the knowledge of good and evil. Its value to the individual came from the fact that it conferred wisdom and respect that could otherwise only be acquired by experience for the man who knew history had the same knowledge of past events as one who was "many years old."¹²⁰ As for which history to study, Sydykov held that one must learn the history of one's own tribe first, and only then the history of other people. If a person did not know his own heritage, it was of little consequence to know that the "people of Iran are Muslims, and the people of Greece are of another religion."¹²¹

Sydykov viewed history as a process of events which one could interpret. His treatment of history stood in opposition to the Islamic historical tradition which saw the past as "a sacralized record of divine intervention in the affairs of men."¹²² In this regard, Sydykov's understanding of history conformed to that of many other Muslim reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. History had been introduced as a subject in the new-method school curricula by reform minded Muslim intellectuals in the late nineteenth century. At the same time these *jadids* had decentered Islam, teaching it as only one subject (albeit an important one) among many others in the academic program. Behbudi, a prominent *jadid*, was one of those to articulate this new distinction between history and religion: "every Christian and

¹¹⁹ *Tārikh bilu nichung, tārikhning fāydasi, qāy tarikhni avval bilu kerak.* Idem., 11-12.

¹²⁰ *Nechen yāshqa chikkan adām shekildi bilur.* Idem., 11.

¹²¹ Idem., 12

¹²² Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 108.

Jewish student learns the guidance and formation of his religion and becomes acquainted with historical events.”¹²³ It is clear that Sydykov, himself a product of the *jadids*’ new-method *mektebs* and *medreses*, had responded enthusiastically to this ideological perspective.

Sydykov discussed the ideas of progress, education and technology in both of his works, especially *Tārikh-i Qırghız-i Shādmāniya*, in which this discussion took up nearly one-quarter of the book. In *Shādmāniya*, these ideas were framed by a harsh critique of local realities. Sydykov painted a gloomy picture of tribal society of the early twentieth century, and voiced his dissatisfaction with the conditions created and maintained by native elites. Sydykov accused tribal leaders of fighting amongst each other to be elected into the local government. He wrote about the celebrations the wealthy organized every year, in order to buy as many votes as possible. While the rich benefitted, the poor were the ones to suffer from these “party” games:

Partisanship fell upon us,
It is growing year by year.
Craftiness is in excess,
And kindness is gone.
The *manap* is eating people,
Poor are giving away their livestock.¹²⁴

These views reflected the social and economic stresses imposed by Russian colonial administration, and the toll they were taking on traditional Kyrgyz society. As scribe to Shabdan, Sydykov would have had a front row seat to the feuds that imperial elections inspired between Kyrgyz tribes, and to the unequal negotiations between Russian imperial officials and local *manaps* over issues relating to land, religious affairs, and native education. This was the context

¹²³ Mahmud Khoja Behbudi, *Mukhtasar tārikh-i Islam* (Samarqand, 1909), 2. Cited in Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 173.

¹²⁴ Sīdīqūf, *Tārikh-i Qırghız-i Shādmāniya*, 10.

that informed Sydykov's reaction to the changes in his society, his condemnations of tribal leaders, and his frustration with the ignorance he saw in his own people.

Despite his critique of Russian bureaucrats and exploitive *manaps*, Sydykov stood firm in his belief that the people themselves bore the ultimate responsibility for their own suffering. This responsibility stemmed, in his view, from the people's ignorance, and their consequent sluggishness, inability to adapt, and unwillingness to make necessary societal reforms. Sydykov complained of the laziness of the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs: while other people were learning science and new skills, the "hopeless Qırghız" had found refuge in the mountains and remained devoid of skills.¹²⁵ Instead of collecting things [*māl*], Sydykov advised his people to collect knowledge; one could lose material possessions, but knowledge remained with a person and helped him through difficult times. Most of all, he urged his readers to open their eyes to what was happening around them, and to embrace the idea of progress:

Oh my relatives [people] it is time to move,
Time to take everything one needs in one's hands.
Think, Qırghız and Kazakh people,
Open your eyes and know of the condition of your time.¹²⁶

Sydykov saw Russia and Europe as holding the keys to progress. They were the embodiment of what could be accomplished through science and skills. Whereas the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs were busy fighting each other, and their young men [*yikit/jigit*] wasted their time in indolence, Europe and Russia were advancing in science and technology, opening schools and educating their people. He argued that the way out of this darkness for the Kyrgyz was through education, which would convey to them the crafts [*khunār*] and science [*ilm*] of Europe:

To know the knowledge of Europe

¹²⁵ Idem., 17.

¹²⁶ Idem., 6.

Reach out for the science, my friend.
 Be aware of the freedom of this time
 Even if not much, this is my advice to you.
 Look for the traces of knowledge
 Straighten your path with science.¹²⁷

Next Sydykov turned to focus more directly on technology. He wrote about technological innovations such as the railroad, the telephone, the steamboat, the air balloon, electricity, and the telescope. All of these innovations, he noted, had been achieved through science:

I will write as a story, if you listen carefully,¹²⁸
 Of things that were created with the help of science.

Thus, the railroad shortened one's time to a destination, the telephone and telegraph brought the news sooner, the electric lamp lit up the whole city in a minute, and the telescope made a grain look bigger than a camel.¹²⁹ Another scientific achievement was the printing press and publishing house:

There is also a publishing house which prints books,
 Which spreads enlightenment to people with crafts.
 A newspaper, magazine and news from many places
 With those our people opened their eyes.
 Mankind found it with the help of crafts
 Only the Kazakhs and Qırghız were watching [without participating].¹³⁰

The Kyrgyz would only be able to harness these technologies when they acquired skills and began to study. Sydykov urged his people to build *mektebs* and *medreses*. It was through active learning in these institutions that people would become informed [*maglumotli bul*] about the world outside.

¹²⁷ Idem., 7-8.

¹²⁸ Idem., 14. Note that Sydykov is “writing”, but he asks his audience to “listen” to his story, not to “read” it. This suggests that “silent” reading was not yet widespread in Central Asia at that time.

¹²⁹ Idem., 14-16.

¹³⁰ Idem., 16.

Although the modernist concepts of education, progress, technology and enlightenment appeared at various places in Sydykov's *Shādmāniya*, they were treated most extensively in the opening part of the book, serving as the introduction to Sydykov's historical and genealogical narrative. When addressing his people, Sydykov used the familiar cadences of oral poetry to express his ideas. Thus, his poem resembled *nasihat*, the genre of wisdom poetry that had been widely employed by Kyrgyz and Kazakh oral poets for centuries. We do not know how widely his *Tarikh* circulated after its publication, but it is obvious that Sydykov hoped to capture as many readers and listeners as possible, and one way to do this was to begin the book by evoking a popular literary form.

It is worth looking more closely into why modernist concepts like progress, education and technology were so important to Sydykov. In his analysis of Tatar and Kyrgyz literature, Mamytov points out that Tatar writers and intellectuals of the time made a profound impression on their Kyrgyz peers. He gives as an example the influence of texts by such Tatar writers as Tukai, Gafuri, and Gabdelmanov on the works of Sydykov and other Kyrgyz poets.¹³¹ There is no doubt that Sydykov was familiar with the work of these Tatar writers. In his books he borrowed literary themes and techniques from his Tatar colleagues, and closely emulated their language and style. However, it would be overly simplistic to say that it was only Tatar or Central Asian *jadid* influences that prompted Sydykov to explore questions related to modernity. In fact Sydykov's *Tārikh* can be seen as springing out of his own experience of the modern. Although he does not use the words "modern" or "modernity," he draws a clear separation between "before" and "now" that is central to the work. Use of such expressions as *bu zaman*,

¹³¹ Mamytov, *Kirgizsko-tatarskie literaturnye sviazi*, 103-109.

sungki kunlar, and *ushbu kunlar*¹³² demonstrate the distinction he perceives between the past and the present. And, it is precisely in this distinction that one can locate Sydykov's understanding of the modern. For Sydykov, "these days" or "this time" are different from "the days of the past," and the difference derives from technology and science. In "these days," therefore, one has to respond accordingly, by learning the skills and tools necessary to meet a new set of challenges.¹³³

A significant portion of *Shādmāniya* consisted of the story of the Sarybaghysh *manap* Shabdan. Sydykov's depiction of Shabdan and his deeds presented a stark contrast to his generalized critique of the Kyrgyz *manaps*. In *Shādmāniya*, Shabdan, although a *manap*, emerged as a generous, humble, and just person; someone who put his people's interests before his own, who always took care of the poor, and who was loved and revered in return. Sydykov's description of the last day of Shabdan's life, when the seventy-three year-old *manap* "migrated from the transitory world [*dār fanā*, from the Arabic *dār al-fanā*] to the real world [*dār baqā*, from the Arabic *dār al-baqā*]" during his evening *namaz* prayer, elevated Shabdan's image to that of a Muslim saint.¹³⁴ To demonstrate the respect and deference with which Shabdan was regarded, Sydykov detailed the expenditures for his funeral and memorial feast.¹³⁵ Adding weight to the point, he also listed the various high-ranking imperial officials and Kyrgyz dignitaries, as well as "Kazakhs, Dungans, Taranchi and Sarts," who attended the funeral and feast. The author also included what he called a *qazal* [Persian *ghazal*] in honor of Shabdan,

¹³² "This time," "latest days," "these days." Sīdīqūf, *Tārikh-i Qirghiz-i Shādmāniya*, 8.

¹³³ Sydykov's view of the modern was complicated, however, by his call for strict adherence to Islam. He felt Islamic traditions and values could peacefully co-exist with "European" technological advancements and the reform of traditional education.

¹³⁴ Idem., 64. See Shabdan's obituary in *Turkestanские vedomosti*, no. 101, May 6, 1912.

¹³⁵ Sīdīqūf, *Tārikh-i Qirghiz-i Shādmāniya*, 64-65.

written as a lament in the popular oral tradition of the *qoshoq*, or a song of mourning.¹³⁶ In it, Sydykov praised both Shabdan and his tribal lineage, the Tynai Sarybaghysh. He expressed his deep sorrow at losing this “hero [*er*],” and lauded Shabdan’s five sons as “smart and capable followers of their father’s path.”¹³⁷

Although *Shādmāniya* was not published until 1914, it was commissioned by Shabdan’s sons in 1911, and Sydykov mentioned his plans for its publication in *Qirghīziya*. Shabdan was still alive in 1911 and it is likely that he was involved in the negotiations to sponsor the work. Since Sydykov served as Shabdan’s scribe, and may have taught at Shabdan’s *medrese*, he already had a connection to the intellectual circle of *aqyns* and *manaschys* who benefitted from Shabdan’s patronage.¹³⁸ *Shādmāniya* demonstrates how the traditional relationship between the Kyrgyz oral poets and their patrons, the *manaps*, continued to be relevant well into the early-twentieth century, even as that oral tradition was slowly being supplanted by the medium of writing and print. People like Sydykov, the modernist-educated elite, had begun to occupy the

¹³⁶ The *qoshoq* is a song of mourning for the dead. It is usually sung by Kyrgyz women at the time of death, during the funeral, and throughout the mourning period, leading up to the one year memorial feast. In it, the women praise the deceased’s good qualities, sing about how he or she is missed, and praise his or her offspring. *Qoshoqs* are improvised and composed on the spot. Traditionally, there were women who were *qoshoq* masters, able to produce them upon request. On mourning songs see Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1974), Loring Danforth, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), Van Arnold Genep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960). On *qoshoqs* in Kyrgyz context, see Elmira Kochumkulova, *Tirüünün körkü syi bolot, ölgöndüün körkü yi bolot: eldik koshoktor zhana koshokchular* (Bishkek: Borborduk Aziia Universiteti, 2014).

¹³⁷ Sidiqul, *Tārikh-i Qirghīz-i Shādmāniya*, 75. Shabdan had ten sons from his nine wives (he also had daughters, but the Kyrgyz, being a patriarchal society, did not count the daughters in their family). Only Sultanbai, Möküsh, Isamiddin, Kamaledin, and Amaneddin are mentioned in *Tārikh-i Qirghīz-i Shādmāniya*. At one point or another, all of his sons ran for positions in the Sarybaghysh *volost* administration. Isamiddin was educated in *medreses* in Namangan and Toqmoq, and taught at Shabdan’s *medrese*. Kamaledin and Amaneddin had a Russian-language education. All of them were exiled in the 1930s. Zh. Abdylidabek kyzy, *Shabdan: epokha i lichnost’*.

¹³⁸ Details of the relationship between Sydykov and Shabdan are unknown, but Sydykov was not the only person to have written a work valorizing Shabdan in the beginning of the twentieth century. Musa Chagataev is one of such *aqyns*, who is known to have written a similar set of poems in honor of Shabdan in 1909-1910, while the latter was still alive. Chagataev’s poems were devoted to Shabdan, they were copied by Belek Soltonoev, the first Kyrgyz historian, and they contain Chagataev’s plea to Ishenaaly Arabaev to publish them, thus turning it into a complex network consisting of a poet, a scribe, a patron, and an intellectual-turned-editor/publisher. The poems authored by Musa Chagataev are: *The Raid on the Qalmaq*, *The Story of Kenensary*, and *The Poem of Saint Sanci*. See Prior, *Sabdan Baatir Codex*.

positions historically assigned to *aqyns*. They were aided in this by their “modern” experiences abroad and their participation in wider intellectual networks. Yet despite the fact they used modern mediums to communicate their message, the message itself remained connected with its origins in the oral tradition. Hence, although Sydykov termed his works *Tārikh* [history], they represented a continuation of the familiar genres and styles employed by *aqyns*, *manaschys*, and *zhomoqchus*, the genres of *sanzhyra* [genealogy], *qoshoq* [song of mourning], and *nasihat* [song of wisdom], thus demonstrating the deep connection between the modernist Kyrgyz intellectuals of the early-twentieth century with the oral tradition from which they emerged. Sydykov may have discussed modern technology and the concepts of progress and enlightenment in *Shādmāniya*, but he did so using the same techniques employed by the Kyrgyz oral poets.

Many years would pass before the first work of history written in the Western historiographic tradition, *Qyzyl qyrghyz tarykhy* [*History of the Red Kyrgyz*], would emerge.¹³⁹ Belek Soltonoev, a Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz of the Aiuke lineage, began researching the history of the Kyrgyz in 1895. It was only decades later, in 1934, that Soltonoev would draw on this research to write *Qyzyl qyrghyz tarykhy*, and not until 1993 that the work would finally be published. The following section will examine and contextualize Soltonoev’s history, paying particular attention to how it reflected his views on the Kyrgyz nation and Kyrgyzness.

¹³⁹ Only the title page of Soltonoev’s work is available in reproduction in the 2003 edition of his *History*. The title is written in Arabic script and can be transcribed as *Qizil qirghiz tārīkhī*. As I noted in my “Note on Transliteration,” I will use the Library of Congress system with modification to transcribe the title since we only have 1993 and 2003 printed versions of the work. Thus, I will use it as *Qyzyl qyrghyz tarykhy* throughout my dissertation.

A “New” Kyrgyz History: Belek Soltonoev and *Qyzyl Qyrghyz Tarykhy*

Belek Soltonoev is often hailed today as the first Kyrgyz historian. His two-volume work on Kyrgyz history, *Qyzyl qyrghyz tarykhy*, was published in 1993, two years after the Soviet Union was dismantled and the Kyrgyz Republic declared its independence,¹⁴⁰ and reprinted in 2003 with an introduction by Askar Akaev, the first President of Kyrgyzstan.¹⁴¹ In his introduction, the President wrote that Soltonoev’s daughter, Nuriia Belekova, presented the original to him, expressing her sorrow that the work had not been published in its entirety and requesting its re-publication.¹⁴² Thus, Soltonoev’s work, which was researched and written between 1895 and 1934, was used to serve the project of nation-building at the beginning of the twenty-first century, a time when Kyrgyz politicians sought to evoke an ancient Kyrgyz past by marking the 2,200th anniversary of Kyrgyz statehood.¹⁴³ This last section will peel back the layers of this present-day nationalist discourse, by providing a brief overview of Soltonoev’s work, and by examining the way that he himself conceptualized the Kyrgyz and Kyrgyznes as he wrote in the early-twentieth century.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Belek Soltonoev, *Qyzyl qyrghyz tarykhy* (Bishkek: Mamlekettik Uchkun kontserni, 1993), 2 vols.

¹⁴¹ Idem., *Qyrghyz tarykhy* (Bishkek: “Arkhi” innovatsiialyk borboru, 2003). This chapter will be discussed on 2003 edition of Soltonoev’s work, which will be used as QT throughout the chapter.

¹⁴² Idem., 5. The present whereabouts of the original text are not known. According to the available sources, the manuscript was kept in the Manuscripts Collection of the National Academy of Sciences during the 1980s, and was available to Kyrgyz historians, some of whom cited it cautiously in their works. That copy is no longer available in the Academy of Sciences collection, and it is possible that Nuriia Belekova, as Soltonoev’s daughter and heir, may have presented it to Akaev. My personal correspondence with Daniel Prior (Miami University) suggests that it may still be in Akaev’s possession. Although Soltonoev’s daughter expressed her desire to publish the work in its entirety, the 2003 edition excludes the section on the revolt of 1916, which was included in the 1993 edition. The revolt became a contested and highly sensitive issue in the realm of Russian-Kyrgyz diplomatic relations during the late 1990s. It was described as the “National Liberation Uprising” and an “anti-Russian movement” in the Kyrgyz media, and the punitive actions taken by the Russian Empire against Kyrgyz and Kazakhs who participated in the revolt were termed “massacres” and “genocide.” More on this issue in the next chapter.

¹⁴³ Sergei Abashin, “Nation-construction in Post-Soviet Central Asia,” in Mark Bassin and Catriona Kelly, eds., *Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 155.

¹⁴⁴ On his title page, Soltonoev noted that he had started collecting material on the Kyrgyz in 1895 and had finished writing it in 1934.

Without the original text it is difficult to examine the language Soltonoev employed. Only the title page of the manuscript has been reproduced, rendered in both the Russian and Kyrgyz languages, in Cyrillic and Arabic scripts respectively. The Kyrgyz text is as follows: “*Qizil Qirghiz Tārikhī. Jāzuču Belek Sultungeldi uulu Soltānāyef. Nāslim qirghiz. Tāylarim sāyāq. 1895-jildān bāštāb jiyib 1934-jilī jāmdādīm.*”¹⁴⁵ And the Russian text runs: “*Materialy po istorii kirgizskogo naroda. Istoriia Krasnoi Kirgizii. Trud Beleka Soltanaeva. Sbor materialov s 1895g. B. S. Soltanaev.*”¹⁴⁶ In the Kyrgyz-language variant, Soltonoev highlighted his maternal ancestry being of the Sayaq tribe, but rather than naming his paternal tribe, he chose to be identified as of Kyrgyz descent (*nasl*, from Arabic, meaning “descent”).¹⁴⁷ In the Russian-language version, all this was omitted entirely. We do not know for certain what motives inspired Soltonoev to write this work. Judging from similar cases, it may have been commissioned by Soviet officials, with the intention of creating a “national” historical narrative of the Kyrgyz; but this possibility cannot be confirmed from early-Soviet archival documents.¹⁴⁸ We do know that between 1929 and the mid-1930s, Soltonoev worked in Kyrgyz cultural

¹⁴⁵ History of the Red Kyrgyz. Writer: Belek, son of Soltongeldi Soltonoev. My ancestry is Kyrgyz. My maternal line is Sayaq. I have been collecting since 1895 and finished in 1934. In Belek Soltonoev, *Qyzyl qyrghyz tarykhy* (Bishkek: “Arkhi” innovatsiialyk borboru, 2003), 6.

¹⁴⁶ Materials on the history of the Kirghiz people. History of Red Kirgiziia. The work of Belek Soltanaev. Collection of materials since 1895. B. S. Soltanaev. In Belek Soltonoev, *Qyzyl qyrghyz tarykhy* (Bishkek: “Arkhi” innovatsiialyk borboru, 2003), 6.

¹⁴⁷ *Nasl* was used in one of the 1847 Kazakh and Kyrgyz oaths, which reads: *Qaraqyrghyz naslli yurtning*. D. Prior translates it as “the lands of those of Karakirghiz descent” and calls it “an attempt on the part of the drafters [of the oath] to clothe imperial Russian concepts of ethnicity and political development in Turki garb.” He notes that the use of all three words is peculiar from historical perspective since, *Qaraqyrghyz* was only used by Russians to indicate the Kyrgyz; *nasl* is being an “Arabo-Persian Turki” expression; and *yurt* having a territorial connotation. See D. Prior, “High Rank and Power,” 151.

¹⁴⁸ In 1926, Mukhametzhn Tynyshpaev, an engineer turned historian, published *Materials on the History of the Kirghiz-Kazakh People*, based on the lectures he offered at the Kazakh Pedagogical Institute of People’s Education in Tashkent. The project was sponsored by the Turkestan Department of the Russian Geographical Society. See Zifa-Alua Auezova, “Conceiving a people’s History: the 1920-1936 discourse on the Kazakh past,” in *The Heritage of Soviet Oriental Studies*, eds. Michael Kemper and Stephan Conerman (Abington, Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2011), 241-261.

institutions in various scholarly capacities, and that he likely wrote *QT* during that time.¹⁴⁹ But the fact that he began collecting and recording the material as far back as the late nineteenth century, means that *QT* is a source which speaks to Kyrgyz identity in the late-imperial period, as well as early-Soviet times.

Soltonoev belonged to the same generation as Arabaev and Sydykov; he was born in 1878, in the village of Jantay in Pishpek *uezd*, and came from the Aiuke branch of the Sarybaghysh tribe. He was familiar with Arabaev, and the two worked together in the 1920s collecting examples of Kyrgyz oral literature.¹⁵⁰ Like Sydykov, Soltonoev also developed an interest in history during the 1890s, and in 1895 he started to “sort through the history and write everything down.”¹⁵¹ But, Soltonoev would go on to distinguish himself from Sydykov by his extensive use of Russian and Central Asian sources, by his embrace of western historiographic techniques, and by the sheer volume of information he presented regarding the Kyrgyz and their lifestyle, customs, worldview, and culture.¹⁵² In many ways Soltonoev’s education resembled that of Arabaev and Sydykov; he received his early training with a local *mullah*, and then studied at a new-method Muslim school in Pishpek. But a key difference is that Soltonoev had early and extensive exposure to Russian, and eventually became fluent in the language. He began learning Russian when he was sent by his uncle to work for a Russian acquaintance. Later he built on this

¹⁴⁹ He was also working to compile a dictionary of Kyrgyz terms during this period, and had already collected about 6,000 words.

¹⁵⁰ Prior, *Codex*. A number of poems on 1916 revolt in Soltonoev’s handwriting and bearing his signature are located at the Manuscripts Collection of the Kyrgyz National Academy of Sciences.

¹⁵¹ Soltonoev, *QT*, 19. Soltonoev’s reasons for studying Kyrgyz history echoed those expressed by Sydykov. Soltonoev wrote that in 1895 he came to a bookstore in Purunza [Pishpek, renamed Frunze in 1926]. He asked the Uzbek bookseller to show him some books. The seller brought out *Haftyak* and the works of Sufi Allah Yar, as well as several other nicely bound books. When Soltonoev asked about other books, the merchant rudely replied that those were history books, and that he would not be needing them, since the Kyrgyz originated from “*kyrk kyz* [forty girls],” and a dog that had gone after those girls. The remark left Soltonoev embarrassed and upset, and from that day on he began to collect stories related to the history of the Kyrgyz. Soltonoev, *QT*, 98.

¹⁵² Soltonoev was familiar with Sydykov’s *Mukhatasar*, and referred to it when discussing the origin of Adygine and Taghay. Soltonoev, *QT*, 102.

foundation by becoming one of the first of the northern Kyrgyz intellectuals to study in a Russian-native school, although extreme poverty cut those studies short after only three months. And although this period of formal training was brief, Soltonoev maintained numerous Russian acquaintances throughout his life, with whom he was able to speak and practice his Russian.

From the Russian-native school, Soltonoev returned to his own village and worked as a hired laborer for five years. He was then able to study for two years in a school for horticulture that had been established in Pishpek in 1890. Upon graduation, Soltonoev returned once more to his village in Atake *volost*, and worked there as a scribe and translator for various *volost* leaders. In 1916, Soltonoev was himself elected as a *volost* administrator, a position which he held for three and a half months, until the revolt of 1916. Soltonoev participated in the revolt, and escaped to the Chinese border city of Turfan, along with other people from his *volost*. In 1917 he returned to Semirech'e, where he would continue to live nearly two decades later when he completed his history.

Soltonoev's *QT* is a multi-layered and densely written compendium of historical facts and genealogical information on the Kyrgyz drawn from various sources. It contains ethnographic notes, literary passages, samples of oral poetry, and biographical entries on Kyrgyz and Turkic historical personalities. It also notes the dates and places of birth of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Kalinin and Stalin, connecting them with concurrent events from Kyrgyz history.¹⁵³ The majority of the work is written in Kyrgyz, along with sections in Russian and Chaghatay. In his introduction, Soltonoev wrote that he "took some information" from the works of Iakinf Bichurin, Vasili Bartold, Wilhelm Radlov, Nikolai Aristov, Makhmud Qashgari, Alexander Miller, Chokan

¹⁵³ Each of these figures from communist and Soviet history received a brief passage of two or three sentences, immediately following the corresponding Kyrgyz historical event.

Valikhanov, Abul Ghazi, Vasilii Grigoriev, and Nikolai Katanov.¹⁵⁴ Soltonoev used these sources to write the “ancient” history of the Kyrgyz, up to Adygine and Taghay.¹⁵⁵ In so doing, he rejected established Islamic traditions for writing history, in favor of a more “scientific” style, which may have been intended to add legitimacy to his claims about the Kyrgyz, their land, and their history. The first hundred pages of *QT* contained many references to Bartold’s *Kirgizy: Istoricheskii ocherk* [*Kirghiz: A Historical Sketch*] (1927) and *Ocherki istorii Semirech’ia* [*Sketches on the History of Semirech’e*] (1898); Lev Oshanin’s *Materialy po antropologii Srednei Azii* [*Materials on Central Asian Anthropology*] (1927); Ghadi Atlasi’s *Sibir tarikhii* [*History of Siberia*] (1912); and Abul Ghazi’s *Shajare-i Turk* [*Genealogy of Turks/Turkic Genealogy*] (1891), among others. Soltonoev relied particularly heavily on Bartold’s history of Semirech’e, noting that it was the first work he had been able to consult, starting in 1899.¹⁵⁶

Soltonoev organized his book chronologically, with thematic essays interspersed throughout the narrative. Soltonoev’s main impetus for collecting the knowledge and history of the Kyrgyz was his belief that having a history allowed an ethnic community to “enter the ranks

¹⁵⁴ The earliest scholarly works on the nomadic Kyrgyz and Kazakhs were authored by Russian imperial scholars, members of the Russian Imperial Geographic society, and Russian imperial officials who were stationed in Central Asia for service in the colonial administration. Much of their research on the nomadic people of Central Asia, the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, was done in the 1850s and 1860s, immediately before and during the Russian advance into the territory of Central Asia. In addition to enriching the imperial knowledge of its subject people, these works unintentionally contributed to the formation of the Kyrgyz identity and became a rich source base for the Kyrgyz intellectuals of the 1920s to justify the creation of the Kyrgyz nation. Some of them include Nikolai Severtsov, *Puteshestvie po Turkestanскому kraiu* (Moscow: Gosugarstvennoe izdatel'stvo geograficheskoi literatury, 1947); Vasilii Radlov, *Iz Sibiri: Stranitsy dnevnika* (Moscow: Nauka, 1989); Petr Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, *Puteshestvie v Tian'-Shan'* (Moscow: Gosugarstvennoe izdatel'stvo geograficheskoi literatury, 1958); Chokan Valikhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* (Alma-Ata: Glavnaia redaktsiia kazakhskoi sovetskoi entsiklopedii, 1984); Mikhail Veniukov, *Puteshesviia po okrainam Russkoi Azii i zapiski o nikh* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Imperatorskoi Akademii nauk, 1868); Nikolai Aristov, *Usuni i kirgizy ili kara-kirgizy: ocherki istorii byta naseleniia zapadnogo Tian'-Shania i issledovaniia po ego istoricheskoi geografii* (Bishkek: Soros-Kyrgyzstan, 2001); Vasilii Bartold, “Kirgizy: istoricheskii ocherk,” *Sochineniia* vol. 2, pt. 1 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Vostochnoi literatury, 1963), 471-543; idem, “Ocherk istorii Semirech'ia,” *Sochineniia* vol. 2, pt. 1 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Vostochnoi literatury, 1963), 21-106; idem., *Istoriia kul'turnoi zhizni Turkestana* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1927).

¹⁵⁵ Soltonoev, *QT*, 20.

¹⁵⁶ Soltonoev, *QT*, 99.

of civilized people.”¹⁵⁷ He outlined a methodology for studying the history of a people like the Kyrgyz, who were “excluded from the benefits of civilization and culture, and lived as nomads in the mountains.”¹⁵⁸ First, one should study the history of the Kyrgyz through the writings of past historians; second, through the works created by their “singers [*aqyn* / *yrchy*] and musicians;” and finally, through the stories collected from the older generation of Kyrgyz, which dated back 50 to 100 years. By describing his methodology up front, and then adhering to it closely, Soltonoev sought to emphasize the reliability and scholarly nature of his work.

While Soltonoev used published sources to recreate the “ancient” history of the Kyrgyz, and to establish a connection between the Enisei and the Tian Shan Kyrgyz, he relied heavily on oral sources to trace the history of the Kyrgyz tribes starting from the Adygine and Taghay lineages. He started to collect these stories and “put them on paper [*qaghaz betine ala bashtadym*]” at the 1896 *uezd* assembly [*top*] in Kötimaldy, based on his conversations with the *biys* and *aqsqaqs* from Przheval’sk, Naryn, Toqmoq, and Pishpek who attended the assembly. From then on, whenever he attended Kyrgyz and Kazakh celebrations or feasts, he would continue to write down everything he heard there regarding Kyrgyz customs, laws, traditions and religious beliefs.¹⁵⁹ Aware that such sources could potentially be biased, Soltonoev apologized in his book for any errors which might have resulted, and expressed his hopes that even if his was not a history of the “first degree,” it would remain a useful work for future generations.¹⁶⁰

Soltonoev’s history was that of the northern Kyrgyz tribes. It told the story of the Taghay lineage, which, according to Kyrgyz genealogy, moved from Ferghana to Tian Shan in the

¹⁵⁷ Idem., 18.

¹⁵⁸ Idem., 18-19.

¹⁵⁹ Idem., 99.

¹⁶⁰ Idem., 100.

eighteenth century. This line included the Bughu, Sarybaghysh, Kushchu, Saruu, Solto, and Sayaq tribes, which had settled in Tian Shan between 1758 and 1760 after the Qing drove the Junghars out of Central Asia. Soltonoev viewed Tian Shan as the land where the ancestors of the Taghay group were “born and had their umbilical cords cut” (*kindik kesip, tuulup öskön*).¹⁶¹ He located each tribe in what he perceived to be its ancestral land. Thus, the Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz occupied the Chui valley, Qochqor and Naryn; the Bughu the area around Lake Isyk Kul; the Solto the area east of Merke and Ysyk Ata; and the Sayaq the region of Zhumgal and Naryn.¹⁶² Soltonoev understood this eighteenth century migration as a homecoming, in which these tribes reclaimed their “own lands [*öz jer*],” the lands that had once been taken away from them by the Junghars. In this way, Soltonoev sought to establish a more enduring connection between the Kyrgyz people and the territory they then occupied. It is also important to note that Soltonoev, like Sydykov, had a somewhat circumscribed understanding of what it meant to be Kyrgyz. Both men used the term *Qirghiziya* as a place name. For Soltonoev, *Qirghiziya* referred to Tian Shan, and as such Soltonoev understood the people of *Qirghiziya* to be the northern Kyrgyz tribes which hailed from Tian Shan.¹⁶³

Soltonoev treated the recent history of the northern Kyrgyz tribes in great detail. Beginning with the reign of Ormon *khan* in 1830s, Soltonoev explored specific episodes which illuminated the relationships between tribes. These episodes included memorial feasts for Kyrgyz tribal elites, wars and peace negotiations among the tribes, and their interactions with the polities around them, including the Kazakhs of the Great Horde, the Khanate of Kokand, and the Russian

¹⁶¹ Idem., 167.

¹⁶² Idem., 167.

¹⁶³ Idem., 103, 111, 118, 152, 237. Soltonoev used “*tün zhak*” *Qirghiziya*, to mean northern *Qirghiziya* and “*kün zhak*” *Qirghiziya* to mean southern. But by southern *Qirghiziya* he referred to the territory south of Naryn, which is still inhabited by the Taghay Kyrgyz.

empire. The bulk of the work consisted of stories, which highlighted Kyrgyz rituals, religious beliefs, healing techniques, and military practices.

Soltonoev discussed these cultural traditions dispassionately, and referred to them in the past tense. For instance in the section on religious beliefs, Soltonoev stated that the Kyrgyz had considered themselves to be Muslims, but did not follow the Muslim way of life; in the section on healing, he recounted that the Kyrgyz had cured all kinds of illnesses with water, and if this did not work, they enlisted the help of a *baqshi* or *bübü*;¹⁶⁴ and in describing their battle techniques, Soltonoev reported that Kyrgyz had a warrior-like spirit, always fought on horseback, and taught their children martial techniques from a very early age.¹⁶⁵ Soltonoev viewed these features as constituting a Kyrgyz way of life that was clearly distinguished from others. But there was one *el*, or people, which did share a close historical, cultural and linguistic affinity to the Kyrgyz, and this was the Kazakhs. For this reason both Sydykov and Soltonoev included large section on the Kazakhs in their works. But whereas Sydykov was interested only in Kazakh genealogy and the origins of three Kazakh hordes, Soltonoev also sought to explore the relationship between the Kyrgyz and the Kazakhs, and to examine the causes of their past animosity.

Like many of his contemporaries, Soltonoev directed scathing criticism at the Kyrgyz ruling elite of the imperial period, the *manaps* and *biys*. In Soltonoev's case, this impulse was certainly encouraged by the historical circumstances he encountered after the collapse of Russian

¹⁶⁴ Idem., 15. Among the Turkic people of Central Asia and Siberia *baqshi* is a term referring to a spiritual healer. The root of the word, *baq*, is Turkic, and means "to look at." The term *bübü* refers to women healers.

¹⁶⁵ Idem., 16-18.

Empire, and the ascendancy of the language of class struggle under the Bolsheviks.¹⁶⁶

Furthermore, these judgments were also informed by his earlier personal experience working with these local elites as *volost* scribe and administrator. Among other Kyrgyz leaders, Soltonoev was likely familiar with Shabdan. Atake *volost*, where Soltonoev was in government service, was located near Shabdan's residence and his tribe's lands. We know that Soltonoev was familiar with Shabdan's inner circle, and can suppose that he would have frequented social gatherings organized by Shabdan and his sons, not least in order to collect material for his history.¹⁶⁷ Thus a balanced look at Soltonoev's work must acknowledge his caustic remarks about the northern Kyrgyz tribal elites in *QT*, penned in the early 1930s, while also recognizing that at the beginning of the twentieth century, he was a part of the cultural enterprise of *manaps* like Shabdan.

Soltonoev participated in the scholarly undertaking to collect and record Kyrgyz oral literature during the 1920s, and it is only natural that he devoted a considerable portion of his work to the *Manas* epic, and to its performers within the Kyrgyz oral tradition, the *aqyns*. Soltonoev was conflicted regarding the origins of the hero Manas, the central figure in the epic. "[T]hey [the *aqyns*] said he was from the Noghoy, Sary Noghoy, Qypchaq, and Löküş tribes. ... The singers themselves were not able to clearly specify the *nasil* [ancestry] of Manas," Soltonoev wrote, thereby casting doubt on the "Kyrgyz" origins of Manas.¹⁶⁸ He identified variations of the name Manas in different languages, and speculated about the possible prototypes for the Manas character among the historical figures of other Turkic peoples.¹⁶⁹ In a

¹⁶⁶ In the mid-1920s Soltonoev was accused of having close ties to the *manap* class, and was persecuted by Soviet state authorities. See Kunduz Zhuzupekova, *Belek Soltonoev – chygarmachyl insan* (Bishkek: Poligraf-resurs, 2007), 16.

¹⁶⁷ Soltonoev, *QT*, 308.

¹⁶⁸ *Idem.*, 196, 197.

¹⁶⁹ *Idem.*, 202-206.

chapter entitled “Compelling Evidence of the Kyrgyz Origin of Manas,” Soltonoev offered a series of unconvincing arguments for the epic’s Kyrgyz roots, but at the end, in his “Resolution,” he arrived at less definite conclusions:

[T]here is no doubt that between 210 BC and the beginning of the fifteenth century, after the Kyrgyz state broke away from the “Hun” Turks, there was a hero, even if his name wasn’t Manas, whose deeds were equal to those of Manas. He came from a mixture of Mongol and Turkic tribes, mostly from the Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Oghuz, Özübek, Tatar, Mongol, and Sary Noghoi, and he originated from either Altay or Central Asia. It is impossible to say for certain that Manas came from Kyrgyz ancestry [*nasil*], and not from other Turko-Mongols. If he was not Kyrgyz, it is possible he was from the Qypchaq Kyrgyz, for the elders of our people [*jurt*] did say he was from the Qypchaq tribe. ...At this moment, *Manas* literature is not devoted to one single nation [*ulut*], it is a property contested among peoples [*el*].¹⁷⁰

Apart from exposing Soltonoev’s ambivalence about the *Manas* epic, which later came to define the Kyrgyz and their culture, this passage also highlighted the malleability and complexity of group identity in the Kyrgyz context. At various points Soltonoev used the terms *nasil*, *jurt*, *ulut*, and *el* to refer to the Kyrgyz, but his choices were carefully chosen and far from arbitrary. He used *nasil* when speaking of the Kyrgyz of the pre-modern period; *jurt* to refer to the recent past (coupled with the verb *deshken*, indicating his reliance on reports of uncertain reliability); and *el* to talk of the various peoples of Central Asia.¹⁷¹ Finally, his use of *ulut* demonstrated that “this

¹⁷⁰ Idem., 211-212.

¹⁷¹ The very fact that he was able to speculate about the origins of *Manas* and the possibility that it sprang from a common Turkic heritage, indicates an unusual level of flexibility regarding collective identity. The process of collecting *Manas* was managed by the Academic Center of the Kyrgyz *Narkompros* [*Narodnyi komitet prosveshcheniia*]. The Academic Center, located in Tashkent until 1924, was the predecessor of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences. The project continued from 1922 until 1928, during which both Soltonoev and Arabaev were involved in the process of recording *Manas*. Arabaev served as Chair of the Academic Center (TsGA KR, f. 647, op. 1, d. 10, l. 106) and launched the initiative to document the epic as it was rendered by Saghyrbay Orozbaev, a prominent twentieth century *zhomoqchu* or *manaschy* (TsGA KR, f. 647, op. 1, d. 65, ll. 1-4). Soltonoev worked with other scholars, such as Kaium Miftakov and Naalqan Bekchoro uulu, to copy and transcribe various works of oral literature. See Prior, *Codex*, 326; Moldo Qylych, *Qazaldar*, 237-253. At one point Soltonoev also requested the Scientific Committee [*Nauchkom*] of KKAO to secure him work at the Central Publishing House of the USSR (TsGA KR, f. 647, op. 1, d. 59, l. 186). During the 1930s, after Soltonoev had finished writing *QT*, the *Manas* epic and other works of oral literature came under harsh criticism, being judged “guilty” of nationalist ideology, and their publication was delayed until the 1950s. On state policies regarding the *Manas* epic, see T. A. Abdykarov et al. eds., *Sud’ba eposa “Manas” posle oktiabria, sbornik dokumentov* (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan, 1995).

moment” in which he was writing, and to which he self-consciously referred, was the period after the national delimitation of Central Asia and the establishment of Kyrgyz national autonomy (a point further emphasized by his use of the ethnonym *Özübek*, rather than *Sart*). Soltonoev employed the term *ulut* in a similar way when discussing history and its importance to the Kyrgyz. Previously, he wrote, the Kyrgyz were “deprived of knowledge, science, and culture, and lived in the mountains as wild nomads tending their livestock.” Only with the October revolution did they became a nation [*ulut*] and “open their eyes, like toddlers taking their first steps.”¹⁷² The analytical portions of Soltonoev’s work continued this line of reasoning, emphasizing that Kyrgyz had only recently, after the revolution, transitioned from an *el* or *jurt* [people] to an *ulut* [nation], and that history and literature had a critical part to play in the development of that nation.¹⁷³ Thus Soltonoev used *el* and *jurt* as historical terms, which were interchangeable and had neutral connotations, whereas he saw the emergence of the *ulut* as a new, distinct and positive occurrence.¹⁷⁴

Although Soltonoev did not put the finishing touches on *QT* until 1934, the work reveals much about emerging visions of community, bearing a term “Kyrgyz,” among the intellectuals in the late imperial period. Soltonoev himself became fascinated with Kyrgyz history at the end of the nineteenth century, and although his methodology and presentation differed significantly from those of peers like Arabaev and Sydykov, he too was drawn to collect the stories that told how the Kyrgyz viewed their past and present. Soltonoev’s project did not arise from the needs of national delimitation—in early twentieth century, while doing his research, he could not have predicted the twists of fate that would bring the Soviets to power. So it was something else which

¹⁷² Soltonoev, *QT*, 18-19

¹⁷³ *Idem.*, 213-215.

¹⁷⁴ In modern Kyrgyz, *el* and *jurt* are sometimes combined into one word, *el-jurt*, meaning “people.”

drove him to write down the stories of his people - a hint of which can perhaps be found in Anthony Smith's reflections on the role of history in defining the nation. The two hallmarks of a nation, in Smith's formulation, are "a sense of cohesion, a 'fraternity,' and a compact, secure, recognized territory or 'homeland.'"¹⁷⁵ History can serve as the foundation for both these national characteristics; it provides fraternity, by recording the past victories, losses, sufferings, and happy moments that a particular group endured together, and it provides homeland, by demonstrating and justifying the group's occupation of a particular territory back into the past. When Soltonoev began his work at the end of the nineteenth century, the Kyrgyz were not a nation, but a community of people with a shared past and shared territory, they already possessed many of the necessary raw materials. Soltonoev, for his part, sought to bring the Kyrgyz into the ranks of the "civilized" peoples by tracing their origins and providing them with a history. Over time these threads came together to support a modern nationalist agenda. Soltonoev's project may have begun much as Sydykov's, with the collection of tribal genealogies and creation of a history of the Kyrgyz, starting with Adygine and Tagay. But the fall of the empire in 1917 and the creation of the Kyrgyz nation state, would redirect his work along truly nationalist lines.

Conclusion

In his study of Kazakh nationalism of the early twentieth century, Peter Rottier writes of the competition between the traditional Kazakh *aqyns*, especially the *zar zaman* poets, and the Kazakh intelligentsia for the right to lead the nation.¹⁷⁶ But this binary classification of old and new, traditional and modern, has been questioned in recent scholarship on the Muslim reform

¹⁷⁵ Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 148.

¹⁷⁶ Rottier, "Creating the Kazakh Nation," 193-197.

movement in Central Asia.¹⁷⁷ And just as that research has shown that it is overly simplistic to divide early twentieth century Central Asian intellectuals into the discrete and clearly distinguished categories of modernizing *jadids* and traditionalist *qadimis*, so the examples of Ishenaaly Arabaev, Osmonally Sydykov and Belek Soltonoev show that there was also no deep division between the Kyrgyz oral poets and the first generation of reform-minded Kyrgyz intellectuals. Both of these groups were concerned about the fate and the historical development of their people, and they both composed works on similar themes using similar styles. The early Kyrgyz intellectuals viewed themselves as an organic part of the cultural milieu of the oral poets and singers, as illustrated by the ways in which Arabaev, Sydykov and Soltonoev drew inspiration from, collaborated with, and sometimes even borrowed from, the oral poets. Thus, in the 1920s, when the national delimitation of Central Asia took place, Kyrgyz intellectuals did not have to “imagine” their nation. Their “imagined” community was in place, they already formed their own views of this community, and it was the community from which they came. One could even go so far as to say that the developing Kyrgyz national identity was a collaboration of sorts, wrought by the modernizing intellectuals from the “preexisting material or the building blocks”¹⁷⁸ which had been passed down to them by the previous generation of the Kyrgyz cultural elite.

However this process was not without its obstacles. Before the early-Soviet project of national delimitation, the establishment of Central Asian national republics, and the formation of new national elites and cultural traditions under Soviet auspices, a series of events occurred that

¹⁷⁷ Stephane Dudoignon, “Qadimiya as a Historiographical category: The Question of Social and Ideological Cleavages between ‘Reformists’ and ‘Traditionalists’ among the Muslims of Russia and Central Asia in the Early 20th Century,” in *Reform Movements and Revolutions in Turkestan: 1900-1924*, ed. Timur Kocaoglu (Haarlem: SOTA, 2001), 159-178.

¹⁷⁸ Alexander Motyl, “Inventing Invention: The Limits of National Identity Formation,” in *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation*, eds. Michael D. Kennedy and Ronald G. Suny (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 61.

would undermine the existing order in Central Asia under Russian colonial rule. World War I, and Russia's involvement in it, kindled the flame of revolt in Central Asia in the late summer of 1916. This uprising and its aftermath were to have lasting impacts on the lives of the native peoples of Central Asia, especially the Northern Kyrgyz. And for a time, at least, they were also to bring the cultural development of the northern Kyrgyz to a halt.

Chapter Five

The Revolt of 1916 in History and Collective Memory

Only on February 17 1918, when the Soviet government was established, did the deaths stop. If there had been no Soviet government, they would have extinguished the Kyrgyz, and not only those Kyrgyz who escaped [to China], but also those who stayed behind and did not revolt, without leaving any trace of them.¹

Belek Soltonoev (1878-1938)

In short, the Kyrgyz people have suffered a great deal. Many of them are scattered in different lands and oblasts. I would be mistaken if I said there are none left, But there are only one tenth of them left.²

Taghay Emilov (unknown)

Introduction

The Russian Empire entered World War I in July, 1914. The war would claim countless lives and cause social and economic upheaval across the empire, but its most important effect in Russia would be the end of the imperial regime. The war was greeted with great deal of enthusiasm in 1914, but by the middle of 1915 the people of the Russian Empire were growing discontented at the growing costs of the war, and the economic hardships which resulted.³ In Turkestan and the Kazakh Steppe, the burden of war was felt not only through monetary taxation, but also through compulsory donations of livestock (camels and horses), mobile

¹ Belek Soltonoev, *Qyzyl qyrghyz tarykhy* (Bishkek: Mamlekettik “Uchkun” kontserni, 1993), v. 2, 134.

² Taghay Emilov, “Akhval-i Qirghiziya,” RF NAN KR, d. 803, l. 31.

³ Regarding World War I and its effects on the Russian empire, see Peter Gatrell, *Russia's First World War: A Social and Economic History* (Harlow, England: Pearson/Longman, 2005); idem., *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia During World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Joshua Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse: The Great War and the Destruction of the Russian Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). For a discussion of the war within the Central Asian context see E. Sokol, *The Revolt of 1916 in Russian Central Asia* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1954).

dwellings (yurts), and items of clothing.⁴ Such levies weighed heavily on the entire population of Central Asia, settled and nomadic alike. But they struck particularly hard at the Kazakh and Kyrgyz nomads, who had already been deprived of their pasture lands by peasant colonization in the years prior to the war, and experienced tremendous difficulties supporting themselves even in peacetime. Yet despite all these strains, the Muslim intellectuals of Central Asia supported the empire at this time of crisis. In Tashkent, these intellectuals called for public cooperation with the imperial war effort; they made declarations of loyalty to the empire and the tsar, and published patriotic poems in the pages of Muslim newspapers.⁵ In southern Semirech'e and the Kazakh Steppe, Kazakh and Kyrgyz intellectuals likewise expressed their patriotic feelings and concerns about the war in the pages of periodicals like *Aiqap* and *Qazaq*. Kazakh activists like Akhmet Baitursynov, Mirzhakyp Dulatov and Alikhan Bokeikhanov published essays on the war and on Kazakh participation in it, in an effort to reach their fellow compatriots and to persuade them of the importance of serving in the military.⁶

Categorized legally as *inorodtsy*, or "aliens," Central Asians were initially exempt from conscription.⁷ By the beginning of 1915, however, imperial officials had begun to consider, with some reservations, the idea of drafting Central Asians into military service.⁸ Members of the

⁴ In November and December of 1914 alone, the population of Pishpek *uezd* in Semirech'e region donated 30,000 rubles, 1,000 fur coats, and 10,000 items of clothing. See G. I. Broido, *Vosstanie Kirgiz v 1916 g. Moe pokazanie prokuroru Tashkentskoi sudebnoi palaty, dannoe 3-go sentiabria 1916g.* (Moscow: Nauchnaia Assotsiatsiia vostokovedeniia pri Ts.I.K. SSSR, 1925), 19.

⁵ Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 236-237.

⁶ Sabol, *Russian Colonization*, 70-71; Rottier, "Creating the Kazakh Nation," 261-62.

⁷ Along with Central Asians, Jews and members of the Siberian tribes also had the legal status of *inorodtsy*. But by the early twentieth century, the term was routinely applied to all non-Russian people. See John Slocum, "Who and When were the *Inorodtsy*? The Evolution of the Category of 'Aliens' in Imperial Russia," *Russian Review* 57, 2 (1998): 173-190.

⁸ Khabib Tursunov, *Vosstanie 1916 goda v Srednei Azii i Kazakhstane* (Tashkent: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo Uzbekskoi SSR, 1962), 185. The main impediment to the conscription of Central Asians was imperial uncertainty concerning the loyalty [*neblagonadezhnost'*] of its Muslim subjects. These fears were amplified when the Ottoman Empire entered the war as an ally of Germany. For a detailed analysis of imperial insecurity regarding its Muslim subjects, see Elena Campbell, *The Muslim Question and the Russian Imperial Governance* (Bloomington, Indiana:

State Duma and the State Council, with the backing of the Ministry of War, demanded that the *inorodtsy* of Turkestan and the Steppe region be made subject to the draft, in order to “protect the Fatherland.”⁹ Their plan was thwarted, at least temporarily, by the imperial administration in Turkestan, and by the successive Governor-Generals A. V. Samsonov and F. V. Martson, who feared it would incite mass protests.¹⁰ Word about possible conscription measures quickly began to circulate among the native residents of Central Asia. The issue was raised in several newspapers published for the Muslims of Russia and Turkestan.¹¹ The editors of *Qazaq* expressed discontent at being left out of discussions regarding the draft, and reduced to relying on exchanges in the Russian press when forming their opinions on the matter:

It appears that every year whenever there is a meeting in the Duma on drafting young people for the war, there are also discussions about drafting Kazakhs. But, since we do not have a deputy in the Duma, we have not heard anything about it ourselves, to this very day.¹²

Kazakh intellectuals sought concessions from the state, in exchange for Kazakhs serving in the military as full-fledged citizens of the empire. If they were to be conscripted and to serve the state’s needs, then they expected to become eligible for the same rights and privileges as other imperial subjects. Thus, they hoped for the introduction of *zemstvos*, membership in the Duma, their own religious governing body [*muftilik*], and more freedom in allocating their own lands for settlement.¹³ They approached the issue realistically, however, foreseeing the possibility that the common folk would be indifferent to such political accommodations, and simply resist the draft.

Indiana University Press, 2015). Chapter 9, in particular, discusses imperial fear and antagonism directed at Muslims during World War I.

⁹ Tursunov, *Vosstanie*, 185.

¹⁰ Idem., 185.

¹¹ *Shuro*, *Tormysh* and *Yulduz* - all newspapers published by Tatar Muslim intellectuals—were among those that discussed the possibility of drafting Turkestanis into the war.

¹² Subkhanberdina ed., *Qazaq*, 237.

¹³ Idem., 237.

But Muslim intellectuals stood ready to hold the empire responsible for any such resistance, which could have been averted, they felt, if the Kazakhs had been properly and fairly integrated into the empire's political, legal and economic systems before the war.¹⁴

Then on June 25, 1916, a decree of labor conscription was issued, calling up the entire male population of Central Asia between the ages of 18 and 43 for service in non-combatant roles. The decree appeared in regional newspapers at the beginning of July, and immediately provoked a violent response from the natives of Central Asia, directed at native and Russian imperial officials and at Slavic peasant settlers. All the people of Pishpek and Przheval'sk *uezds* in Semirech'e *oblast*, native peoples and Russian settlers alike, endured tremendous violence and privation during the revolt. Among the northern Kyrgyz, the anger inspired by labor conscription quickly transformed into rage against the region's Slavic settlers, resulting in widespread attacks, looting, and killings.

The imperial administration retaliated by killing the insurgents indiscriminately, executing their leaders, and driving the Kyrgyz people off their lands and across the Chinese border. The devastation the Kyrgyz experienced during and after the revolt would continue to be felt for years to come; thousands of Kyrgyz died in the fighting itself, and many more perished while trying to escape the Russian army. Those who made it to the cities of Kashgar, Uch Turfan, and Qulzha [Ghulja] in Chinese Tukestan were extremely impoverished, and had to sell themselves, their children, and their belongings to the locals there in order to survive. Moreover, the cultural and intellectual development of the northern Kyrgyz that was beginning to flourish at the beginning of the twentieth century was halted by the revolt, and many Kyrgyz poets and intellectuals, including Arabaev, Soltonoev, and Sydykov, had to flee to China. The period from

¹⁴ Idem., 238.

1914 to 1918, which Benjamin Loring calls the “baptism by fire” for the Kyrgyz intellectuals, played a crucial role in politicizing the first, “older,” generation of Kyrgyz intellectual elites, and in molding and empowering the Russian-educated second, “younger,” generation.¹⁵ This was a period of hardship and devastation, but it was also a time of hope and renewal for the people of southern Semirech’e. The fall of the Russian empire presented the Central Asian cultural and political elite with a multitude of possibilities for social and economic development. For the Kyrgyz intellectuals, who were still recovering from the wounds of the revolt, this period was marked by the search for the best path forward for the northern Kyrgyz.

This chapter examines the 1916 revolt as a turning point in the history of Central Asia, focusing particularly on its impact on the lives of the northern Kyrgyz and its implications for subsequent developments in the region. It argues that the revolt added a new layer to existing ideas of Kyrgyzness. This change came as a direct result of the shock and tragedy experienced by the northern Kyrgyz. The revolt and its brutal suppression by the Russian imperial army, along with the pain, suffering, and loss of its aftermath, were transformed in the imagination of the northern Kyrgyz into a symbol of their unity as a community bound by immutable bonds of shared experience. This transformation in community identity was guided by the Kyrgyz *aqyns* and intellectuals, who memorialized the tragic experience of the revolt in their works.

The Northern Kyrgyz and the Revolt

On the morning of August 8, 1916, Lieutenant Colonel F. G. Rymshovich, the head of Pishpek *uezd*, received a message from the Pishpek post office. It reported that the mail, which

¹⁵ Loring, “Building Socialism in Kyrgyzstan,” 34.

had been on its way to Przheval'sk containing a large sum of money, had been seized by the Kyrgyz.¹⁶ Upon arriving in Toqmoq, Rymshevich learned that the disturbances had begun when the Kyrgyz of Atake and Sarybaghysh *volosts* received a secret message from Vernyi *uezd* signaling the beginning of the uprising.¹⁷ In the succeeding days, crowds of Kyrgyz from across Pishpek *uezd* attacked Russian settlements and postal stations. Russian cavalry fended off their attacks as best as they could, but they were too few to deflect the attacks effectively. During the first days of the uprising, Rymshevich had only twenty-six cavalrymen with which to face attacks by hundreds of Kyrgyz.¹⁸ Caught off guard and completely unprepared for the uprising, the imperial administration at first lost quite a few soldiers. A number of peasant settlers were also either killed, or else captured and led away to the mountainous areas near Naryn and Qochqor.¹⁹

Later Rymshevich would learn that at the meeting of the Kyrgyz of Atake and Sarybaghysh *volosts*, Shabdan's son Möküsh Sahbdanov had been elected *khan* of the Kyrgyz. Among the other prominent figures were Belek Soltonoev, the newly-elected leader of Atake *volost*, and another of Shabdan's sons, Kemel Shabdanov, then head of Sarybaghysh *volost*.²⁰ The Kyrgyz uprising in these two *volosts* set an example that was quickly emulated by the rest of the northern Kyrgyz. Mass disturbances engulfed the mountainous areas of Pishpek *uezd*, including Zhumgal, Qochqor, Abaiylda, Kurmanqozho, and Cherekchi *volosts*,²¹ as well as the

¹⁶ TsGA KR, f. 75, op. 1, d. 34, l. 8.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ TsGA KR, f. 75, op. 1, d. 34, l. 8 ob.

¹⁹ The insurgents set fire to settlements, killed the Russian men, took the Russian women and children captive, and drove off the livestock. TsGA KR, f. 75, op. 1, d. 34, l. 10 ob.

²⁰ TsGA KR, f. 75, op. 1, d. 34, l. 12 ob.

²¹ In these *volosts*, the insurgents killed the heads of the police and several Russian settlers, including some women. They also took some police officers captive. TsGA KR, f. 75, op. 1, d. 34, l. 13 ob.

greater part of Przheval'sk *uezd*, along the northern and southern shores of Lake Isyk Kul.²²

Among those leading the disturbances in these *volosts* were northern Kyrgyz *manaps*. One of them, Qanat Ybyke uulu [Abukin] of Abaiylda *volost*, led several effective attacks on Russian settlements.²³ Yet not all of the Kyrgyz *manaps* supported the revolt. Among those who chose not to participate was Dür Sooronbaev, leader of the 400 households of Tynai *volost*.²⁴ Several Kyrgyz *volosts* in the Talas region, then part of Aulie-Ata *uezd*, were also persuaded by their leaders not to take part in the revolt (in part because news of the punitive responses undertaken by the Russian army had begun to reach them).²⁵ Even Shabdan's son Kemel Shabdanov was at first opposed to the uprising, and he warned his people about the Russian army's might. But he was soon swept into the revolt by the pressure of other influential figures, including his own brother, Möküsh Shabdanov.

²² Along with Kyrgyz, the Dungan population of the *uezd* played a major part in the revolt. TsGA KR, f. 75, op. 1, d. 2, l. 9-12; 16-17. Russian officials were shocked by the Dungan unrest. When they had come to Turkestan in the 1860s as refugees, following the Muslim rebellion in China, the Russian Empire took them in and helped them to settle. The Russian administration believed that since then the Dungans had made a good living for themselves in Turkestan, and the animosity they displayed during the 1916 revolt baffled them. See, for instance, the report of Iungmeister, Turkestan officer of Imperial *Okharana*, which states "[T]he insurgency of the Dungans of Mariinskoe, who were cherished [*oblaskany*] by the Russian government and became wealthy since their migration from China to Russia, is incomprehensible." A. V. Piaskovskii, *Vosstanie 1916 goda v Srednei Azii i Kazakhstane (sbornik dokumentov)* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1960), 398.

²³ Some witnesses reported that the Kyrgyz of Abaiylda *volost* elected Qanat as their *khan*. But during his interrogation, Qanat said that he was not elected *khan*, but only *volost* leader. TsGA KR, f. 97, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 25 ob.-26. Qanat was later betrayed by Iskak Lepesov, a fellow tribesman, who gained his own freedom by promising to capture Qanat and his son for the Russians. Qanat's son was executed immediately, and Qanat himself was subsequently captured in Naryn, tried in Vernyi, and executed. TsGA KR, f. 75, op. 1, d. 34, l. 44. Qanat Abukin's interrogation by the *okhrana* is discussed in detail in Jörn Happel, *Nomadische lebenswelten und zarische politik: der Aufstand in Zentralasien 1916* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2010), 183-306. See also Qanat's deposition from October 17, 1916 at Przheval'sk *uezd* court. TsGA KR, f. 97, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 24-26 ob.

²⁴ Reminiscences of Mergenbaev Meder (b. 1896) on the revolt of 1916. In K. Üsönbaev, et al. eds., *1916-zhylky Kyrgyzstandagy kötürülüsh* (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan, 1996), 223-227. Mambetaaly Muratalin, a *volost* administrator and translator (who referred to himself as "*chinovnik, gubernskii sekretar*") in his interrogation: TsGA KR f. 97, op.1, d. 1. l. 31), at first joined Sooronbaev in rejecting violence, but later got caught up in the disturbances. He was captured and tried alongside Qanat Abukin in Naryn on October 19, 1916. TsGA KR f. 97, op.1, d. 1. He was released on a bail of 1000 rubles, and almost immediately began serving as a court translator on cases related to the revolt. TsGA KR f. 28, op. 2, d. 3. l. 7 ob.

²⁵ Reminiscences of inhabitants of the Talas region, Nurmambet Nasarov, Imanbek Shygaev, Zhamankul Tynystanov, and Sake Turdaliev. In K. Üsönbaev, et al. *Kyrgyzstandagy kötürülüsh*, 240-245.

The revolt itself has received scant attention from historians. Analysis of the revolt during the Soviet period was shaped by the state ideology of the moment. Thus in the 1920s, the revolt was used to expose the “true” face of the tsarist regime toward the non-Russian peoples of the empire.²⁶ By the late 1930s the subject was closed to inquiry, and was only reopened in the 1950s, during the Thaw period after Stalin’s death. Among the major works that appeared at that time were a collection of documents on the revolt compiled by A. V. Piaskovskii,²⁷ and Kh. Tursunov’s monumental 1962 history of the revolt.²⁸ These studies were careful not to cast the revolt as anti-Russian, but rather to label it a “popular uprising” of the people of Central Asia against tsarist rule. Broad public interest in the revolt surged in the 1990s, with the establishment of the newly independent states in Central Asia. The memory of the revolt helped to stoke growing nationalist sentiments among the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz.²⁹ The revolt of 1916 and the Kyrgyz flight to Chinese Turkestan were identified as a “national-liberation movement” by Kyrgyz activists and intellectuals, while the retaliation of the Russian imperial government was condemned as oppressive and brutal.³⁰ In western historiography the uprising remains little studied. The only comprehensive account is Edward Sokol’s 1954 monograph.³¹ More recent

²⁶ L. V. Lesnaia and T. Ryskulov, comp. *Vostanie 1916 goda v Kirgizstane: dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel’stvo, 1937); G. I. Broido, *Vosstanie Kirgiz v 1916 godu. Moe pokazanie prokuroru Tashkentskoi sudebnoi palaty, dannoe 3-go sentiabria 1916 g.* (Moscow: Nauchnaia assotsiatsiia vostokovedeniia pri Ts.I.K SSSR, 1925); Petr Galuzo, *Vosstanie 1916 goda v Srednei Azii* (Moscow: Ob’edinenie gosudarstvennogo izdatel’stva Sredneaziatskogo otdela, 1932); idem., “Vosstanie 1916 g. v. Srednei Azii,” *Krasnyi Arkhiv, istoricheskii zhurnal* 4(1929): 39-45.

²⁷ A. V. Piaskovskii, et al. eds. *Vosstanie 1916 goda v Srednei Azii i Kazakhstane* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1960).

²⁸ Khabib Tursunov, *Vosstanie 1916 goda v Srednei Azii i Kazakhstane* (Tashkent: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo Uzbekskoi SSR, 1962). Tursunov was on the editorial board of the 1960 publication.

²⁹ Manash Qozybaev, *Qaharly 1916 zhyl: quzhattar men materialdar zhinaghy* (Almaty: Qazaqstan, 1998), 2 volumes; Uzbekali Dzhanybekov, *1916 zhyl: Qazaq khalqynynq ult-azattyqoterilisining 80 zhyldyghyna: angimeler, olender men dastandar* (Almaty: Rauan, 1996); Esentur Qylychev and Nuraly Zhaparov, eds. *Ürkün 1916, tarykhyi-darektüü ocherkter* (Bishkek: Ala-Too zhurnalynyn redaktisiiasy, 1993); Mistegül Makhmutbekova, *Kyrgyzstandagy uluttuk-boshtonduk kötürülüsh* (Bishkek: Erkin-Too, 1996).

³⁰ See an introductory essay by Ch. Bazarbaev, Chair of “Asaba” National Revival Party in *Vosstanie kirgizov i kazakhov v 1916 godu* (Bishkek: Asaba uluttuk kaira zharaluu fondu, 1996), 2-4.

³¹ Edward Sokol, *The Revolt of 1916 in Russian Central Asia* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1954).

studies have focused on specific social and political aspects of the revolt, analyzing it as a symptom of larger problems in imperial governance.³²

One piece that deals directly with the area of Pishpek and Przheval'sk *uezds* is Daniel Brower's article, "Kyrgyz Nomads and Russian Pioneers: Colonization and Ethnic Conflict in the Turkestan revolt of 1916."³³ Drawing on the report of *okhrana* officer Lungmeister, Brower concludes that "inter-ethnic relations were a key factor in the uprising" in this region.³⁴ He suggests that while the labor conscription order provided the proximate cause, the deeper reasons for the uprising lay in the socio-economic changes brought by the Russian conquest of the region.³⁵ Archival documents corroborate Brower's observations on the inter-ethnic character of the disturbance. The cruelty, violence and hatred that the Kyrgyz and the Slavic settlers displayed toward each other during the revolt shocked both sides, as well as imperial officials.³⁶ It was especially hard for the imperial officials to reconcile the extent of the revolt among the

³² Daniel Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire* (London, New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003); Elena Campbell, *The Muslim Question and the Russian Imperial Governance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); Joshua Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse: The Great War and the Destruction of the Russian Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Marco Buttino, *Revoliutsiia naoborot: Sredniaia Aziia mezhdur padeniem tsarskoi imperii i obrazovaniem SSSR*, trans. Nikolai Okhotin (Moscow: Zvenia, 2007). Jörn Happel's work stands out among these for its approach. He examines the interaction of the *okhrana* captain Vladimir Zhelezniakov and the Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz *manap* Qanat Abukin (Qanat Ybyke uulu), one of the leaders of the uprising in Pishpek *uezd* of Semirech'e oblast. See Happel, *Nomadische Lebenswelten*.

³³ Daniel Brower, "Kyrgyz Nomads and Russian Pioneers: Colonization and Ethnic Conflict in the Turkestan Revolt of 1916," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Bd. 44, H. 1 (1996):41-53

³⁴ Idem, 43.

³⁵ Idem, 44.

³⁶ Many Russian fields were burned and settlements were razed; women and children were taken prisoner, and some were forced into marriage as the "younger" wives of Kyrgyz men. Some reports from the time, most notably the diary of a priest named Shemanovskii, contained graphic depictions of the brutality of Kyrgyz and Russians alike. See "Dnevnik nastoiatelia Isyk Kul'skogo monastyria o vosstanii kirgizov." TsGA KR, f. 75, op. 1, d. 45, ll. 25-26, 57 ob.-58. An excerpt from the diary was published in Piaskovskii, *Vosstanie*, 418-420. The diary itself consists of 70 sheets (*listy*). Also, Piaskovskii, *Vosstanie*, 405. Russian settlers, angered by the actions of the Kyrgyz, responded in kind. Angry Russian mobs tortured and killed Dungans and Kyrgyz who had been captured during the riots. One deposition reads: "[P]eople took revenge with blood and horror of their own. Mariinka (Mariinskoe, a settlement that is believed to have been destroyed by Dungan insurgents) sent us cartloads of fresh flesh; inside the fortress, the crowd, primed by animal instinct, prepared the same dish from Chinese, Dungans, and Kashgarians." L. V. Lesnaia, ed. *Vosstanie 1916 goda v Kirgizstane, dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow: Sotsekgiz, 1937), 44. The actions of Russian peasants toward Kyrgyz captives, containing description of torture and killings, are filed under the title *Mest' russkikh* at TsGA KR, f. 75, op. 1, d. 49, ll. 111-131.

northern Kyrgyz, with the enthusiasm and willingness they had previously shown in sacrificing their money, livestock, dwellings and clothing for the war effort.³⁷ When General A. N. Kuropatkin (appointed Governor-General of Turkestan in July) toured Semirech'e in September, and stopped in Chimkent to address a group of soldiers bound for the front, he expressed his disappointment with Shabdan's sons, who had led the uprising in Pishpek *uezd*. Evoking the memory of Shabdan, Kuropatkin said: "If my friend Shabdan was still alive, would any of this have happened?"³⁸ The attitude of many imperial officials towards the Kyrgyz nomads was that of paternalism, *otecheskaia zabolivost'* in Kuropatkin's words, and when the Kyrgyz revolted against the Russian Empire, these officers felt utterly betrayed.³⁹ But what were the underlying factors which provoked the Kyrgyz to rise up against the empire?

By 1914, the Kyrgyz had lost much of their land to Slavic settlers, and been forced to retreat toward less fertile, mountainous areas. Moreover, as land had become less plentiful, the tsarist administration in Semirech'e had begun mixing together the newly arrived settlers [*novosely*], old settlers, Cossacks, and those Kyrgyz who wished to settle, all in the same district.⁴⁰ This practice increased the friction between Russian settlers and Kyrgyz nomads, since they now had to negotiate with each other over scarce resources on a daily basis. Land and water deficits resulted in many impoverished and displaced Kyrgyz, who were hired by Russian peasants as low-wage farm workers.⁴¹ The reliance of peasant settlers on Kyrgyz labor increased

³⁷ Piaskovskii, *Vosstanie*, 407.

³⁸ Subkhanberdina, *Qazaq*, 332. During the 1870s, Shabdan helped the Russian army conquer and pacify some of the northern Kyrgyz tribes, as well as the Alay Kyrgyz. See Chapter 1.

³⁹ "Iz dnevnika A. N. Kuropatkina," *Krasnyi Arkhiv* 4 (1929): 57.

⁴⁰ Piaskovskii, *Vosstanie*, 406.

⁴¹ Almost all of the accounts of the revolt by Russian settlers pointed out that the Kyrgyz started leaving their jobs in the middle of July, under the pretext of visiting their relatives. A priest at the Preobrazhenskoe monastery in Przheval'sk *uezd* recalled in his diary that all the Kirghiz workers and students had suddenly departed "towards the mountains" in early August. TsGA KR, f. 75, op. 1, d. 45, ll. 7ob – 8. See Chapter 2 regarding peasant resettlement and the relations between nomads and settlers.

still further with the beginning of war, as many capable male members of the peasant households left to fight. A new obligation was imposed on Kyrgyz *volosts*, to send groups of workers to help soldiers' families during the harvest, a burden which was compounded when these workers found themselves poorly treated by the soldiers' wives.⁴² In addition to paying their usual taxes, the Kyrgyz of each *volost* were expected to cover any "unexpected" administrative expenses incurred at both the *uezd* and *volost* levels, which included hosting visits by the *uezd* administration, requiring lodgings, food and entertainment for numerous officials.⁴³ Nor did the burdens end with Russian government officials. The Kyrgyz were also exhausted by the demands of the native *volost* administrators, who used their positions to enrich themselves, as well as to recoup the costs of an election process in which fraud and corruption were rampant.⁴⁴

Thus while the labor conscription order may have lit the fuse, the powder-keg of the revolt, and the anti-Russian sentiment that infused it, had been built up over the course of decades of impoverishment, inequality and exclusion experienced by the Kyrgyz. Once this force was unleashed, its violent consequences were wide-ranging and indiscriminate. Almost all of the Russian settlements in Pishpek and Przheval'sk *uezds* were razed to the ground and burned. Settlers took refuge in the cities of Toqmoq, Pishpek, and Przheval'sk, which were protected by small army detachments. According to figures compiled by the *uezd* administrations, Russian civilian casualties in the revolt numbered 98 people killed and 65 missing in Pishpek *uezd*, and 2,179 killed and 1,299 missing in Przheval'sk *uezd*.⁴⁵ Losses among the Muslim insurgents were

⁴² Broido, *Vosstanie*, 102.

⁴³ Piaskovskii, *Vosstanie*, 396. Ivanov, the head of Przheval'sk *uezd*, was particularly notorious for his extravagant demands and large entourage during his visits to various *volosts*.

⁴⁴ The "party games" of which Kyrgyz oral poets complained in the early-twentieth century referred to the elections for the *volost* administration. Each candidate for office recruited a group of people, or "party," who would spend their energy and wealth to get him elected.

⁴⁵ "Raport A. N. Kuropatkina na imia Nikolaia Romanova" in P. Galuzo, ed. *Krasnyi Arkhiv* 4 (1929): 70-71.

much higher. According to some sources, 123,000 people from Przheval'sk *uezd*, 64,000 from Zharkent *uezd*, and 47,000 from Pishpek *uezd* perished during the revolt.⁴⁶ Thus although the uprising of the northern Kyrgyz in Pishpek and Przheval'sk *uezds* against the labor conscription order started considerably later than in other parts of Turkestan, it was ultimately bloodier and longer-lasting than in other areas, with dire consequences for both Kyrgyz and Slavic peasant settlers.⁴⁷

By mid-September, however, the revolt had begun to collapse under the weight of the imperial response. The Bughu and Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz, especially those in Przheval'sk *uezd* and in the mountainous regions of Naryn and At-Bashy to the south of Pishpek *uezd*, had to flee in the face of Russian punitive expeditions arriving from Zharkent, Andijan, and Vernyi.⁴⁸ Leaving most of their belongings, people from thirty-nine Kyrgyz *volosts* escaped to China. The first wave of refugees arrived in Chinese Turkestan at the beginning of September, and great numbers of them continued to file in until November.⁴⁹ Many died along the way, unable to survive the cold which had begun to settle in the high-altitude mountain passes by September. Those who did make it to Kashgar and Qulzha led a tragic and impoverished existence. Their dire condition was described vividly by Stefanovich, the dragoman of the Russian consulate in Kashgar, in a note to the Russian Consul General.⁵⁰ He estimated the number of refugees from Pishpek and Przheval'sk *uezds* at 100,000 to 120,000, and wrote:

⁴⁶ A. A. Anson, "Vosstanie kazakov," *Sibirskaia Sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 1, 531. Cited in Sokol, *The Revolt*, 159.

⁴⁷ The uprising began in the settled areas of Turkestan, in Syr-Dar'ia and Ferghana *oblasts*, at the beginning of July, but was put down by the end of the month. These revolts were far smaller than the uprisings of the nomads in Zharkent, Pishpek, and Przheval'sk *uezds* of Semirech'e region. Sokol calls the Syr-Dar'ia and Ferghana disturbances "the first phase" of the revolt, and discusses them in detail in *The Revolt of 1916*, 72-98.

⁴⁸ "Raport A. N. Kuropatkina na imia Nikolaia Romanova" in P. Galuzo, ed. *Krasnyi Arkhiv* 4 (1929): 70.

⁴⁹ Sokol, *The Revolt*, 131-132.

⁵⁰ Stefanovich, "Dokladnaia zapiska dragomana konsul'stva v Kashgare Stefanovicha Gospodinu rossiiskomu imperatorskomu general'nomu konsulu v Kashgare," in Lesnaia, *Vosstanie*, 109-130.

[I]n order to support themselves, the Kirghiz began to sell their household items, such as felt rugs, cauldrons, tea pots, saddles, bridles, etc. The steep prices for necessities in Uch Turfan and Aksu led masses of Kirghiz to face death from starvation: as a result of malnutrition, epidemics of typhus and scurvy appeared. In order to shed the extra mouths and burdens, the Kirghiz began to leave their underage children behind at their rest camps, and to sell their girls and boys over the age of twelve to local Sarts, for 30 to 40 rubles. In such conditions, their future looks grim and hopeless.⁵¹

Close to 250,000 people are estimated to have died during the revolt and the subsequent escape to China.⁵² Active participants in the rebellion were captured, tried, and sentenced either to death or to the hard labor camps. By February 1, 1917, 347 people had been sentenced to death, and 51 had actually been executed.⁵³ Archival sources reveal that Russians and Kyrgyz continued to inflict brutality and pain on each other in the aftermath of the revolt. With memories of the uprising still fresh in the minds of everyone involved, and examples of ongoing conflict before them, Russian imperial officials deemed it impossible for Kyrgyz nomads to continue to coexist alongside Russian settlers. In this context, Kuropatkin's proposal to separate the Kyrgyz into a newly-created Naryn *uezd* seemed a rational idea.⁵⁴ According to this ambitious plan, the area around Lake Isyk Kul was to be emptied of Kyrgyz, and given over entirely to peasant settlers and Cossacks, as a horse breeding region which might attract "foreign capital."⁵⁵ These plans were short-lived, however. The February Revolution of 1917 and the collapse of the imperial regime favored the Kyrgyz and Kazakh refugees, who were able to return to Semirech'e in an effort to reoccupy the lands they had fled the previous year. But as with everything else related to the revolt of 1916, the journey back from China and resettlement of their lands was no

⁵¹ Stefanovich, "Dokladnaia zapiska," 115.

⁵² The total number of deaths in Semirech'e region (excluding Kopal *uezd*) was estimated at 262,700. See Sokol, *The Revolt*, 159.

⁵³ Sokol, *The Revolt*, 156.

⁵⁴ Przheval'sk *uezd* was cleared of Kyrgyz, and their lands were confiscated for use by the Cossacks. It became a "pure" Russian *uezd*. The mountainous parts of Przheval'sk *uezd* were transferred to Naryn *uezd*, creating a "pure" Kyrgyz *uezd* in the Naryn region. Kuropatkin explained his decision by citing the Kyrgyz as a security risk. A. N. Kuropatkin, "Raport," *Krasnyi Arkhiv*, 88.

⁵⁵ A. N. Kuropatkin, "Dnevnik," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 4 (1929): 60.

easy task. This was to be the last act in a sweeping dramatic journey that encompassed resistance, flight and return. As the next section will relate, the epic resonances of this journey were not lost on the Kyrgyz intellectuals and *aqyns*, and they would soon begin to create literary works which would retell this story, shaping how it would be remembered by subsequent generations.

Memorializing the Revolt: Kyrgyz Intellectuals Respond

The revolt of 1916 greatly disrupted the development of Kyrgyz intellectual and cultural life. On the eve of the revolt, the leading Kyrgyz intellectuals and oral poets were scattered across Pishpek and Przheval'sk *uezds*. Since 1913 Ishenaaly Arabaev had been working as a new-method *mekteb* instructor in Przheval'sk *uezd*, and in 1914 had opened a new school in the village of Törtkül at the invitation of *manap* Saghaaly.⁵⁶ In 1916, Arabaev, along with many other Kyrgyz, escaped to the city of Uch Turfan in China.⁵⁷ In June 1917 his letter "Don't Forget Your Poor Kyrgyz Relatives" was published in the newspaper *Qazaq*.⁵⁸ In it, Arabaev told of two young Kyrgyz men, Maksüt Toltoev and Qasymbay Teltaev, who had arrived from Almaty, gathered together the Kyrgyz of six *volosts* from Przheval'sk *uezd*, and explained to them the "current situation," that is, the recent political changes in Russia.⁵⁹ He expressed his gratitude towards the men for doing everything they could to help their dying people, as well as his hope

⁵⁶ T. A. Abdrakhmanov, et al. *Eki door insany Ishenaaly Arabaev* (Bishkek: I. Arabaev atyndagy Kyrgyz mamlekettik universiteti, 2013), 100.

⁵⁷ Idem., 101.

⁵⁸ Idem., 141. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to find this particular issue of *Qazaq*.

⁵⁹ Idem., 183. Qasymbay Teltaev was a Przheval'sk *uezd* translator.

that efforts to save the Kyrgyz would continue. The issue also contained personal details on

Arabaev:

The author of this letter is Ishenaaly Arabaev, a Kyrgyz. He is an exemplary *jigit* [young man], who, having finished at the Ghaliya *medrese* in Ufa, returned to his people and opened a *medrese*, hired instructors as knowledgeable as himself, and began to spread the light of knowledge to the ignorant Kyrgyz people. The destructive order of June 25 of last year brought the Kyrgyz into chaos, drove them to the lands of China, and threatened them with starvation. Ishenaaly's friend, Iskak Qanatov, who studied with him at the Ghaliya *medrese*, was executed by hanging during the time of the brutal government.⁶⁰ A young man of Alash! Do you hear? He [Arabaev] says that they ask for help with tears in their eyes, while staring death in the face. If you do not have a heart of stone [*boor*, literally "liver"], then hurry up! Have compassion, be generous!⁶¹

By 1916, Arabaev was an established and well-known intellectual in Kyrgyz and Kazakh cultural circles. He was connected with the Kazakh intellectual milieu through his studies at Ghaliya, his publishing efforts, and his frequent contributions to Kazakh periodicals. He used his connections to rally Kazakhs in support of the Kyrgyz cause. Similar reports of the desperate state of the Kyrgyz in China also appeared on the pages of *Qazaq*. Mirzhaqyp Dulatov, whose book *Oian Qazaq!* [Wake up, Kazakh!] had been banned by imperial censors in 1911, announced that he was selling 1,000 copies that he had hidden away, and donating all the proceeds to benefit Kyrgyz "orphans and widows [*jetim-jesir*]."⁶² Another piece in *Qazaq* reported that at Alikhan Bokeikhanov's request, Mukhametzhan Tynyshpaev had received 200,000 rubles from the Provisional Government to aid the returning Kyrgyz.⁶³

⁶⁰ Iskak Qanatov was Qanat Abukin's son, and was mentioned in Sydykov's work as one of the Kyrgyz who studied at the Ghaliya *medrese*.

⁶¹ Abdyrakhmanov, *Eki door insany*, 184.

⁶² M. Dulatov, "Oian, qazaq! (Bosqyn qyrghyz baurlyryma arnady)," in Subkhanberdina, *Qazaq*, 394.

⁶³ "Bosqyn qyrghyzdarga 200 myng," in Subkhanberdina, *Qazaq*, 398. Mukhametzhan Tynyshpaev was a Kazakh engineer who toured Semirech'e with Kuropatkin, and wrote a report to Kuropatkin (based on his deposition in court in Vernyi on February 6-24, 1917) on the "short history of Russian power [*vlast*]" toward the Kirghiz in relation to the events of 1916." TsGA KR f. 75, op. 1, d. 46, ll. 118-146. His deposition was published in Lesnaia, *Vosstanie*, 132-149.

Belek Soltonoev was the head of the Atake *volost* when the disturbances broke out in Pishpek *uezd*. As such, he was responsible for drawing up the conscription rolls, and ensuring that people of his *volost* obeyed imperial orders. It is important to note that initially, the crowd's anger was directed toward native administrators – *volost* leaders, scribes, *pristavs*, and translators. In other parts of Turkistan, some native administrators were killed in the days after the announcement of the conscription order. This would have been a difficult position for anyone, and all the more so for Soltonoev, who, as we have seen, had been a *volost* head for only three months prior to the beginning of the disturbances. During the revolt, a number of native administrators were targeted by angry mobs, and presented with the choice of either being killed by the insurgents, or joining them and facing the punishment of the imperial administration. Soltonoev chose the latter path. “[H]e got rid of his *volost* administrator regalia, threw away his stamp and office paper into the river, and joined the poor *buqara* in the uprising on August 7, 1916.”⁶⁴ According to a report by Rymshovich, head of Pishpek *uezd*, Soltonoev quickly rose to become one of the leaders of the revolt. At the meeting of the community leaders [*pochetnye litsa*] of Atake and Sarygaghysh *volosts*, Soltonoev was heard to say “We need to thrash the Russians and chase them away to Tashkent. It is better to die on the lines of battle [*na pozitsiakh*].”⁶⁵ In another court document, he was mentioned as one of the leaders of a group that raided Toqmoq and the Russian settlement of Pokrovskoe.⁶⁶

Years later, Soltonoev would include a section on the revolt, its causes, and its aftermath, in his *Qyzyl qyrghyz tarykhy*. His was a view of the revolt from within. Although subject to his

⁶⁴ These citations are taken from the 1993 publication of Soltonoev's *Qyzyl qyrghyz tarykhy*; the section on the revolt was omitted from the 2003 edition in its entirety. B. Soltonoev, *Qyzyl qyrghyz tarykhy* (Bishkek: Mamlekettik “Uchkun” kontserni, 1993), v. 2, 98.

⁶⁵ TsGA KR f. 75, op. 1, d. 34, l. 12 ob.

⁶⁶ TsGA KR f. 75, op. 1, d. 25, l. 35 ob.

own biases, as well as the ideological currents of the early 1930s when he was writing, Soltonoev allowed his readers to see the revolt through the eyes of the insurgents.⁶⁷ He traced the underlying causes of the revolt back to the 1860s, when the Bughu Kyrgyz first expressed their wish to join the Russian Empire (see Chapter 1). Many Sarybaghysh leaders were subsequently imprisoned or killed by the Russians, giving rise to lingering anger among the Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz.⁶⁸ Other northern *manaps* and Alay Kyrgyz leaders also died at the hands of the Russians during their imperial advance into the region, leading Soltonoev to conclude that eventually, all the Kyrgyz “held a grudge [*ichi kektüü bolup*]” against the Russians.⁶⁹ With the in-migration of Russian peasants, land was taken from the Kyrgyz, impoverishing many, so that when the conscription order came, it was simply the last drop that filled the cup of Kyrgyz tolerance, and triggered the revolt. According to Soltonoev, the Kyrgyz did not rise against the conscription order blindly or impulsively. They waited to hear how other people in Turkestan were responding to the order. When they heard that disturbances had occurred in various districts, but were immediately suppressed, they continued to bide their time. It was only when they learned that the people of Zharkent *uezd* had rebelled that they decided to join in.⁷⁰ Soltonoev offered a great many details about how the revolt ran its course; he identified which Kyrgyz tribes and leaders joined the uprising and which stayed out, or even aided the Russian army’s punitive response.⁷¹ He provided a thorough account of the Kyrgyz escape to China, their suffering along

⁶⁷ It is clear that during the revolt Soltonoev kept some sort of a diary, which included dates, names and numbers of people, and place names. When telling of the escape of the people of Atake and Sarybaghysh *volosts* to China, he listed their move day by day, with dates and geographic names, along with the notation that “this is what is written in my notebook.” Soltonoev, *QQT*, 114.

⁶⁸ Among those mentioned were Törögeldi, Ormon’s *baatyr* and advisor, and Ümötäaly, Ormon’s son. Soltonoev *QQT*, 92-93.

⁶⁹ *Idem.*, 94.

⁷⁰ *Idem.*, 97.

⁷¹ “Yrysbeke Osmonbek uulu, Sarbaghysh Myktybek uulu, Aiylchy Tatybek uulu, Bektai Cholponkul uulu, etc. followed Nicholas’s wishes [*Nikolaidyn tilegin tilep*] and killed many Kyrgyz who revolted. Sons of Özbek also followed Nicholas’s wishes.” Abdykerim Sydykov (1889 -1938), one of the sons (grandsons) of Özbek Boshkoev,

the way, and the moral and physical humiliations they experienced in exile. Even when the Kyrgyz heard of the regime change in Russia and began trickling back from China, their hardships continued, he wrote, as they endured both starvation, and the deadly reprisals of angry Russian soldiers who returned from the war and found their families gone and households destroyed.⁷² According to Soltonoev, peace came to Semirech'e only in February 1918, with the establishment of the Soviet government. After returning to Semirech'e, Soltonoev, like Arabaev, became closely involved in the affairs of the Kyrgyz refugees. He went back to Uch Turfan in 1917 to organize the return of those who were still left behind.⁷³ He aided in the resettlement of the Kyrgyz in Pishpek *uezd*, particularly in his own *Atake volost*.⁷⁴

Memorializing the Revolt: Kyrgyz *Aqyns* Respond

Along with the Kyrgyz intellectuals, the northern Kyrgyz *aqyns* were also involved witnesses to the revolt. Their accounts of these troubled times helped keep the original memories of the revolt alive through periods in Kyrgyz history when discussions of the rebellion could not be separated from broader ideological concerns. Composed during or shortly after the revolt, the oral poems on the uprising were recorded from the mid-1920s to the early-1930s, during the oral literature campaign of the Academic Center of Kara Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast, but remained unpublished until the 1990s.

worked as a translator for the imperial administration during the revolt, and was later awarded the St. Stanislav medal of the third degree for his service to the empire. More on him in Chapter 6. Soltonoev, *QQT*, 118.

⁷² Idem., 130-133.

⁷³ Zhuzupekova, *Belek Soltonoev*, 15.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

The value of these works to this dissertation is twofold. First they reveal how these *aqyns* used the shared experiences of the northern Kyrgyz in 1916 to develop and strengthen the notion of Kyrgyzness. And second, they provide another opportunity to see revolt from the point of view of the participants. Most of the archival sources on the revolt were written by people in power, who were capable of recording their side of the story. Some Kyrgyz and Kazakhs do appear in the colonial archives, but usually only in interrogation materials and witness testimonies. Forced to testify under pressure and through an interpreter, these informants had little opportunity to convey their own emotional and perceptual experiences of the revolt. The poems of the Kyrgyz *aqyns* represent an important tool to address such limitations. Speaking of oral societies more generally, Jan Vansina reminds us: “One cannot emphasize enough, however, that such [oral] sources are irreplaceable, not only because information would otherwise be lost, but because they are sources ‘from the inside.’ In oral and part-oral societies, oral tradition gives intimate accounts of populations, or layers of populations, that are otherwise apprehended from the outside point of view.”⁷⁵ It is the Kyrgyz *aqyns*’ poems on the revolt that offer us a glimpse “from the inside.”⁷⁶

In Kyrgyz popular memory, the revolt came to be called the *ürkün*, a word normally indicating the commotion caused by being suddenly startled.⁷⁷ Poems on the revolt of 1916 came

⁷⁵ J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, p. 197.

⁷⁶ This is not to say, however, that oral sources should be taken at face-value without critical analysis. Information may be distorted or lost during the transmission of oral sources. That some of these poems may have been altered in this way is suggested by cases in which one poem exists in several versions, or one poet’s work resembles another’s. Some of these poems were also composed only later, after significant amounts of time had passed, raising concerns about the reliability of memory. Finally, these poems, like all historical sources, reflect basic human subjectivity. As human beings, these poets interpreted events based on their own emotions and perceptions, as well as facts and evidence, all the more so because of the life-changing and traumatic nature of the disturbances.

⁷⁷ E. Abduldaev, D. Isaev, eds., *Tolkovyī slovar’ kirgizskogo iazyka. Kyrgyz tilinin tushundurmo sozdugu* (Frunze: Mektep, 1969), p. 662. It is also possible that the Kyrgyz only began to refer to the 1916 revolt as the *ürkün* in the late 1980s and 1990s. At times Soltonoev refers to the rebellion as *buzuq* [break-up] and *urush* [fight], but the chapter title “The Kyrgyz Revolt of 1916” uses the term *kötörülüsh*, which is equivalent to Russian word *vosstanie*.

to constitute a special genre in the Kyrgyz literary history, known under the name *ürkün yrlary*, or the songs of the *ürkün*. Most of the *aqyns* who composed on the theme of the revolt were born in the 1870s and 1880s in Pishpek and Przheval'sk *uezds* of southern Semirech'e *oblast*, and were in their mid-thirties or early-forties during the revolt. They all had *mekteb* education and generally went on to become teachers. This group of poets escaped persecution in the 1930s, and most of them lived into the 1950s. Some even benefitted from state patronage, and served as messengers of socialist ideas and advocates for the Soviet way of life.⁷⁸

The poems on the revolt followed a standard script. They began with the announcement of the labour conscription order and the people's reaction to it. Next they described episodes from the revolt. Finally, they included a section on the Kyrgyz flight to China, the difficulties they endured there, and their return. Most of the poems ended by praising Lenin and the revolution. All of these elements were present in the revolt poems composed by Aldash Zheenike uulu (also known as Aldash Moldo, 1874-1930). Aldash was teaching in Przheval'sk *uezd* when the revolt broke out, and soon joined those fleeing to China. Judging from their content, Aldash composed some of these poems in China, and others after his return. Aldash's poems communicated a strong sense of Kyrgyz identity, by stressing the differences between the Kyrgyz and the other ethnic groups of Semirech'e, and by expressing deep longing for the lands of Isyk Kul and Jeti Suu, which Aldash considered the land of the Kyrgyz. Thus he wrote of the Dungans that they had "a heart of grass [denoting weakness], eat chives and other herbs, garlic

This reflects the political and academic culture of the 1930s, when Soviet research on the topic tended to refer to it as *vosstanie 1916 goda*.

⁷⁸ Daniel Prior notes that patronage patterns in Kyrgyz society shifted between the imperial and Soviet periods. In place of the *manaps* who had supported the *aqyns* and *zhomoqchus* before 1917, Soviet (and later Kyrgyz national) state institutions took over the roles of guardians and patrons of cultural production. See Daniel Prior, *Patron, Party, Patrimony, Notes on the Cultural History of the Kirghiz Epic Tradition* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University, Research for Inner Asian Studies, 2000). The poems on the revolt were never published during the authors' lifetimes.

and onions,” and sent their sons to China to avoid conscription. Here Aldash differentiated the Dungans and Kyrgyz, not by language, but by diet, and thus implicitly by lifestyle. The foods attributed to the Dungans highlighted their agricultural orientation, and contrasted with the traditional Kyrgyz diet of meat and dairy products, and reliance on animal husbandry. By painting the Dungans as weak and unsteady, Aldash also sought to employ them as a negative example by which to motivate the Kyrgyz. Aldash encouraged the Kyrgyz to stand strong and united against conscription, saying:

Don't be deceived by the *bays* and *manaps*,
 Don't give your sons to the army.
 Take away their signs and stamps,
 And tear apart their lists.⁷⁹

For Aldash, the key difference between the Dungans and the Kyrgyz was that the Dungans did not have a land to call their own, and so were willing to flee at the first sign of danger. The Kyrgyz, by contrast, had a land to lose, Isyk Kul, which Aldash described as *kasiettüü* [sacred]. Through his poetry, Aldash hoped to inspire the Kyrgyz to fight for the chance to stay in this sacred place.

In another poem on the theme of the revolt, Aldash wrote about the Altishahr region in Chinese Turkestan:

We fled to Alty Shaar [*Ürküp keldik Alty Shaar*],
 Poor people you became desperate,
 And filled with sadness and sorrow.
 Having no house to spend your winter in,
 You froze in the winter's cold.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Abdyl daev, *Muras*, 200.

⁸⁰ Idem., 201

Here Aldash sang of human suffering, humiliation, and destitution; about the plight of the women and children who were the innocent victims of the conflict. Women suffered at the hands of wealthy Chinese and *taranchi*, who took them as wives against their will. When they appealed to the local Muslim courts, they found no help there, only further injustices. Aldash was appalled by the people of Altishahr: by the deceit and greed of the merchants, by the high-handedness of the city officials, and by the false piety of the Muslim officials. While in Altishahr, Aldash was detained by Chinese officials for spreading news about the Russian Revolution. Expressing his anger, Aldash sang:

We are people of the Russians,
Our land is Jety Suu (Semirech'e)
Because of the Germans, and
Because of people like you [local officials],
We suffered from conflict and came here for a time.
Altishahr will not be our land,
Its people do not see us as human beings.⁸¹

Aldash still considered himself to be connected to the Russians, but by this he meant those Russians who had come to power after “Nicholas was shaken from his throne.”⁸² As with his *zamana* genre poems (discussed in Chapter 3), Aldash’s poems on the revolt contained many details about the personalities of Kyrgyz, Dungan, and Russian society of the time, as well as accounts of specific events, such as the meeting of the Bughu Kyrgyz to discuss the conscription order and a letter from Shabdan’s sons asking them to join with the Sarybaghysh. Aldash ended this poem by expressing his gratitude to Lenin for the *uruia*t [freedom] he had brought, and by revealing his hopes to return to his native land of Isyk Kul and Jety Suu [Semirech’e].

⁸¹ Idem., 213.

⁸² Ibid.

Another poet who explored themes of human loss and suffering was Isak Shaibekov (1880-1957), who came from the village of Chong Kemin in Pishpek *uezd*, an area traditionally associated with Shabdan and his authority. In 1900, Isak went to Toqmoq and enrolled in a new-method school. For a while he worked as an accountant for a *volost* leader named Baizaq, and later travelled around the *uezd* teaching. Among his many poems, were works describing Isak's experiences of the revolt and his escape to China. He composed three major poems on this theme while still in China, *Azghan el* [Wandering People], *Qairan el* [Desperate People], and *Qaitkan el* [Returning People]. This trio surpassed other poems on the revolt in their refinement and complexity.

The first of these three poems, *Azghan el*, began with a brief history of Russian rule over the Kyrgyz. Isak sees the decision by the Kyrgyz to join the Russian empire as the source of all their later suffering. The Kyrgyz had surrendered themselves to the tsar, Isak wrote, who then divided them into *volosts*, took away their lands, and imposed heavy taxes on them. Meanwhile the Kyrgyz poor had also endured tremendous oppression by their own *manaps*. The tsar's mobilization order, therefore, struck when their plight was already desperate. However a chief regret for Isak is that even when the Kyrgyz were called up to serve, the tsar still did not trust them with weapons:

I wish he took us as soldiers.
We were people in sleep, I wish he woke us up.
I wish he trusted us and gave us weapons,
I wish he let us shoot at the target.⁸³

Like many Kazakh intellectuals, Isak desired that the Kyrgyz be trusted to bear arms, and sent to fight the enemy. He did not explain this sentiment, but it is likely that he was influenced by the

⁸³ Abdyl daev, *Muras*, 423.

idea circulating in the Kazakh newspapers, that the people of Turkestan might gain concessions from the state if they were to fight in the war. Thus for a number of reasons, both current and historical, Isak was disillusioned with the regime and discouraged about the future of the Kyrgyz.

Subsequently, Isak described the Kyrgyz people's suffering during their long trip to China. Personal possessions and livestock were scattered and lost. People were lost too, and those that went on became desperate, because the wealthy did not care for the poor, and they could not see any way to survive [*amal kalbady*].⁸⁴ Once they reached China, Isak added, the Chinese deceived them and their suffering continued. The Kyrgyz could not forget their native land; they sighed and wept when they remembered it, and wondered if they would ever see it again:

There was Cholpon Ata, Dolonotu,
It was a place full of grass from summer to winter.
If we go back to our land, will Nicholas punish us?
Toru Aygir, its valleys and meadows, Doro, Kol Tör,
It was a place for the livestock during the summer.
We ran away trying to escape death.
People, take pride in your land.⁸⁵

All of the poets who described the revolt stressed its raw emotions, but Isak's description of the Kyrgyz people's suffering surpassed them all.

This was especially true in his second poem, *Qairan el*, which told of his people's plight in China. He sang that the old could not walk because they were sick, and the young could not walk because they were too young; having no water to wash themselves, people turned into a dark-brown mass; they sold most of their belongings for nothing:

Their horses worth hundred *soms*, they sold for one *seer*,⁸⁶ those desperate people,

⁸⁴ Idem., 425.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Currency in Eastern Turkestan.

The *seer* they received, they sold for a place to stay one night, those desperate people,
 Having no felt rugs, no bedding, they slept on the ground, those desperate people,
 They sold those who were meant to continue their race, those desperate people,
 They sold the dowry of their sons and daughters, those desperate people,
 They sold the widows, who survived their husbands' deaths, those desperate people.⁸⁷

However, despite all their difficulties, the Kyrgyz somehow went on with their lives.

They found ways to survive; some made materials [*uuk*, *tündük*] for yurts and sold them, some embroidered, some sold a drink made from corn flour. The wealthy sold nothing, for they did not want to part with their livestock, but the poor did whatever they had to in order to live. They sold everything they owned – their dishes, buckthorn roots, *kymyz*, wood, wool, saddles, and *shyrdaks*.⁸⁸ Even a leg of lamb could be traded for more immediate necessities:

They sold a cooked leg of lamb at the bazaar, those desperate people,
 Singing “here is a cheap leg of lamb,” those desperate people.⁸⁹

One of the dominant emotions here is shame—an emotional dimension of suffering that compounded the physical. The Kyrgyz, who had never considered selling goods as an occupation, were degraded to such a degree that they had to go to the bazaar, sing and hawk their goods in order to survive. Another disgraceful marker of this loss of nomadic freedom and wealth for Isak was the fact that “they rode donkeys as if they were riding stallions.”⁹⁰ Isak’s last poem, *Kaitkan el*, completed his trilogy on the revolt. In it Isak sang about hearing the good news about the toppling of the Russian imperial government. The poor rejoiced at the change, and began to dream about returning to their native land.

Qalyq Aqyev (1883-1953), another prominent *aqyn* who composed poems on social issues in Kyrgyz society, was born in the Zhumgal region of Pishpek *uezd*. Unlike many of his

⁸⁷ Abdyl daev, *Muras*, 426, 428.

⁸⁸ Embroidered felt rug.

⁸⁹ Abdyl daev, *Muras*, p. 429.

⁹⁰ Idem., 430.

contemporaries, Qalyq did not study with a *mullah* or receive a traditional *mekteb* education. Instead, he was taught by respected Kyrgyz *aqyns* like Eshmambet and Toqtoghul.⁹¹ As their apprentice, Qalyq learned the arts of composing and performing. He was known for his improvisation, and often competed with other oral poets at *aitysh* competitions. Qalyq's poem on the revolt, entitled *1916-zhyl* [*The Year 1916*], began with the announcement of the tsar's mobilization order. In Qalyq's account, many Kyrgyz refused the order, pointing to their ailing parents and dependent families; there would be no one to take care of them if the men were conscripted. Therefore, these young men decided to attack the *uezd* and *volost* leaders. After a month, Qalyq continued, Russian soldiers arrived and began shooting:

Innocent children and mothers got shot.
Peaceful people without any guilt were scattered around.⁹²

He sang about Dür, a Sarybaghysh Kyrgyz *manap*, who, seeking to gain the approval of the tsarist administration, went against his own people and had many of them punished. Along with Dür, Qalyq named many other wealthy Kyrgyz who slaughtered sheep and erected yurts in order to host the Russian soldiers. In another poem on the theme of the *urkun*, Qalyq discussed the imperial administration of the nomadic Kyrgyz, which formed the backdrop for the conflict.⁹³ He sang about the people's suffering from the "white tsar," who divided them up into *volosts*, elected *volost* heads, and placed onerous taxes on the people:

[He] took ten *soms* from each household.
Saying that his soldiers would wear them, [he] took thousands of warm fur coats.
The poor do not have a single horse, [for he] took the horses with their equipment.⁹⁴

⁹¹ On Toqtoghul see chapter 2. Eshmambet (1870-1926), another Kyrgyz *aqyn*, who comes from Aulie Ata *uezd* of Semirech'e *oblast*. He travelled extensively and was familiar with Toqtoghul.

⁹² Abdyldaev, *Muras*, p. 441.

⁹³ This poem was published as a "second version" of *1916-zhyl*. Abdyldaev, *Muras*, 412-414.

⁹⁴ *Idem.*, 413.

Qalyq viewed the revolt as a consequence of these oppressive tsarist policies – the decision to run to China was a rational response by those who could stand such oppression no longer. Qalyq concluded his poem on the sad note that “no one knows how many of those who fled died, [they] did not bury their dead or wrap them in a white shroud.”⁹⁵

Gripping scenes from the revolt are also described by Abylqasym Zhutakeev (1888-1933), who was born in Pishpek *uezd*, acquired a traditional education with a *mullah*, and began performing his poems at local gatherings when he was just fourteen. Abylqasym never wrote down his own poems, but they were later collected and recorded. Several of these poems discussed the uprising. In *Qachaq turmushu* [*Life of a Refugee*], he described the Kyrgyz people's lives after they fled to China. According to Abylqasym, the people of Zhumgal, Qochqor, Chui, Toqmoq, and Kemin (mostly of the Sarybaghysh and Bughu Kyrgyz) escaped to China, leaving their livestock and belongings behind. Their most difficult trial was crossing the Bedel Pass: many died, children were left without parents, young men lost their wives, and the livestock was abandoned. Like other poets, Abylqasym sang about how the wealthy took advantage of the poor. Once the people reached China, Abylqasym continued, the Kyrgyz poor found that the poor of China were no better off than the newcomers. Abylqasym concluded by singing about the people's longing for their own land:

The soles of my feet are bleeding from rocks.
 Jeti Suu (Semirech'e), you are always in my mind.
 I wonder if we will reach the snowdrop fields.
 [I wonder if we will] ride fast horses with beautiful manes and tails.
 Jeti Suu of the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, when will I reach you?⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Idem., 413-414.

⁹⁶ Idem., 440.

Abylqasym composed two more short poems on the theme of the revolt. The first, *1916-zhyl*, depicted the Russian army's attack on the fleeing Kyrgyz. The second poem, *Kairan el*, like Isak Shaibekov's poem of the same title, depicted the people's lives in China.

The works of *aqyns* like Qalyq and Abylqasym point out the challenges of working with oral literature. Most of these poems did not reach us in the poets' own handwriting, but were either copied and passed along from person to person, or collected later from those who had memorized them. Thus, in the case of Qalyq, we find two versions of his songs on the revolt; while in the case of Abylqasym we can infer that some form of borrowing or mutual influence took place between his work and that of Isak. Such occurrences are not unexpected. *Aqyns* learned from each other, shared their ideas, and observed keenly what worked with audiences. Most *aqyns* also improvised while singing, adding details while keeping the basic storyline intact (and Qalyq was a master improviser). These techniques certainly enriched the content and performance experience of Kyrgyz oral poetry, but they also raise questions about the reliability of poems based on historical events.

One other poem that is particularly important to this study is Taghay Emilov's *Akhvāl-i Qirghiziya* [The state of the Kyrgyz].⁹⁷ One of the lengthiest poems on the revolt, it has never been published. A handwritten copy, along with a transliteration into the Cyrillic alphabet, is held in the Manuscripts Collection of the Kyrgyz National Academy of Sciences.⁹⁸ Little is known about the author,⁹⁹ only that he was from the Sayaq Kyrgyz of Zhumgal region but lived

⁹⁷ Emilov's use of "*Qirghiziya*" is similar to that of Soltonoev's and Sydykov's.

⁹⁸ Khusein Karasaev (b. 1900), was a prominent Kyrgyz linguist and eyewitness to the revolt. Karasaev found Emilov's works, read and transcribed them, and also collected information on Emilov's life is. He claimed that some copies of Emilov's work were preserved at the Academy of Sciences in Kazakhstan. See Karasaev, *Khusein Naama*, 54-65.

⁹⁹ Karasaev stated that Emilov was a close relative of Ishenaaly Arabaev. RF NAN KR, d. 803.

in Isyk Kul.¹⁰⁰ *Akhvāl-i Qirghiziya* was written in the style of the reformist intellectuals, stressing the importance of knowledge and enlightenment. He wrote that all other Muslims – the Noghoys, the Sarts, and even the Kazakhs – were knowledgeable; only the Kyrgyz held back and watched their progress from a distance. He then turned to the Russian imperial administration, writing that when the Russian Empire gained dominion over the Kyrgyz, it promised not to touch their land and water, to bring justice, and not to conscript the Kyrgyz:

[They] said, we won't take your livestock by force,
 [They] said, you are not to serve in the army.
 [They] said, pay us taxes from each household,
 [They] said, live peacefully after that.¹⁰¹

When Russians came, he continued, instead of giving knowledge, they gave titles and ranks [*chin*] to their chosen agents, and introduced the election system. This, in turn, encouraged further corruption among Kyrgyz tribal leaders: whoever was elected as *volost* leader would take bribes, and demand *chygym* [tribute] from the people. Thus, Taghay wrote, the Kyrgyz were deprived of their land and water, and were unable even to protest because of their ignorance. Then in 1916 the mobilization order came from the tsar:

In his order our tsar said the following:
 We [the Kyrgyz] will compete with the other advanced peoples.
 We will perform [military] exercises with machine-gun and cannon,
 and in that way we will be introduced to the world.¹⁰²

Ultimately Taghay blamed the tsar for the calamities that befell the Kyrgyz. If the tsar had taught the Kyrgyz science, Taghay said, then the people would have been prepared and willing to fight for him, and would not have resisted the order.

¹⁰⁰ Karasaev, *Khusein Naama*, 65.

¹⁰¹ RF NAN KR, d. 803, l. 3

¹⁰² RF NAN KR, d. 803, l. 5

Taghay was the only poet to depict in detail, and at length, the conflict between the Russians and the Kyrgyz at the beginning of the revolt.¹⁰³ Other *aqyns* saw the revolt as a reaction to the tsarist mobilization order, and they presented the enemies of the Kyrgyz people as being the tsar, Russian officials, and local native administrators. None of them described the rebellion as a clash between ordinary Russian and Kyrgyz people. One reason for this is that these poems were collected in the 1920s and 1930s, at a time when the state was exerting pressure to portray the revolt as anti-colonial, rather than anti-Russian. Taghay's case was different; according to Khusein Karasaev, he wrote his poems between 1916 and 1918,¹⁰⁴ a period when the conflict remained fresh in the minds of the participants, and the Kyrgyz continued to fear Russian retaliation.

Taghay wrote that the fight between the Russians and Kyrgyz started with livestock. The Kyrgyz began to drive off the Russians' livestock from their fields. When the Russians heard of this, they responded angrily, saying they should destroy Kyrgyz and taking up their rifles [*bardangke*]. Meanwhile the Kyrgyz had begun to kill Russian officials. Some Kazakhs joined them in destroying Russian settlements and driving away their livestock. Fights erupted in Vernyi and in different parts of Semirech'e *oblast*:

Przheval'sk is a border town [inhabited by] Russians.
It borders with Zharkent, Qulzha, and China.
Naryn, the fields of Zhumgal, Chui, Oluyata.
Those are the places where the fight erupted.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ This may also explain why his poem was excluded from the collection of Kyrgyz poems on the revolt. His work exceeds the others in its complexity, and provides a much more realistic depiction of events.

¹⁰⁴ RF NAN KR, d. 803, list not numbered.

¹⁰⁵ RF NAN KR, d. 803, l. 8

Taghay observed that because of their ignorance, the Kyrgyz did not know the size of the *guberniia*, nor that the Russian population was enormous:

Let alone us, not even Germany could take [the Russians],
whom we disturbed so suddenly.
We do not know anything, we are ignorant,
so why are we speaking up?¹⁰⁶

When the Russian army arrived, Taghay wrote, they were ordered to wipe out Kyrgyz.

Meanwhile, the Kyrgyz tribes continued to destroy towns and settlements. They did not commit these acts because they were brave, says Taghay, but out of fear of being conscripted. Taghay was critical of his own people's motives for the revolt. In his mind, the Kyrgyz found themselves in this desperate situation due to their own ignorance and weakness. They had overestimated their own strength, and went blindly to their death.

Taghay wrote that once the Kyrgyz heard of the approaching Russian army, they decided to flee to China, leaving behind their belongings and livestock. Taghay counted fifty Kyrgyz tribes that had escaped to China. He described the experiences of the Kyrgyz who went to different parts of China. Some had heard that Tekes was good for cattle-breeding, so they moved there and settled in various towns and villages. Others moved through the Bedel Pass and arrived in other Chinese towns. Everywhere they experienced difficulties and died in great numbers.

Unlike many *aqyns*, Taghay also told the story of those who decided to stay behind. He described a scene in which several soldiers came and gathered the Kyrgyz, and asked them about the whereabouts of those who had dared to stand up against the tsar:

[The Kyrgyz] answered: They moved to China.
Who could stay and tolerate all of this?¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ RF NAN KR, d. 803, l. 9.

¹⁰⁷ RF NAN KR, d. 803, l. 17.

At that point the soldiers killed the guilty and innocent indiscriminately, destroying entire households. The people of Qanat, from Qochqor, were among those who suffered the most. Taghay wrote that Russians continued to impose punishments on those Kyrgyz who remained. They were burdened with various fees, their livestock was slaughtered, and they were interrogated in a government “field court”:

At that time they interrogated the Kyrgyz,
They asked questions and wrote down their words.
They found many guilty
And hung some of them.¹⁰⁸

Taghay wrote about Governor-General Kuropatkin’s project to physically segregate the Kyrgyz. The Russians gathered the Kyrgyz, appointed several *volost* leaders, and drove everyone out to the newly formed Naryn *uezd*. They placed soldiers in each *volost*, united various tribes into a single unit, and continued to tax the people heavily. Those who had remained in Turkestan began to regret staying, wrote Taghay, while those in China regretted fleeing. They could not get used to living in a foreign land, and their hopes of uniting with the Chinese people remained unfulfilled. After three months some of them began to leave China for their own land. Upon their return, they did not find any trace of their previous life:

There is no prosperity as it used to be among the people,
All of the wealth floated away in a flood.
Cities were closed off and trade stopped.
Great calamity fell on the people.
On the other hand, disease fell on them,
And wheat was scarce that year.¹⁰⁹

Taghay wrote that many died of starvation. They could no longer sustain themselves with their traditional meat diet, and they did not have enough grain to make up the difference. Men

¹⁰⁸ RF NAN KR, d. 803, l. 18.

¹⁰⁹ RF NAN KR, d. 2077, l. 27

abandoned their wives, unable to support them, and many young men sought to be adopted just to be fed. Theft and robbery became rampant. Once other nations heard of the disaster, they began sending help to the Kyrgyz, in the form of food and clothing. Yet Taghay revealed that corruption remained endemic, as what little aid did arrive was divided up by the Kyrgyz officials overseeing the distribution of relief. Taghay claimed that only a small portion of the donations were ever given to ordinary people in need.

Only in the third year after the revolt were the Kyrgyz able to return to a fairly normal way of life again. However, Taghay sang, Kyrgyz society would never be the same:

[T]he Kyrgyz people have suffered a great deal.
Many of them are scattered in different lands and oblasts.
I would be mistaken if I said there are none left,
But there are only one-tenth of them left.¹¹⁰

Taghay ended his poem by calling on his people to become literate, educate themselves, and learn skills. He also stressed the importance of knowing one's religion. "We do not have anyone in the 'spiritual institutions' because we do not have knowledge," lamented Taghay. He sang hopefully about recent changes, and welcomed the fact that young men were beginning to take up studies.

If we see the Kyrgyz *aqyns* as reflecting the views of the northern Kyrgyz of that period, it is evident that the Kyrgyz believed they had suffered injustices under the Russian colonial regime. These injustices resulted from the administrative division of the nomads, in ways that disregarded their existing social structure and lifestyle; from Slavic peasant settlement and the attendant land shortages; and from the corruptibility of Kyrgyz tribal leaders, the *manaps*. Staying true to their profession, the Kyrgyz *aqyns* continued to serve as social-critics, pointing

¹¹⁰ RF NAN KR, d. 2077, l. 31.

out the shortcomings of both the imperial administration and their own society even during these turbulent times. Likewise, they also continued to preserve the stories of their people, singing about the revolt in an effort to keep its memory alive for the next generation of Kyrgyz.

The experience of the revolt united the northern Kyrgyz in their grief. By depicting the sorrow and losses endured during the uprising as a unique Kyrgyz experience, Kyrgyz *aqyns* reinforced and added new depth to the sense that the Kyrgyz constituted a coherent cultural and ethnic identity. They used images of ethnic others – the Chinese, Taranchi, Dungans, and Russians – to emphasize what, in their opinion, made the Kyrgyz distinct and unique. They stressed such specific qualities as their attachment to land, their distinct way of life and worldview, and their outlook on the things they recognized as alien to their own society. In most cases, they connected the experience of the tragedy of the rebellion to the feeling of longing for one's homeland, by evoking romanticized images of Jeti Suu, Isyk Kul and its surroundings.¹¹¹ Yet, despite its potential value to the project of national unification, the memory of the revolt was never used for that purpose during the 1920s. After the February revolution of 1917, the complexities and dangers of the political landscape discouraged leaders and writers from taking a firm public stand on the revolt. Nor, at that time, was there any Kyrgyz national state around which to rally such efforts. By the time Kara Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast was established in 1924, the attention of Kyrgyz intellectuals had shifted to the more immediate political, social and economic issues. Although it had occurred less than a decade earlier, the revolt was already regarded as a thing of the past.

¹¹¹ The image of Isyk Kul is a constant in the poetry of the *aqyns* (See Chapter 3 for Qalyghul's description), but the idea of Jeti Suu as the land of the Kyrgyz emerged only in the first decade of the twentieth century. It was at this time that Jeti Suu emerged to eclipse Tian Shan as the "place of the Kyrgyz."

Conclusion

The revolt of 1916 did not bring the end to the empire, but it did have devastating results for Kazakhs and Kyrgyz. Most importantly, the revolt of 1916 had brought these two people and their intellectuals closer together, through their shared grief for the plight of their people. The *aqyns*, along with the modernizing intellectuals, formed a cohesive educated class within northern Kyrgyz society of the time. With few exceptions, the *aqyns* had received a traditional education with a *mullah*, and they strove to pass along their knowledge to Kyrgyz society, particularly among the younger generation. They operated alongside the first generation of Kyrgyz intellectuals, and the social and cultural divisions between the two groups were few. Their literary and cultural aspirations were similar, they shared the same public sphere of social gatherings, feasts and memorials, they read the same newspapers, they were aware of debates on contemporary issues, and they recognized the need for change in their society.

Perhaps surprisingly, however, none except Ishenaaly Arabaev became politically active and visibly involved in regional politics after 1917. The new generation of Kyrgyz political elites came from the Russian-educated cohort of the northern Kyrgyz in the first decade of the twentieth century. The majority of this new political class came from *manap* families or had other ties to the *manap* class. It was they, rather than the Muslim-educated intellectuals and authors, who would preside over the establishment of Kyrgyz national autonomy. Their careers peaked in the early-Soviet period, and nearly all of them perished in Stalin's purges of the late-1930s. Their story represents a part of the Soviet nation-building and modernization project, and as such, has been told as part of that historical narrative.¹¹² The next chapter will take a brief look

¹¹² Benjamin Loring, "Building Socialism in Kyrgyzstan: Nation-Making, Rural Development, and Social Change, 1921-1932," (Ph. D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 2008).

at the career path of one of these new nationalist politicians, Abdykerim Sydykov, a close friend and colleague of Arabaev during the early-Soviet period. It will examine the political choices that faced the Kyrgyz intellectuals in the immediate aftermath of the 1917 revolution and the fall of the imperial regime.

Chapter Six

From Culture to Politics: Creating the Nation

...because tribal-patriarchal relationships still exist and sometimes manifest themselves strongly, especially among the Kara Kirghiz, a certain part of the population is still led by the old bureaucrats [*chinovniki*], translators, and intelligentsia from among the *bay-manap* element, who are very much interested in the creation of a separate *oblast* and who rely on the same *bay-manap* element in their pursuit of this project of separation.¹

R. Khudaikulov, Letter to TsK RKP(b), 29 December, 1922

If an Uzbek is speaking, he begins with Ferghana and Samarkand and immediately passes to Aulie Ata through Tashkent, forgetting to touch upon the Kara Kirghiz. And if another Kirghiz [Kazakh] has his turn, he speaks of Jeti Suu and Syr-Dar'ia, and absolutely fails to mention the Kara Kirghiz of Jeti Suu. I recently have said that along with [the Uzbek, Turkmen and Kazakh] nationalities, it is necessary to promote two more nationalities: the Kara Kirghiz and Tajik, so that there are five nationalities.²

I. Arabaev, "Excerpts from the notes of the plenary session of TsK KPT," 23 March, 1924

Introduction

In March 1924, Ishenaaly Arabaev found himself in Tashkent speaking in front of the members of the Central Asian Bureau to justify the creation of the Kara Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast (KKAO). His road to Tashkent had been full of challenges. After a period of shock and

¹ RGASPI, f. 62, op. 2, d. 43, l. 5.

² RGASPI, f. 62, op. 2, d. 101, l. 97.

recovery from the devastation of the revolt of 1916, the revolutions of 1917 and the fall of the imperial regime, there followed a time of starvation and famine, and then the search for various cultural and political alliances, marked by the unsuccessful attempt to create the Kyrgyz Mountain Oblast in 1922. Through it all came new efforts to redefine what it meant to be Kyrgyz, encouraged by the changing political and cultural climate of the early-1920s.

During the imperial period, the Russian and native worlds had been able to exist separately from each other, as distinct cultural and political domains. The politics of the post-1917 era, however, demanded that they coalesce into a single order. As Adeeb Khalid points out, the cultural struggles waged between Central Asia's Muslims under tsarist rule were superseded after the revolution by a broader "political struggle to be decided by the vote."³ These new political conditions demanded people who were fluent in the language of empire, and could translate their experiences working in the imperial administration into the framework of Soviet cultural and political institutions. As such, representatives of the Kyrgyz "old bureaucracy, translators, and intelligentsia" began to play a more prominent role during the immediate post-imperial period in debates on the nature of the Kyrgyz nation, alongside the Muslim-educated Kyrgyz cultural elite. By stressing the political dimension to the creation of the KKAO, this chapter will illustrate how this new partnership between Kyrgyz cultural and political elites transformed the cultural concept of the Kyrgyz community into the political concept of the Kyrgyz nation. I argue that during the period of national delimitation in the 1920s, the earlier focus on Kyrgyz literary and cultural capital proved insufficient to support the establishment of Kyrgyz autonomy, forcing Kyrgyz political and cultural elites to come up with new arguments to justify carving out a territory for their nation.

³ Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 245.

In the Service of Empire and Nation: Abdykerim Sydykov

As World War I dragged painfully on, Russia's economic crisis had intensified. Food shortages and inflation in the central provinces gave rise to widespread dissatisfaction among factory workers, women, and peasants. By 1916, strikes and labor protests were commonplace. As the empire's periphery dealt with the Central Asian revolt of 1916 and its aftermath, the imperial core faced increasing war demands and the threat of famine. Finally, workers in Petrograd and Moscow, dissatisfied with poor work conditions, food shortages and financial crises, took to the streets in February of 1917. Unable to resolve the country's many troubles, Nicholas II agreed to abdicate, and shortly afterward a Provisional Government was formed.⁴

The February revolution may have "arrived in Turkestan by telegram," but the news left the lives of the northern Kyrgyz untouched.⁵ The Kyrgyz were reeling from disease, poverty, and malnutrition as a result of the 1916 revolt. Nearly 200,000 Kazakhs and Kyrgyz were still displaced, living in remote mountain areas or Chinese territory.⁶ Although some were beginning to return to their lands, they continued to fear punishment by the empire and death at the hands of angry Slavic settlers. In southern Semriech'e, political activity following both the February and October revolutions was largely the province of workers' unions. The membership of these unions was predominantly Russian, with Kyrgyz participation limited to a small number of intellectuals, former native officials, and some members of the Kyrgyz tribal elite.⁷ Most Kyrgyz were too busy surviving and rebuilding to pay much attention to imperial politics, and too

⁴ Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924* (Penguin books, 1998), 299-353; Kappeler, *Russian Empire*; Joshua Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse: The Great War and the Destruction of the Russian Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 348-366.

⁵ Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 245.

⁶ Kappeler, *Russian Empire*, 352.

⁷ Zainidin Kurmanov, *Politicheskaya bor'ba v Kyrgyzstane: 20-e gody* (Bishkek: Soros-Kyrgyzstan, 1997), 44.

politically unsophisticated to grasp the full significance of the events that were unfolding. At this crucial juncture, it was the partnership of two men, Ishenaaly Arabaev and Abdykerim Sydykov, that would prove decisive for the development of the Kyrgyz as a nation. Arabaev remained politically active following the revolt and revolution, and was one of the most well-established figures among the Kyrgyz cultural elite, with political views and convictions rooted in the pre-1916 era. However, his training and education in Islamic institutions had not prepared him to navigate the party antagonisms that animated the post-1917 public sphere. As Arabaev struggled to establish a Pishpek branch of the Alash party under these conditions, he entered into a partnership with a complementary figure, Abdykerim Sydykov, who possessed the political skills Arabaev lacked. This was a collaboration which would have important consequences for the future of the Kyrgyz nation.

Abdykerim Sydykov (1889-1938), today often considered the founder of Kyrgyz statehood, was born into the Boshkoev family. His father, Sydyk Boshkoev, had served as head of Talkan *volost* in Pishpek *uezd* for almost ten years, and also functioned as a *biy* in a neighboring *volost* from 1912 to 1915.⁸ Sydykov's grandfather, Özbek Boshkoev (1826-1912) was a contemporary of Shabdan. An influential *manap* in Talkan *volost* and a shrewd businessman, Özbek Boshkoev's enterprises included commercial trade, horse-breeding and bee-keeping (which he introduced to the *volost*).⁹ Sydykov's great uncle, Baytik Qanaev, was a *manap* of the Solto Kyrgyz, best known for assisting the Russian troops in the 1860s during their advance into the northern Kyrgyz territories and capture of the fortress of Pishpek (detailed in Chapter 1). Sydykov himself had a privileged upbringing. He began with a traditional *mekteb*

⁸ Zainidin Kurmanov, *Abdykerim Sydykov: lichnost' i istoriia* (Bishkek: Sham, 2002), 10.

⁹ Idem., 9-10.

education, but at his father's insistence, continued his studies at the Russian language gymnasium for boys in Vernyi between 1904 and 1911.¹⁰ Upon graduating, he entered the veterinary department of Kazan University, but returned home due to poor health, and took a place in the family business.¹¹ In 1912, Sydykov applied for the job of translator to the head of the Pishpek *uezd*, and in 1913 was accepted. Sydykov's exemplary service earned him several awards and promotions, and in 1915 Putintsev, the head of Pishpek *uezd*, rewarded him with a silver medal for his "hard work under difficult wartime conditions."¹²

In short, Sydykov was one of those native officials, such as clerks, scribes, and translators, who made up the lower ranks [*nizhnie chiny*] in the ladder of imperial governance.¹³ Although these officials played a crucial role in establishing trust and respect between Russian officials and natives inhabitants, they suffered a poor reputation in both camps. Russian officials despised them as the "living wall" standing between the Russian administration and native peoples, while native residents deemed them unreliable because they served the empire.¹⁴ Initially, most of these native officials were Tatar and Bashkir Muslims, hired by the state for their language skills and close religious and cultural affinity with the peoples of Turkestan. By the late nineteenth century, Kazakhs had begun to replace them in Pishpek and Przheval'sk

¹⁰ Idem., 12. On Russian-native schools, see Wayne Dowler, *Classroom and Empire: The Politics of Schooling Russia's Eastern Nationalities, 1860-1917* (McGill Queens University Press, 2001); K. E. Bendrikov, *Ocherki po istorii narodnogo obrazovaniia v Turkestane, 1865-1924* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo kademii pedagogicheskikh nauk RSFSR, 1960).

¹¹ Kurmanov, *Abdykerim Sydykov*, 13.

¹² Idem., 14.

¹³ They have received limited attention in current scholarship on the empire's administration of its borderland regions. Among the existing scholarship see Gulmira Sultangalieva, "Karatolmach, shtabs-kapitan Mukhammed-Sharif Aitov v kazakhskoi stepi (pervaia polovina XIX v.), *Panorama Evrazii* 2 (2008): 13-22; idem., *Zapadnyi Kazakhstan v sisteme etnokul'turnykh kontaktov (XVIII-nachalo XIX vv.)* (Ufa: RIO RUNMTs Goskomnauki RB, 2002)50-69; Alexander Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarqand*.

¹⁴ V. P. Nalivkin, *Tuzemtsy ran'she i teper'* (Tashkent: Izdanie A. L. Kirsnera, 1913), 71-73.

uezds.¹⁵ As they did so, Kyrgyz *manaps* increasingly came to see Russian-language education as a way for their children to gain advancement within the empire's administrative ladder for natives, and improve their financial standing. Over the first decade of the twentieth century, a handful of Kyrgyz scribes, secretaries and translators began to appear in various *volosts* of Pishpek and Przheval'sk *uezds*, assisting the government with court disputes, trips and speeches by imperial bureaucrats, and negotiations between native and Russian officials.¹⁶ In peacetime these translators had little difficulty reconciling the two sides of their existence, but at times of disturbance, they found themselves caught between the world in which they had been born and raised, and the world that provided them with comfort and privilege. The revolt of 1916 was one of those moments of extremity, and in that moment Sydykov chose to side with the empire and remain loyal to the oath he took when he entered government service.¹⁷ His actions and political convictions during the revolt left little trace in the archival record, and remain open to speculation.¹⁸ Sydykov was mentioned only once in Qanat Abukin's deposition, as having been present at a meeting between Qanat, Möküsh Shabdanov, Kurman Lepasov and Putintsev, the head of Pishpek *uezd*, on August 7, 1916. Sydykov was named as the *pis'mennyi perevodchik*

¹⁵ One of such Kazakh translators is T. Diusebaev, who lived in Przheval'sk and was in close relationship with the *uezd* head Ivanov. Diusebaev was known for his wealth, which people believed he amassed during his service to Ivanov. See L. V. Lesnaia and T. Ryskulov, eds. *Vosstanie 1916 goda v Kirgizstane* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1937), 30-32; 48-49; 52-58.

¹⁶ Most of the times these titles and duties converged.

¹⁷ The oath read: "I swear on the Quran and on God almighty that I desire and owe it to His Imperial Majesty His All-forgiving Highness, the All-Russian Sovereign, to serve without sparing my own life (*zhivota*) to my last drop of blood. I kiss the Quran, Amen. A. Sydykov." Cited in Kurmanov, *Abdykerim Sydykov*, 14. There were many other translators who got involved in the uprising, either by choice or conviction. Mambetaaly Muratalin was one translator who, when caught up in the chaos of the uprising, chose to participate in the revolt on the side of the insurgents. He was later tried and released on bail. He led a comfortable life and had a house in Pishpek, which seems to explain why the court believed that he would not risk his wealth (particularly the house) by further aiding the insurgents. Ts GA KR, f. 97, op. 1, d. 1, l. 34. In another case, involving the death of doctor Levin in August 1916, Kasymbai Teltaev, a *gubernskii sekretar'* and translator, figured as a major actor. He was an eye-witness to Levin's death, but fearing murder at the hands of Russian settlers, he decided to join his family and escape to China. Ts GA KR, f. 75, op. 1, d. 5.

¹⁸ Without providing any evidence, Z. Kurmanov maintains that Sydykov "saved a number of Kyrgyz lives by letting the insurgents know about the punitive operations of the Russian army." Z. Kurmanov, *Abdykerim Sydykov*, 16. In Soltonoev's *KKT*, Sydykov is mentioned as someone, who assisted the Russians.

who translated the meeting.¹⁹ Sydykov's role during the revolt itself remains a topic of controversy, but he performed his duties well enough to receive the Medal of St. Stanislav, 3rd degree, for his "comprehensible transfer of the orders of Lieutenant Colonel Rymshovich during battle, in which the attacks of the insurgents were turned back."²⁰ Sydykov's apparently successful imperial career came to an abrupt end with the revolution of February 1917. He worked briefly as an assistant to the commissar of Pishpek *uezd*, but soon resigned in protest to the policies of the Provisional Government, which permitted Slavic settlers to retain the lands of Kyrgyz refugees who had fled to China.²¹ Disillusionment prompted Sydykov to seek an alliance with Arabaev aimed at creating a local Kyrgyz branch of the Alash party in Pishpek. This effort held great appeal to the generation of Kyrgyz political activists that came of age after the 1917 revolution.²² In order to understand why the political program of the Alash party was appealing to these Kyrgyz intellectuals, it is necessary to examine the historical circumstances under which Central Asian political movements like Alash emerged and functioned.

The Alash Party: Exercise in Future Kyrgyz Autonomy

The rise of the Alash party was closely connected with the Kazakh national movement and its leader, Alikhan Bokeikhanov.²³ As Andreas Kappeler notes, the February revolution

¹⁹ "Vypiska iz pokazanii Kanata Abukina," in Lesnaia, *Vosstanie*, 156.

²⁰ Kurmanov, *Abdykerim Sydykov*, 14.

²¹ *Idem.*, 17.

²² *Idem.*, 19.

²³ For a detailed history of Alash Orda see Dina Amanzholova, *Na izlome: Alash v etnopoliticheskoi istorii kazakhstana* (Almaty: Taimas, 2009); *idem.*, *Kazakhskii avtonomizm i Rossiia* (Moscow: Rossiia molodaia, 1994); T.K Zhurtbai, *Dvizhenie Alash: sbornik materialov sudebnykh protsessov nad alashevtsami* (Almaty: El Shezhire, 2011); G. Enes, at. al. eds. *Alash. Alashorda: Entsiklopediia* (Almaty: Arys, 2009). Articles in *Qazaq* reflect the political and social views of the party's members. See Subkhanberdina, *Qazaq*.

spurred a number of national movements in different parts of the empire.²⁴ Emboldened by the Provisional Government's laws on freedom of speech, assembly and the press, the empire's non-Russian elites began to draw up plans for the development of their respective nations. In mid-1917, Kazakh elites organized a series of regional congresses in Orenburg, Vernyi, Ural'sk, and Omsk.²⁵ The issues discussed at these congresses pertained to all aspects of Kyrgyz and Kazakh life, including education, religion, local governance, public safety, taxation, and the role of women, as well as the conditions in Semirech'e, which was recognized as the region worst affected by the 1916 revolt. One burning question on the political agenda of the Kazakh elite was the distribution of land. The delegates sought to curb the resettlement administration's practice of allocating lands once belonging to Kazakh and Kyrgyz nomads to Russian peasants.²⁶ This issue was especially important to the delegates from southern Semirech'e, where settler land appropriations made at the expense of the Kyrgyz nomads had already resulted in the impoverishment of the Kyrgyz and a rise in inter-ethnic clashes before 1914.

The spark that led to the emergence of the Alash party was the all-Kazakh conference in Orenburg, which took place in July 1917. The congress was attended by Kazakh and Kyrgyz delegates from Aqmola, Semey, Torgai, Semirech'e, Syr-Dar'ia, Ferghana, and Samarkand *oblasts*. The Semirech'e delegation was headed by Muzkhametzhan Tynyshbaev, a Russian-educated Kazakh engineer, and consisted of eleven people. Among them, Abdykerim Sydykov

²⁴ Kappeler, *Russian Empire*, 355.

²⁵ Amanzholova, *Kazakhskii avtonomizm*, 25. The number of attendees in each city speaks to the regional situation at the time. The congress in Orenburg was attended by 300 delegates, that in Ural'sk by 800, and the event in Omsk by 150. By contrast, the Semirech'e congress in Vernyi was attended by only 81 delegates, a number that was depressed by the lingering effects of the 1916 crisis. See *ibid.*

²⁶ The programs of these congresses can be found in N. Martynenko, ed. *Alash orda, sbornik dokumentov*, (Alma-Ata: Aiqap, 1992).

and Dür Soornobaev were the two northern Kyrgyz delegates to attend.²⁷ There were fourteen questions on the congress agenda, which spanned issues such as the form of state government, autonomy in Kazakh *oblasts*, land allocation, education, the judicial system, religion, women's rights, and conditions in Semirech'e *oblast*.²⁸ Thus it is clear that by July 1917, Kazakh intellectuals had started to work toward Kazakh autonomy (albeit within the *oblast* system of political delineation), and to assert that such autonomy should reflect the "national differences and particularities of [the Kazakh] lifestyle."²⁹ Kazakh autonomy was expected to exist within a Russian state, which, according to the resolution of the congress, was to be a "democratic federative parliamentary republic."³⁰ In the wake of the July congress, the Alash party was founded to compete for a place in the Constituent Assembly, which was scheduled to begin writing a new constitution for Russia in January 1918. Elections to the assembly were held at the end of November, and a number of other Central Asian national parties competed alongside Alash, including Buqara, Turan, Shuro-i Islamiya and the Union of the Revolutionary Kirghiz Youth.³¹ Alash won the majority of the votes, however, securing forty three delegates to the Constituent Assembly.³²

²⁷ "Postanovlenie vsekirgizskogo s'ezda v Orenburge 21-28 iulia 1917 goda," Martynenko, *Alash orda*, 51; Subkhanberdina, *Qazaq*, 407. Dür Sooronbaev was one of the delegates to the congress in Orenburg. Dür and his *volost* did not revolt in 1916 and were spared of the punishment inflicted by the Russian army on the Kyrgyz insurgents (See Chapter 5).

²⁸ Subkhanberdina, *Qazaq*, 405-409.

²⁹ Idem., 405. These demands for autonomy were informed by events in the western part of the empire, where Ukrainian, Belorussian, Baltic, and Finnish national movements began to form their own governing bodies. See Kappeler, *Russian Empire*, 356-359.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Olcott, *The Kazaks*, 130-151.

³² Alash won the majority of votes in Steppe, Turgai, Ural'sk, Semipalatinsk, and Semirech'e *okrugs*. D. Amanzholova, *Na izlome*, 186. The constituent assembly only met for one day in January and the next day it was dismissed by the Bolsheviks.

In December 1917, Alash organized another all-Kazakh congress in Orenburg, where it declared the establishment of a quasi-state called the Alash Orda Autonomy.³³ The creation of Alash Orda followed the Bolshevik takeover in Petrograd in November. The leaders of the Alash party resolved to create a territorial-national autonomy which would curb “the anarchy that was spreading in Kazakh and Kirghiz territories, and threatening the lives and property of the Kazakh-Kirghiz population.”³⁴ The autonomy was to include the territory of the Bukei Horde; Ural, Torgai, Aqmola, Semipalatinsk, Semirech’e, and Syr-Dar’ia *oblasts*; and the Kirghiz (Kazakh) *uezds* of Ferghana, Samarkand and Transcaucasus *oblasts* and Amu-Dar’ia *okrug*.³⁵ Arabaev received a “special invitation” to the conference, along with members from other regional branches of the Alash party.³⁶ He supported the creation of the Alash Autonomy, but voted with the leading Kazakh intellectuals, including Baitursynov, Bokeikhanov, Dulatov, and Zhumabaev, to defer announcing it. This group wanted the announcement to be made by the official people’s council, after the autonomy’s militia units had mobilized, and negotiations with the Kazakhs of Turkestan and other regions had been completed.³⁷ They took this cautious approach because they feared that declaring Alash Autonomy before the Kazakh military was formed would provoke Slavic settlers and reignite inter-ethnic conflict.³⁸

“Experiment[s] in government,” as Khalid describes them, took place in other parts of Turkestan as well.³⁹ The post-February period witnessed the proliferation of various Muslim

³³ “Protokol zasedaniia obshchekirgizskogo s’ezda v Orenburge, 5-13 dekabria 1917 goda,” Martynenko, *Alash Orda*, 69.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Idem., 64.

³⁷ Members from Ural and Syr-Dar’ia *oblasts* and the Bukei Horde resisted the idea of delay, and threatened to join the Turkestan autonomy instead. This was unacceptable to the leaders of Alash party, and as a compromise they resolved to make the announcement within one month. “Protokol,” *Alash Orda*, 70.

³⁸ Amanzholova, *Na izlome*, 190.

³⁹ Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 275.

parties, driven by different goals, in Tashkent, Kokand, Andijan and Samarkand. The main struggle in Turkestan was between radical Muslim clerics from the *'ulema*, and reform-minded Muslim intellectuals.⁴⁰ In Tashkent, the clerical *Ulema Jamiyati* party won the majority of votes in elections to the city Duma.⁴¹ A week before the establishment of the Alash Orda Autonomy, another group of Central Asian Muslims from Syr-Dar'ia, Samarkand and Ferghana *oblasts* and the Emirate of Bukhara met in Kokand under the leadership of Alash party members Mustafa Choqayev and Mukhametzhan Tynyshpaev. After much deliberation about what Choqay called the "absence of government in Russia today," the congress declared the establishment of a provisional government of Turkestan.⁴² M. Choqay, M. Tynyshpaev, Sh. Lapin, and U. Khojaev were elected to lead what later became known as the Kokand Autonomy. These declarations of autonomy resulted from the power vacuum and chaos created in the region by the Bolshevik takeover. This situation would not last long, however. By January 1918, the Bolsheviks had strengthened their position, and in February the Kokand Autonomy was crushed by the Tashkent Soviet.⁴³ As for the Alash Orda Autonomy, after considering various options, the leaders of Alash joined the Bolsheviks at the end of 1919,⁴⁴ lured by the promise that Kazakh autonomy would be allowed to develop within the Russian federal state.⁴⁵ Whatever its longer-term possibilities, the union meant the abandonment of the Alash Orda government.

The emergence of various national movements in Central Asia at this time raises the question of the absence of a Kyrgyz national movement among them. Why didn't the Kyrgyz intellectual elites create their own parties and fight for autonomy during this period of relative

⁴⁰ Idem., 245-274.

⁴¹ Idem., 260.

⁴² Idem., 275.

⁴³ Idem., 279.

⁴⁴ The western branch of Alash Orda, under Baitursynov, joined the Bolsheviks earlier, in December 1918.

⁴⁵ On the negotiations between Sovnarkom and the leaders of Alash Orda, see Amanzholova, *Na izlome*, 192.

freedom and experimentation that followed the demise of the Russian empire? Part of the answer lies in the difficult conditions the Kyrgyz then faced. At meetings of their various parties in Turkestan and the Steppe region, Muslim leaders consistently touched upon the hardships suffered by the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz in Semirech'e, the dangers posed to them by the Slavic population, and the need to supply them with food. The question of Semirech'e was on the agenda of every all-Kirghiz congress, and the Kazakh leadership did their best to raise public awareness of the tragedy. Meanwhile the Muslims of Turkestan took to the streets on August 18 to call for action by the Provisional Government against the bloodshed in Semirech'e.⁴⁶ They demanded that the weapons Kuropatkin had distributed to Slavic settlers be collected, and the refugees returning from China be allowed to resettle on their own lands.⁴⁷ These facts illustrate how critical the situation in southern Semirech'e was during this period, and help to explain why northern Kyrgyz participation in regional politics was limited to the handful of intellectuals able to attend the Kazakh congresses. Describing the revolt and its aftermath in Pishpek and Przheval'sk *uezds*, Marco Buttino writes, "[D]eprived of help and driven out of their territories, the Kyrgyz tribes, it seemed, were destined to turn into a half-starving, scattered people."⁴⁸ For the moment, at least, the northern Kyrgyz had been silenced by the devastating consequences of the revolt.

These conditions were exacerbated by the dispersal of the Kyrgyz people. While Kazakh and Turkestan Muslim national elites were mobilizing to organize political parties in the spring of 1917, the northern Kyrgyz were still divided between Chinese and Russian territory. Their eventual reunification was a slow process. In early 1918, Chinese authorities began to press the

⁴⁶ Marko Buttino, *Revoliutsiia naoborot: Sredniaia Aziia mezhdur padeniem tsarskoi imperii i obrazovaniem SSSR*, N. Okhoti, trans., (Moscow: Zven'ia, 2007), 173.

⁴⁷ Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 272.

⁴⁸ Buttino, *Revoliutsiia naoborot*, 81.

refugees to return to their former territories, arguing that their continued presence in China posed a threat to the area's economic and social stability. As a result, large numbers of Kyrgyz and Kazakhs began migrating back to their own lands. The newly established Bolshevik administration in Vernyi was unprepared to deal with this huge wave of migrants, and the winter and spring of 1918 proved disastrous for the nomads, who endured famine as well as the threat of typhus.⁴⁹ Meanwhile the return migration went on, eventually stretching out over the course of several years. Khusein Karasaev, a prominent Kyrgyz linguist, recalled in his memoir that his family and several other tribes did not return to their homeland near Przheval'sk until 1921.⁵⁰ Under these circumstances, Pishpek and Przheval'sk *uezds* of southern Semirech'e *oblast*, the core territories of the northern Kyrgyz, could not resist being drawn into the whirlwind of Kazakh politics. Among those who attended the all-Kazakh congresses after having remained in Russia during the revolt were Abdykerim Sydykov, and Imanaly Zhainakov, both translators for the imperial administration, and Dür Sooronbaev, a *volost* administrator who had also spurned the revolt. Arabaev, meanwhile, lingered in China until mid-1917 and then returned to Vernyi at the head of a group of refugees. He came to Orenburg for the congress and, in his own words, "addressed the congress asking for help for the starving, half-naked refugees."⁵¹

Even had they not been scattered and destitute, the Kyrgyz still would have felt the absence of their own politicized national leadership, national movement, and press. Without these basic building blocks for political activism, Kyrgyz intellectual elites had little choice but to participate in the Kazakh national movement, which was considerably larger and more powerful. The cultural and linguistic affinities between the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, their long-

⁴⁹ Buttino, *Revoliutsiia naoborot*, 236-238.

⁵⁰ Karasaev, *Khusein naama*, 175-185.

⁵¹ TsGA SPD KR, f. 10, op. 15, d. 188, ll. 8-9.

standing social and economic ties, and their intellectual partnership during the late imperial period, disposed Kyrgyz intellectual elites to imagine the development of their nation as bound up with that of the Kazakhs. Kyrgyz nationalism, in this sense, developed alongside the Kazakh nationalist movement, and Kyrgyz leaders expected their mutual relationship to endure. In the mid-1920s, however, this assumption would be discarded.

Although the role of Kyrgyz national elites in the creation of the Alash party and the Alash Orda Autonomy was marginal, the experience they gained by participating in the all-Kazakh congresses and assisting in the creation of the Alash Orda Autonomy would prove invaluable. In its program, the Alash party stressed the need to publish books in Kazakh and educate children in their own language; it endorsed the separation of church and state; it tackled the practical challenges of effective administration and finance; and it experimented with the formation of self-governing units. In its brief existence, the Alash Orda Autonomy provided a unique training opportunity for the Kyrgyz intellectuals, and they would put all the experience they gained there to good when they contemplated the creation of the Kyrgyz Mountain Oblast in 1922.

From Alash Orda to the Kyrgyz Mountain Oblast

When the Bolsheviks came to power in the fall of 1917, they did not have widespread support among the non-Russian population of Turkestan, and relied instead on the backing of a small number of European-Russian workers and soldiers. Driven by long-standing tensions, and exacerbated by the lingering memories of 1916, regional politics had become divided along ethnic lines. The Soviets therefore gained influence among the European segment of the

population⁵², while Central Asians preferred to align themselves with parties like Alash, which promoted ethnic, religious, and cultural separatism. In southern Semirech'e, the result was that in the early days after the October revolution, Bolshevik influence did not extend much further than the *uezd* centers of Pishpek, Toqmoq, and Przheval'sk, which had the largest concentrations of Slavic residents.

In 1918, the Bolshevik party began a program of mass recruitment, in Central Asia as in other parts of the Soviet state, intended to expand the party's ranks. The need for new members was so great that Bolshevik recruiters at first ignored the social background of prospective members, thus allowing some *bays* and *manaps* to infiltrate the organization. At this early stage in its development, the Bolshevik party could not afford to be too selective in restricting its potential members to those with "proletarian roots." According to Kurmanov, the Bolsheviks also understood the influence that the *manaps* continued to have over the common people, and hoped to gain their trust in order to attract more members from the non-Russian population.⁵³ One result of all this was that in 1918, membership in the Bolshevik party was open to Kyrgyz intellectuals. In fact, by the end of that year, this was the only choice available to them, since all other parties were shut down following an assassination attempt on Lenin. Thus the Pishpek branch of Alash was disbanded in the summer of 1918, and in the same year Arabaev, Sydykov and various other members of the Kyrgyz cultural and political elite entered the party of the Bolsheviks.

Throughout the Civil War, Sydykov worked in administrative positions in the Semirech'e regional revolutionary committee [*revkom*], helping to strengthen Bolshevik rule in the region.

⁵² Kurmanov, *Politicheskaya bor'ba*, 64-65.

⁵³ Idem., 69.

He began organizing Muslim cells of the Communist party in Turkestan, in an effort to increase the number of Muslims in the party.⁵⁴ With the creation of the Muslim Bureau [*Musbiuro*] of the regional committee of the Communist Party of Turkestan [KPT], Sydykov went as a delegate to the Semirech'e regional Muslim Party conference and was elected as an assistant to the chair of *Musbiuro*.⁵⁵ After a time, *Musbiuro* came to be seen as a threat to the integrity of the Communist Party and was disbanded, after which Sydykov was appointed to a position in Vernyi as chair of the administration of the regional committee of KPT in Semirech'e.

Arabaev, meanwhile, was involved in the committee assisting Kyrgyz refugees in Przheval'sk *uezd*. In 1920, Arabaev, along with a group of Kyrgyz activists that included the poet Isak Shaibekov and Shabdan's son Isametdin Shabdanov, co-authored a letter addressed "personally to comrade V. I. Lenin," which expressed their concerns about the plight of the Kyrgyz. The letter began, "If anybody asks us whether the Kyrgyz of Semirech'e *oblast* enjoy the freedom bestowed by the class [*soslovnyi*] revolution, we would say that we do not enjoy the freedom and in fact do not have it as such."⁵⁶ They complained about the lack of schools for Kyrgyz children, about the revolt of 1916 and the flight to China, and about peasant resettlement and land shortages. They went on to ask the Soviet government to offer financial aid to the refugees, allowing them to return from China and resettle on their own lands, as well as to guarantee their protection from Russian peasants.⁵⁷ Lenin received the letter, and M. D.

⁵⁴ Kurmanov, *Abdykerim Sydykov*, 42-43.

⁵⁵ The Muslim Bureau of the regional committee of the Turkestan Communist Party was created in 1919 with the approval of TsK RKP, but functioned for only six months. The goal for the creation of *Musbiuro* was to "calm Muslim irritation at Russian chauvinism." The Turkestani Communists Turar Ryskulov, Nizametdin Khojaev and Mukhitdinov led the Bureau, but went too far in their desire to establish *Musbiuro* as an independent organization. Furthermore, its leaders went on to rename the KPT as the Turkic Communist Party, which was unacceptable to the center. See Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2001), 56.

⁵⁶ V. Ploskikh, *Repressirovannaia kul'tura Kyrgyzstana, maloizuchennnye stranitsy istorii* (Bishkek: Ilim, 2002), 179.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Kamenskii re-addressed it to the People's Committee on Nationalities [*Narkomnats*], asking them to get involved in addressing the situation.⁵⁸ Ultimately the plea was not in vain, for with the approval of the Politburo and KPT, the Ninth Congress of Soviets in Turkestan took away the privileges of the Slavic settlers, and restored all lands seized from Kazakh and Kyrgyz nomads before the revolt of 1916.⁵⁹

For the most part, however, Arabaev's energies were focused on culture and education. He organized preparatory schools to educate Kyrgyz children using the new method in Przheval'sk *uezd*. In 1919, he attended the Turkestan teachers' regional assembly in Tashkent. All the while he continued to contribute opinion pieces to the Kazakh-Kyrgyz language newspapers *Ak jol* and *Sholpan*.⁶⁰ In one article in *Ak jol*, Arabaev told of his conversations with Kyrgyz students studying at the Kazakh-Kyrgyz institute in Tashkent. He expressed his delight that these students were planning to return to their native villages during the summer break, and combine entertainment with education by staging plays, reading literary works to the people, and helping to explain to them the policies of the Soviet government. Arabaev wrote, "My hope was

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Loring, "Building Socialism," 40. According to 1917 statistics, the population of the Naryn Mountain *raion* was 94 percent Kyrgyz, 5 percent Russian, and 1 percent "indigineous" [*tuzemnoe*]; The population of Pishpek *raion* in 1920 was 64 percent Kyrgyz, 32 percent Russian, and 4 percent "indigenous." GARF, f. 6892, op. 1, d. 32, ll. 10, 12. By April 1921, Soviet authorities had removed 14 European villages in Przheval'sk *uezd*, 12 villages in Pishpek *uezd*, and 1 village and 10 homesteads in Vernyi *uezd*. These liquidations freed up 18,000 *dessiatinas* (48,345 acres, 197 sq. km.) of land for 1,186 Kyrgyz and Kazakh households. By June of the same year, 32 villages and 54 homesteads were liquidated in Pishpek and Przheval'sk *uezds*, displacing over 14,000 people. The European population of the Naryn district was grouped into a single settlement, Kochkor. Cited in: Loring, *Building Socialism*, 47. Kh. Karasaev, who returned with his family to settle in Isyk Kul in a former Slavic settlement, wrote in his memoir: "I was astonished when I saw the village of Taldy Suu [in Przheval'sk district] in 1921. Their [Russian] houses were built of *karagai*, and there had been rose bushes and fruit trees in every yard. When I returned after a few years – the village was unrecognizable. The walls were falling down. People, who never lived in a house all their lives could not get used to living a sedentary life right away. I suppose several years of preparatory work and training would have been needed [for them to get used to it]." Karasaev, *Khusein naama*, 185-186. Another group of Kyrgyz, appealed to Turkestan TsIK on January 27, 1920, requesting aid for the Kyrgyz refugees: "V presidium Turtsika ot Semirechenskikh delegatov," TsGA KR, f. 75, op. 1, d. 43, ll. 14-18.

⁶⁰ Abdrakhmanov, *Eki door insany*, 113.

renewed, that the Kyrgyz spirit, which had survived the calamities of 1916-17, would someday reach parity with the neighboring nations.”⁶¹

With the dissolution of the Alash Orda Autonomy and the establishment of the Kirghiz [Kazakh] ASSR in 1920, the focus of Kazakh intellectual activity shifted to Orenburg, while Vernyi and Tashkent served as cultural and political centers for the Kazakh and Kyrgyz intellectuals of Semirech’e, which remained a part of the Turkestan ASSR. When the Kirghiz ASSR was created, much of the Kazakh population remained within the Turkestan ASSR, but it was decided that they would be transferred gradually to the Kirghiz ASSR, based on their own expressed desire to switch.⁶² By 1922, the delimitation of the Turkestan and Kirghiz ASSRs was a burning issue for the People’s Commissariat of Nationalities [*Narkomnats*], prompting it to reach out to TsK KPT and the Kirghiz regional committee of RKP(b) for input. The Kirghiz ASSR requested authority over Semirech’e and Syr-Dar’ia *oblasts* of Turkestan ASSR, and their population made up largely of nomadic Kazakhs and Kyrgyz. Kyrgyz intellectuals were divided over this issue; some of them, including Sydykov and Arabaev, were against the realignment, seeing it as the end of Kyrgyz autonomy; whereas others, headed by Rakhmankul Khudaikulov, saw no objection to combining the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs in the Kirghiz ASSR.⁶³ It was in response to this disagreement that the idea arose to create the Mountain Kyrgyz Oblast within the RSFSR. The effort was championed by a group of Kyrgyz political and cultural leaders, led by Sydykov, who was now a chair of the Semirech’e regional executive committee [*oblispolkom*],

⁶¹ I. Arabaev, “Kyrgyz shakirtteri,” *Aq jol*, no. 10, 1921. Published in Abdrakhmanov, *Eki door insany*, 203-204.

⁶² Kurmanov, *Abdykerim Sydykov*, 58.

⁶³ Rakhmankul Khudaikulov (1885-1930s?) was born into a family of a *mullah* in the Sarybaghysh tribe. Khudaikulov participated actively in the revolt of 1916, and joined the Bolshevik party in 1918. From 1921 to 1924, Khudaikulov was head of the Semirech’e Oblast *Koshchu* Union. In 1925 and 1926, he chaired the *Koshchu* Union of KKAO, and served as a member of the KKAO Executive Committee. Subsequently he worked for various agricultural departments. See Z. Kurmanov, *Natsional’naia intelligentsia*, 359.

and Arabaev, who headed one of the departments in the Semirech'e *oblispolkom*.⁶⁴ As in 1917, the pair were once again combining their talents and energies in a political cause—this time to promote territorial autonomy for the Kyrgyz.

In March 1922, Sydykov presented the idea of the Kyrgyz Mountain Oblast to the Turkestan Executive Committee. According to his plan, this future *oblast* for the Kyrgyz was to consist of Pishpek, Przheval'sk, and Naryn *uezds*, along with the mountainous districts of Aulie Ata *uezd* (the Talas region in present-day Kyrgyzstan).⁶⁵ The question of integrating mountainous areas of the Ferghana valley inhabited by the Kyrgyz tribes was postponed until the *basmachis* rebellion was put off in the region.⁶⁶ The capital of the future *oblast* would be Kochkor, which had been settled by the Russians driven out of Naryn *uezd* in 1920 and 1921.⁶⁷ At the end of March, the TsK KPT and the Executive Committee of Turkestan approved Sydykov's plan, and preparations began to organize a congress of the Kara Kyrgyz in June.⁶⁸ On April 2, S. Khodzhanov, the Chair of the Central Executive Committee of the Turkestan ASSR, signed a decree approving the creation of the Mountain Oblast.⁶⁹

From this point on, the effort to establish Kyrgyz autonomy became the focal point of a political struggle between two groups led by Sydykov and Khudaikulov. Rakhmankul Khudaikulov was a representative of the *Koshchu* Union, one of the largest mass organizations in Semirech'e, whose members came from the more reliable "proletarian" backgrounds.

⁶⁴ "Sozyv s'ezda po obrazovaniu gornoi kara-kirgizskoi oblasti v Turkestanskoi respublike v 1922 g." in Dz. Dzhunushaliev et al. comp., *Iusup Abdrakhmanov: izbrannye trudy* (Bishkek: Sham, 2001), 263.

⁶⁵ Kurmanov, *Politicheskai bor'ba*, 126; "Sozyv," 263-277.

⁶⁶ "Sozyv," 263. The *basmachis* movement, directed against the establishment of the Soviet rule in the Ferghana valley, ravaged the region until the mid-1920s. On the *basmachis* activities in the Ferghana valley see Loring, "Building Socialism."

⁶⁷ See footnote 59.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ RGASPI f. 62, op. 2, d. 43, l. 6.

Khudaikulov offered vigorous opposition to Kyrgyz autonomy, instead favoring administrative rapprochement between the Kyrgyz and the Kazakhs of the Kirghiz ASSR.⁷⁰ Khudaikulov's opposition had its basis in political and personal motivations, but nevertheless he was able to find support among the communist leadership of Turkestan and later Semirech'e, both of which requested that the congress be cancelled.⁷¹ Soon the struggle between the two factions escalated into a political war between the leaders in Tashkent and Vernyi, and the leaders of Pishpek *uezd*. Unable to control the Pishpek *uezd* party organization, the Semirech'e regional committee opted for compromise, declaring that only administrative and territorial secession for the future Kyrgyz autonomous region could be considered at the congress.⁷²

On June 1, 1921, the Semirech'e regional committee published a statement on the Kara Kyrgyz congress in the *uezd* newspaper, *Krasnoe Utro*. It announced that the assembly was to be called the First Congress of the Kara Kyrgyz People, and that all its resolutions were to be sent to Tashkent for approval. It suggested the establishment of a revolutionary committee to oversee the Mountain Oblast's internal affairs, but noted that all decisions regarding land, the military, nationality issues, and the activities of the *Koshchu* Union were to be confirmed with the Semirech'e regional committee of KPT and Tashkent.⁷³ The center, in this case, was willing to grant a degree of freedom to Kyrgyz activists, but kept their "national" aspirations on a short leash. In the same issue of the paper, Sydykov, who had earlier been dismissed from the

⁷⁰ Kurmanov, *Politicheskaiia bor'ba*, 129. The *Koshchu* Union was created in 1920 at the Fifth Congress of the Turkestan KP. It was to unite the "full- and half-proletariats of the villages" and consisted largely of the poorer strata of Kyrgyz society. It began operating in Naryn, Pishpek, and Przheval'sk *uezds* in 1921, and created 47 peasant soviets with 8,000 members. Its main goal was to protect the interests of the poor. The union was active till 1933. As head of the *Koshchu* Union, Khudaikulov saw it as his duty to report diligently on the activities of the "bai-manap elements."

⁷¹ Idem., 133-134; "Sozyv," 265-267.

⁷² Idem., 134.

⁷³ Ibid.

Communist party for his “doubtful” origins, published an essay entitled, “A Short Sketch on the History of the Kirghiz People.”⁷⁴ His intent in writing this essay on the eve of the congress is readily apparent—he wished to establish clear cultural, ethnic, and linguistic boundaries between the Kazakhs and the Kyrgyz. The text was studded with Sydykov’s views on what made the Kyrgyz unique:

1. The Kyrgyz are an independent people (*narodnost*), distinct from the other Turkic peoples inhabiting Central Asia (including from the Kazakhs, although some previously thought them united), but connected with them through their origin from related ancient tribes.
2. [D]ue to their specific geographic location (in mountainous areas suitable for livestock grazing), they preserved their tribal type, language, customs, and traditions in almost pristine form.
5. Are the Kyrgyz a separate Kazakh tribe, or are they an independent people who preserved their original type and character? The Kazakhs, by their ethnic constitution, belong to a Turkic tribe and present a bright mixture of different branches of that tribe, mixed with different people throughout centuries of nomadism in the steppes. The Kyrgyz, on the contrary, differ through the homogeneity and wholeness of their type.
7. According to Chokan Valikhanov, the tribes of Kazakhs and Kyrgyz differ in their language, origin, and customs. He also acknowledged that “even in physiognomy of the Kyrgyz there is something unique, non-Kazakh.”
9. Love for poetry is the trait that differentiates the Kyrgyz [from others], along with the ability to express their thoughts not only clearly, but also graciously and eloquently. Therefore, their oral literature is quite developed...
10. Epic works depict the deeds of the *baatyr*s, and some of them have historical basis. ...*Manas* and *Semetey* are told in a pure and rich Kyrgyz language.
11. Folktales are numerous and their content varies greatly. Works of oral poetry are not narrated, but sung to the accompaniment of stringed instruments, such as the *chertmek* and *qomuz*.
15. ...The Kyrgyz had their own aristocracy, made up of *manaps* from the “best people,” descended from a number of *biys*. None of the *manaps* traced the origin of their tribe to Chingiz Khan.⁷⁵

Sydykov was adamant in his efforts to prove the purity, uniqueness, and ancient roots of the Kyrgyz, their language, and their customs. He built his concept of Kyrgyz identity by

⁷⁴ Abdykerim Sydykov, “Kratkii ocherk istorii razvitiia kirgizskogo naroda,” *Krasnoe Utro*, June 1, 1922. I was not able to get hold of the original publication. The text I used was reprinted in Z. Kurmanov, et al. *Abdykerim Sydykov – natsional’nyi lider* (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan, 1992).

⁷⁵ Kurmanov, *Abdykerim Sydykov*, 76-83.

combining already existing popular notions of Kyrgyzzness with some recent “scholarly” findings about the Kyrgyz. In his effort to provide something that he felt was indisputably Kyrgyz, Sydykov tapped into the literary culture of his people, employing the sources of oral literature as the basis of an argument about Kyrgyz particularity. It is important to note that Sydykov’s interest in oral literature was not superficial or affected. As the grandson of an influential *manap*, Sydykov had extensive exposure to the literary milieu of oral poets and singers. He was personally acquainted with Sagymbay Orozbaqov and his *Manas* recitation, and, according to his daughter, Nurzhamal Bairova, transcribed some of Sagymbay’s passages himself.⁷⁶ National identity rooted in the literary culture of oral poetry, the *Manas* epic, and folktales was important to Sydykov, and constituted a significant portion of his argument for Kyrgyz particularity. In that respect, Sydykov’s views on Kyrgyz identity were closely aligned with those of the Muslim-educated *aqyns* and intellectuals of the late-imperial period who preceded him.

Unlike those predecessors, however, Sydykov in the 1920s faced new pressures as he attempted to build his case for a “national” Kyrgyz identity distinct from the Kazakhs. He could not simply speak in abstract terms, and “imagine” his community as a collection of tribes scattered around Tian Shan. His arguments needed the backing of scientific knowledge. To this end, Sydykov cited Russian scholars’ arguments about the Enisei and Tian Shan Kyrgyz, pointed to the use of the ethnonym “Kyrgyz” in Chinese sources, and provided evidence from the “scientific” field of physiognomy that purported to differentiate the Kyrgyz from the Kazakhs.⁷⁷ Sydykov made extensive reference to concrete facts and numbers. His section “Kyrgyz Abroad” indicated that there were four *volosts* of Kyrgyz representing nearly 60,000 people in Kashgar;

⁷⁶ Z. Kurmanov, “Moi otets byl chestnym chelovekom,” *idem.*, 171.

⁷⁷ According to Sydykov, “The Kyrgyz are taller than the Kazakhs (the average Kazakh is 164 cm tall, whereas the average Kyrgyz is 167 cm tall). The skull shape of the Kyrgyz is more elongated. Finally, the Kyrgyz have narrower forehead and wider jaw bones.” *Idem.*, 78.

and 5 *volosts* in Uch Turfan, 12 *volosts* in Aksu, and 5 *volosts* in Quchar totaling 330,000 people in China. In Afghanistan, according to Sydykov, there were “plenty” of Kyrgyz from the Qataghan tribe.⁷⁸ These facts, concluded Sydykov, “merit a great deal of attention in political terms.”⁷⁹

At this stage, the Kazakhs appeared to represent the greatest threat to Kyrgyz autonomy. Arabaev, Sydykov and their supporters were all convinced that if the Kyrgyz were to become part of the Kirghiz [Kazakh] autonomous republic, they would be treated as an offshoot of the Kazakh nation, and subsist at the margins of the Kazakh politics, economy and culture. Now, with the Kara Kyrgyz People’s Congress impending, its opponents made one more effort to cancel the event, at a meeting of the executive committee of the Semirech’e *obkom* KPT. There Rakhmankulov and the Semirech’e *obkom* expressed their conviction that the *bay* and *manap* elements, led by Sydykov, were ignoring the opinions of the Kyrgyz poor and trying to establish Kyrgyz autonomy solely for their own benefit.⁸⁰ With Sydykov absent, Arabaev was the only person to speak in support of the congress. As a compromise position, he suggested that the congress proceed as planned, but that the poor and the *batrachestvo* should also have opportunities to voice their opinions.⁸¹

At last the congress convened on June 4, 1922 under the working title “The First Historical Preparatory Congress of the Working Masses of the Kara Kirghiz People on the Creation of the Mountain Oblast within Turkestan Republic with Attendance of the Representatives from National Minorities of this Territory.” More than four-hundred people

⁷⁸ Idem., 80.

⁷⁹ Idem., 81.

⁸⁰ Kurmanov, *Poiliticheskai bor’ba*, 130.

⁸¹ Ibid.

attended, including Russian, Jewish, Kazakh, Dungan, Ukrainian, Tatar, and Uighur representatives of the region's "national minorities."⁸² Among the participants were R. Khudaikulov and U. Dzhandosov, from the Semirech'e regional committee of KPT, both of whom tried to disrupt the proceedings.⁸³ The majority of delegates voted in favor of creating the Kyrgyz Mountain Oblast, and the congress passed thirteen resolutions supporting the formation of the Kyrgyz autonomous *oblast* within the Turkestan ASSR.⁸⁴

Their hopes for Kyrgyz autonomy were short-lived, however. On June 13, 1922, the Turkestan Bureau (later renamed *Sredazbiuro*) in Tashkent received a telegram from Joseph Stalin, then General Secretary and People's Commissar on Nationalities, which expressed the central government's bewilderment about the congress in Pishpek on Kara Kyrgyz autonomy. He asked that TsK RKP(b) be informed immediately as to who authorized the congress, who the organizers were, and the nature of the congress.⁸⁵ The telegram put an end to the creation of the Kyrgyz Mountain Oblast; political leaders in Tashkent and Vernyi were reprimanded, and Sydykov was transferred to the Commissariat of Agriculture [*Narkomzem*] in Tashkent.⁸⁶ The first attempt to establish Kyrgyz autonomy proved unsuccessful, with several factors playing into its failure. First, the Kyrgyz political elite were not united in their demand for autonomy; instead they were caught up in personal disputes and divided in their vision for the future development of the Kyrgyz as a nation. Second, they did not persuasively justify the need for the Kyrgyz autonomy. In the end, their evidence for Kazakh and Kyrgyz difference was insufficient to convince the center. But third and most importantly, in the early-1920s the Soviet leadership

⁸² Idem., 134, 140.

⁸³ Dzhandosov was chased away from the congress and Khudaikulov was punched in the face. Idem., 135.

⁸⁴ RGASPI f. 17, op. 33, d. 141, ll. 11-12. For a detailed description of how the events unfolded at the congress see Kurmanov, *Politicheskaya bor'ba*, 132-137.

⁸⁵ Idem., 138.

⁸⁶ Idem., 141.

itself was not yet ready to create ethnically homogenous territorial entities in Turkestan.

Although discussions of national delimitation in Central Asia had begun in the Central Committee in 1920, no specific plan had yet been developed.⁸⁷ In addition to Turkestan, the center had to deal with administrative and economic problems in the People's Republics of Khorezm and Bukhara, while trying to develop a more or less viable plan for the administrative-territorial division of Central Asia as a whole.⁸⁸ Seen in this light, it is clear that the initiative of the Kyrgyz elite had been premature. Not until two more years had passed would conditions become more favorable.

“The Kara Kyrgyz Must Develop Separately”: the Second Attempt at Kyrgyz Autonomy

The project of the TsK RKP(b) for national delimitation in Central Asia was finalized on June 12, 1924, eventually leading to the creation of the five Central Asian national republics. That day marked the beginning of a long process of drawing up borders, dividing the population of Central Asia, and creating and managing its national elite.⁸⁹ The state relied on the “academic cultural technologies of rule” collected by imperial and Soviet ethnographers, as well as local elites.⁹⁰ A centerpiece of the project was the policy of indigenization [*korenizatsiia*], which for a

⁸⁷ By 1920, in order to deal with growing “pan-Turkic” sentiments among the Central Asian elite, Soviet leadership in Moscow had decided to divide Turkestan into three major republics. Pan-Turkism, the idea of uniting all the Turkic people of Central Asia, regardless of their ethnic background, came from Turar Ryskulov, a Kazakh intellectual and political activist who later served as the chair of the *Sovnarkom* in the Turkestan ASSR. See Sergei Abashin, “Istoriia zarozhdeniia i sovremennoe sostoianie sredneaziatskikh natsionalizmov,” in S. V. Cheshko, ed. *Natsionalizmy v Srednei Azii, v poiskakh idenitichnosti* (Sankt-Peterburg: Alateia, 2007), 177-206.

⁸⁸ For a discussion of the political situation in Bukhara and Khorezm, and the challenges their administration posed, see Sh. Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca*, 69-80.

⁸⁹ In the Kyrgyz case, the Kara Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast was established in 1924. In 1925, it was renamed the Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast; in 1926, it became the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, and finally, in 1936 it was titled the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic, existing under that name until 1991.

⁹⁰ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005). In the 1920s, Soviet ethnographers were responsible for delineating Central Asian identities and studying “tribal and clan divisions” [*plemennoe i rodovoe delenie*] of the population of Central Asia.

time, at least, gave preference to the development of indigenous languages and leaders.⁹¹ But most importantly, the soviet nation-building was guided by the Soviet nationalities policy worked out by Lenin and Stalin in the late-imperial period.⁹² The policy was approved at the Twelfth party Congress in April 1923 and at a Central Committee conference on nationalities policy in June 1923.⁹³ Four national forms were to be supported according to the Soviet nationalities policy - national territories, national languages, national elites, and national cultures – as long as they did not interfere with a central state.⁹⁴

Struggles among the national elites of these newly created states over material resources, land and cultural institutions would continue for years. Earlier historical studies had suggested that Moscow was the major political actor behind the process of national delimitation of Central Asia. Recent research, however, has offered a more balanced picture, by including the voices of local political and cultural elites during the process. These studies have argued convincingly that the opinions of local elites did matter, and were taken into consideration during the debates on delimitation.⁹⁵ The example of the Kyrgyz elite here supports the existing view.

The Soviet state encouraged and rewarded the works of “orientalists”—the commission on delimitation listed a monetary reward [*gonorar*] of 300 rubles per work on each nationality [*narodnost*]. These nationalities included Uzbek, Tajik, Kirgiz, Kara Kirgiz, Turkmen, and Karakalpak, with “other” as the seventh nationality. GARF, f. 6892, op. 1, d. 32, ll. 58-61.

⁹¹ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

⁹² Idem., 3.

⁹³ Idem., 9.

⁹⁴ Idem., 10.

⁹⁵ Among these, Adrienne Edgar’s study offers a detailed account of the “making” of the Turkmen nation, and along with the role of the state during the process, she does an excellent job in stressing the role of native Turkmen intellectuals in negotiating with the state what it meant to be Turkmen (the meaning of Turkmen-ness). Her argument follows in the footsteps of other recent scholarship on nation formation and national delimitation in the Soviet Union. However she excels by bringing actual native voices into the narrative, and by providing extensive information on native political figures active before and during the process of delimitation. See: Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: the Making of the Soviet Turkmenistan*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005). Arno Haugen argues that national delimitation of Central Asia was not driven by any ideological goal, but by the center’s attempt to efficiently implement its project of modernization. Arno Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia*, (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

In early 1924, the Central Committee of the RKP(b) raised the question of the delimitation of Central Asia in earnest. Several factors encouraged the Central Committee to pursue delimitation, but one of the major concerns in Moscow was the existence of ongoing conflicts between the various ethnic groups of the Turkestan ASSR, the Bukharan People's Republic, and the People's Republic of Khorezm, over the distribution of resources. The Central Asian Bureau [*Sredazbiuro*], a major governing body of the Central Committee of the RKP(b) in Turkestan, was put in charge of overseeing the delimitation.⁹⁶ In March 1924, members of the TsK KPT and TsKK, members of *Sredazbiuro* of TsK RKP(b), and members of the Turkestan's central executive committee met in Tashkent. There was only one item on the agenda – the national delimitation of Turkestan.⁹⁷ Ishenaaly Arabaev was joined at the meeting by Zhusup Abdrakhmanov⁹⁸ as members representing the “Kara Kirghiz.” The discussion began by evaluating the pros and cons of national delimitation in Central Asia. A. Rakhimbaev, a member of *Sredazbiuro*, stressed the necessity of dividing Central Asia along national lines. If one did not take steps to create homogenous national republics, he stated, the result would be constant “national debates” over the distribution of resources.⁹⁹ The creation of national republics, by contrast, would further the cause of socialism, Rakhimbaev maintained. “[I]f the Uzbek poor

⁹⁶ On the Central Asian Bureau, see Shoshana Keller, “The Central Asian Bureau, an Essential Tool in Governing Turkestan,” *Central Asian Survey* (June/September 2003) 22 (2/3), 281-297.

⁹⁷ RGASPI f. 62, op. 2, d. 101, l. 7. “Protokol no. 1, soveshchaniia chlenov i kandidatov v TsK KPT, TsKK, chlenov *Sredazbiuro* TsK RKP (b), chlenov Prezidiuma Turtsika i otvetrabotnikov g. Tashkenta.”

⁹⁸ Zhusup (Iusup) Abdrakhmanov (1901-1938) was born in a village near Przheval'sk. From 1910 to 1916 he studied in the Russian-native school in Sazanovka. In 1916 he lost his parents and fled to China. He served in the Red Army between 1918 and 1919, and from 1920 to 1924 he was involved in various district-level party committees. He became executive secretary of the Turkestan TsIK in 1924, while working in different capacities in the *oblast* and state committees. Abdrakhmanov was executed in 1938 for participating in the Alash Orda organization. On Abdrakhmanov see Dzh. Dzhunushaliev and I. E. Semenov, “Vernyi syn naroda” in IU. Abdrakhmanov, *Izbrannye Trudy* (Bishkek: Sham, 2001), 74-76; IU. Abdrakhmanov, *1916. Dnevnik. Pis'ma Stalinu* (Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1991).

⁹⁹ RGASPI f. 62, op. 2, d. 101, l. 10.

fight with the Uzbek kulak, the Turkmen poor with the Turkmen, and the Kirghiz with the Kirghiz, then our class struggle won't be shaded out by national moments.”¹⁰⁰

One immediate obstacle for delimitation was posed by “the Kirghiz (Kazakh) part of Turkestan,” or Syr-Dar’ia and Semirech’e *oblasts*, which were populated largely by Kazakhs and Kyrgyz. To Rakhimbaev, uniting these *oblasts* with the Kirghiz [Kazakh] ASSR was not an option, for this would increase the territory of the Kirghiz ASSR, and tip the regional balance in favor of the Kazakhs. Therefore, he suggested they be united into a single republic, which would remain under the authority of Turkestan.¹⁰¹ Rakhimbaev’s plan would therefore provide national territories only for the Kazakhs, Turkmen, and Uzbeks. This proposal was countered by S. Khodzhanov, then a People’s Commissar of Agriculture in the Turkestan ASSR, supported by other Kazakh activists from the Turkestan executive committee.¹⁰² Khodzhanov was convinced that economic, rather than national, problems were at the root of the conflicts in the Turkestan ASSR, and suggested that the state focus on improving the economic conditions for any given nationality, rather than heeding the “national longings [*vozhdeleniia*]” of their elites.¹⁰³ Although Khodzhanov did not present a concrete plan for delimitation, his assessment reflected the views of many Kazakh and Kyrgyz leaders, who feared Uzbek cultural and economic domination within the Turkestan ASSR.

Interpretations of the Kara Kyrgyz delegation’s demands at the meeting on national delimitation vary widely, being seen as everything from heroic to opportunistic. Kurmanov

¹⁰⁰ RGASPI f. 62, op. 2, d. 101, l. 12.

¹⁰¹ RGASPI f. 62, op. 2, d. 101, l. 13.

¹⁰² According to Haugen, the Kazakh communist leadership of Turkestan was against merging with the Kirghiz ASSR for fear of being marginalized. They felt a strong affinity with Turkestan, which would be jeopardized if they were to become part of the Kirghiz ASSR with its center in Orenburg. Arno Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 117.

¹⁰³ RGASPI f. 62, op. 2, d. 101, l. 26.

stresses the struggle the Kyrgyz delegation put up in order to bring the “Kara Kirghiz question” to the fore during the debate.¹⁰⁴ Haugen, by contrast, views the Kyrgyz demands for national autonomy as a direct result of the delimitation process itself.¹⁰⁵ He further argues that *Sredazbiuro* anticipated demands for Tajik or Kyrgyz autonomy, and came prepared to make concessions.¹⁰⁶ Assessing these conflicting interpretations requires a closer look at the demands of the “Kara Kirghiz” delegation, and the ways in which they were expressed.

Arabaev acted as the major spokesperson for Kyrgyz interests at the meeting in March, 1924. Although there was no “Kara Kirghiz” autonomy at that time, Arabaev started out by expressing his dissatisfaction that Rakhimbaev failed to mention “Kara Kirgiziia” in his speech on delimitation. He then continued to say:

When creating the government and the TurTsIK, the interests of Kara Kirgiziia are also being neglected. The Kara Kirghiz differ from the Kazakh Kirghiz in their language and other characteristics. Therefore, the Kara Kyrgyz question has to be reviewed independent of the Kirghiz [Kazakh] question, and independent of whether Semirech’e *oblast* will be merged with the Kirghiz [Kazakh] ASSR or not. As for the Kara Kirghiz, they must stay within Turkestan. ...[T]he language of the Kara Kirghiz is different from the Kirghiz [Kazakh] language, therefore, for us, the Kirghiz [Kazakh] textbooks are not textbooks with which one can teach children. The Kara Kirghiz must develop separately. The Ferghana Kyrgyz have economic commonalities with the Kyrgyz of Semirech’e, they also have some relations. Therefore, it is necessary to separate the Kara Kirghiz.¹⁰⁷

In this statement, Arabaev made two key points. First, just as the supporters of the Kyrgyz Mountain Oblast had done in 1922, Arabaev and the Kyrgyz delegation highlighted their differences from the Kazakhs and their own national distinctiveness. This statement might have sounded strange coming from Arabaev, who as recently as 1911 had joined with a Kazakh peer

¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, Kyrgyz scholars ignore Arabaev’s contribution, or even participation, in this debate. Z. Kurmanov mentions only the participation of Zh. Abdrakhmanov, I. Aidarbekov, R. Khudaikulov, and D. Babakhanov. Z. Kurmanov, *Politicheskaiia bor’ba*, 146.

¹⁰⁵ Haugen, *Establishment of National Republics*, 169.

¹⁰⁶ *Idem.*, 171.

¹⁰⁷ RGASPI f. 62, op. 2, d. 101, ll. 40-41.

at the Ghaliya *medrese* to write a primer for Kyrgyz and Kazakh children (see Chapter 4). Back then, his text had been widely used to teach Kyrgyz children the basics of reading and writing.¹⁰⁸ But now, little more than a decade later, Arabaev clearly saw his own people and their relationship to the Kazakhs in a very different light.

Yet although Kyrgyz intellectuals like Arabaev perceived a significant distinction between the Kyrgyz and the Kazakhs, they also well understood that in the political climate of 1924, that alone would not be sufficient to justify Kyrgyz autonomy. This awareness prompted Arabaev's second line of argument, which was to emphasize the importance of the Kyrgyz in the Ferghana valley, and their cultural, economic, and historic ties to the Kyrgyz of Semirech'e.¹⁰⁹ As discussed earlier, the Kyrgyz Mountain Oblast project of 1922 did not include the Kyrgyz of Ferghana, although the relationship between the Kyrgyz of Semirech'e and Ferghana had always been acknowledged in Kyrgyz tribal genealogies and histories. As someone in a leadership position who travelled extensively throughout the region, Arabaev saw the Kyrgyz in Ferghana as "oppressed" by the Uzbek majority, and he recognized an opportunity to use the language of "oppression and backwardness" in an effort to bring the Ferghana Kyrgyz into the fold:¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Karasaev, *Khusein Naama*, 75.

¹⁰⁹ From 1917 to 1924, the Ferghana valley was within the Turkestan ASSR. Administratively, it was divided between Ferghana and Samarkand *oblasts*. It consisted of Khodzhen, Namangan, Andijan, Ferghana, Kokand and Osh *uezds*. The Ferghana valley was, and still is, one of the most complex regions in Central Asia in terms of ethno-linguistic and social composition. On the ethnic composition of the Ferghana valley see S. N. Abashin, "Naselenie Ferganskoi doliny (k stanovleniiu etnograficheskoi nomenklatury v kontse XIX-nachale XX veka)" in S. N. Abashin and V. I. Bushkov eds., *Ferganskaia dolina: etnichnost', etnicheskie protsessy, etnicheskie konflikty* (Moscow, Nauka, 2004). On the territorial delimitation of the Ferghana valley, see Arslan Koichiev, *Natsional'no-territorial'noe razmezhevanie v Ferganskoi doline (1924-1927)* (Bishkek, 2001).

¹¹⁰ Terry Martin places the "rhetoric of backwardness" in light of the competition of the Soviet national elites to secure certain financial help from the center. He argues that Bolsheviks turned "backwardness" into an official category which became associated with rewards. See Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 125-132. Haugen stresses the importance of the "rhetoric of backwardness" in the debates of the national elites for the cultural and territorial autonomy. See Haugen, *Establishment of National Republics*, 130. By 1926, "backwardness" came to be associated with "traditional society" which would hinder the development of the Soviet state, and thus, the Soviet assault was

There are 64 schools in Ferghana, 20 orphanages, and 2 technical schools. There are a total of 11,800 students in the boarding and technical schools. But, if comrade Karimov says that 200 of these students are Kara Kirghiz, I will be very happy. If he says that 5 of these schools are Kara Kirghiz schools, I will also be happy. The point is that there are no schools for the Kara Kirghiz on the state budget. The Kyrgyz themselves opened schools there, named after T. Ryskulov, Serghaziev, and the third after Khodzhanov, hoping that if they took the lead, the government of Turkestan would help them financially. But there was no support, and as a result they closed. The boarding schools are closed due to the lack of teachers and school supplies. There are no newspapers in the Kara Kirghiz language in Ferghana *oblast*, nor any booklets. Recently, a Kara Kirghiz from Ferghana went to the Kirghiz Institute of Enlightenment [*Inpros*], and since he spoke Uzbek, they did not accept him. He then went to Uzbek *Inpros*, where they looked at his physiognomy [*fizionomiia*] and said that he looks Kirghiz and told him to go to the Kirghiz *Inpros*. In the end, he had to go back to Ferghana.¹¹¹

Fierce fights for resources among the Central Asian elites preceded the meetings on delimitation, and were an ever-present factor during the debates. The Kazakhs complained about Uzbek domination, The Kyrgyz complained about the Kazakhs, and the Tajiks, despite coming late to the discussion of territorial autonomy, expressed their dissatisfaction with the Uzbeks.¹¹² Arabaev's statement above reflected the feelings of many Central Asian communists. The Kyrgyz of Ferghana, whose right to "national self-determination" was being jeopardized by their minority status and lack of resources, could, in Arabaev's view, develop properly only if they were united with the larger group of Kyrgyz in Semirech'e. But before the Kyrgyz could be united, Kara Kyrgyz autonomy itself would have to first be secured.¹¹³

One last point to be drawn from Arabaev's polemic is the sheer fluidity it reveals in the national identity of an ordinary Kyrgyz citizen in 1920s. It was natural for a young Kyrgyz man to go to the "Kirghiz [Kazakh]" Institute of Enlightenment [*Inpros*, or *Institut Prosveshcheniia*],

directed toward eradicating "old" for the sake of the "modern." See Adeeb Khalid, "Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective," *Slavic Review*, 65, 2 (2006):242-243.

¹¹¹ RGASPI f. 62, op. 2, d. 101, l. 96.

¹¹² Haugen, *Establishment of National Republics*, 126-137.

¹¹³ RGASPI f. 62, op. 2, d. 101, l. 97.

since he felt an affinity with the Kazakhs, and for both Kazakhs and Kyrgyz it was the only place in Tashkent to further their education. But when told to go to Uzbek *Inpros*, he accepted the suggestion without hesitation. As Haugen rightfully indicates, national distinction was taking center stage in the 1920s, but it was not distributed evenly across the different components of the population.¹¹⁴ In this case, the national identity of an individual was more important to bureaucrats at the Uzbek and Kirghiz *Inpros*, which were “national” institutions, than it was to the ordinary “Kara Kirghiz” himself. But nationality was extremely important to Arabaev, also an official representative of a “national” institution, who preferred to be identified as Kara Kyrgyz only. A shrewd comment by Khodzhanov during the debate illustrates this point:

During this school year, comrade Arabaev is chair of the Kirghiz [Kazakh] Scholarly Commission, and we consider him a representative of both the Kara Kirghiz and the Kirghiz [Kazakhs]. The Kirghiz [Kazakh] portion of the workers agree to him being the chair, and one cannot say that anybody is preventing him from doing his job. On the contrary, the Kirghiz [Kazakhs] would never renounce such a worker as comrade Arabaev. In the sphere of enlightenment he can represent both, the Kirghiz [Kazakhs] and the Kara Kirghiz.¹¹⁵

As discussed earlier, Khodzhanov was among those Kazakhs who opposed the national delimitation of Turkestan, for fear of being marginalized if the Kazakhs of the Turkestan ASSR were to join the Kirghiz ASSR. He used Arabaev’s own cultural flexibility to highlight the futility of delimitation.

By 1924, Kyrgyz possessed most of the elements necessary to be called a nation, according to Stalin’s definition. They were a “historically constituted community of people” who came to be formed from various tribes; they had inhabited a certain territory for a lengthy period of time; they had an “internal economic bond” due to their integration into the Russian empire in

¹¹⁴ Haugen, *Establishment of National Republics*, 120.

¹¹⁵ RGASPI f. 62, op. 2, d. 101, l. 110.

the second half of the nineteenth century; and finally, they differed from other people in “spiritual complexion, which manifests itself in peculiarities of national culture.”¹¹⁶ The first three components had emerged over the preceding fifty years, as a result of the Russian imperial conquest, the imposition of Russian administration in the region, and the consolidation of the northern Kyrgyz tribes. The fourth characteristic, the distinctive peculiarity of Kyrgyz national culture and character, was their “love of poetry and their ability to eloquently express their thoughts,”¹¹⁷ resulting in a highly developed, rich and unique tradition of oral poetry. This last element was mostly the work of Kyrgyz *aqyns* and intellectuals in the late imperial period. The existence of this singular Kyrgyz literary culture left no doubt in the minds of those who attended the meeting on national delimitation that the Kyrgyz had their own cultural identity.

And yet, there was one major component which left the Kyrgyz short of qualifying as a nation, and this was language. The Kyrgyz did not have their own press prior to 1924, and had very few published literary works. Kyrgyz intellectuals were typically published in Kazakh newspapers, and made contributions to the development of the Kazakh literary language. The lack of publications in “Kyrgyz” made it hard to discern any signs of a “pure” Kyrgyz language. As a result, Arabaev made an all-out effort at the meeting to prove the existence of a distinct “Kara Kyrgyz” language. He chose consciously to “become and speak the language” of the Kara Kyrgyz, and to make the case that Kazakh was unintelligible to the common Kyrgyz folk. Thus, the discussions of the Kyrgyz delegation centered on the alleged “distortion,” or Kazakhification, of the Kyrgyz language. Arabaev went so far as to say that if a Kara Kyrgyz was to read a

¹¹⁶ Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question. Selected Writings and Speeches* (New York: International Publishers, 1942), 9-12. All of these points were clearly articulated by Sydykov in the article cited earlier, “A Short Sketch on the History of the Kirghiz People.”

¹¹⁷ A. Sydykov, “Kratkii ocherk,” 79.

newspaper published in Kirghiz [Kazakh], he would not be able to understand a thing.¹¹⁸ This stance was baldly hypocritical, but the tactic would ultimately pay off, when *Sredazbiuro* resolved the delimitation debate in favor of the Kara Kyrgyz.

Conclusion

Such was the discourse of the day: to promote the national autonomy of their respective nations, Central Asian elites had to learn and nimbly deploy the correct political jargon, rhetorical stances and political strategies to succeed in debates with their peers. The language used by Kyrgyz cultural elites in the 1920s differed drastically from their language during the imperial period, and their definition of Kyrgyzness naturally shifted as well. In this new political environment, being Kyrgyz at home, in southern Semirech'e, was different from being Kyrgyz in Tashkent. In the emerging atmosphere of seemingly clear-cut national identities, a Kyrgyzness that was defined by lifestyle, traditions, customs, and rich oral literature was not enough to secure territorial autonomy for the Kyrgyz. In the 1920s, the pre-existing cultural notion of Kyrgyzness became politicized.

Thus, in addition to the lack of educational facilities and supplies, both Arabaev, as well as Abdrakhmanov, brought up the problem of the lack of newspapers and brochures in Kyrgyz, and the subsequent missed opportunities to spread "Soviet ideas and the ideas of the party in Kara Kirghiz villages."¹¹⁹ They were worried that the lack of newspapers and brochures in Kyrgyz would impede the distribution of the Soviet ideas among the Kara Kyrgyz masses. Their

¹¹⁸ RGASPI f. 62, op. 2, d. 101, ll. 96-97.

¹¹⁹ RGASPI f. 62, op. 2, d. 101, ll. 102-103.

demands were perfectly in line with Stalin's mission of the Soviet power in the "east," which was "to raise the cultural level of [its] backward peoples, to build a broad system of schools and educational institutions, and to conduct ... Soviet agitation, oral and printed, in the language that is native to and understood by the surrounding laboring population."¹²⁰ By giving Kyrgyz territorial autonomy, Bolsheviks realized that their power would be strengthened among the Kyrgyz.¹²¹

The Kyrgyz had to be fashioned and presented as an aggrieved party, as a nation with a "pure" language and literature, but held in a state of "backwardness" by its minority status, and the resulting lack of cultural and educational institutions, print and publishing facilities, and literate masses. Under such circumstances, only territorial autonomy could guarantee the Kyrgyz their proper chance to develop as a nation. This was the card that the Kyrgyz and many other Central Asian elites played during the debate on national delimitation in Central Asia. On May 5, 1924, the Kirghiz and Kara Kyrgyz commission under the national delimitation commission of *Sredazbiuro* of TsK RKP(b) resolved to create the Kara Kyrgyz Autonomy consisting of the Mountain and Ferghana *okrugs*.¹²² The resolution was approved by the Central Committee, and on October 14, 1924 the Kara Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast officially came into existence.

This chapter has focused on the Kyrgyz cultural and political elites' national-territorial demands of the 1920s. Scholars have based their evaluations of these demands solely on the

¹²⁰ Quoted in Khalid, "Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization," 238.

¹²¹ On the example of the Khakass, Francine Hirsch illustrates similar goals pursued by the Soviet state officials. See Francine Hirsch, "Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities," *Russian Review*, 59, 2 (2000):213.

¹²² The Mountain *okrug* was comprised of Pishpek, Naryn, and Karakol *uezds*, and Zhaiyl and Talkan *volosts* of Aulie Ata *uezd* in Syr-Dar'ia *oblast* (the present day Talas region). The Ferghana *okrug* consisted of Osh *uezd*, the right bank of the Kara Dar'ia river in Andijan *uezd*, all the mountainous areas of Namangan *uezd*, and the mountainous areas of Aulie Ata *uezd* of Syr-Dar'ia *oblast*. Pishpek became the *okrug* center for the Mountain *okrug*, and Jalal Abad the center for the Ferghana *okrug*. RGASPI f. 62, op. 2, d. 101, l. 55.

deliberations between Soviet state officials and Central Asian elites during the meetings on national delimitation.¹²³ Thus, Francine Hirsch has stated that during the period of Soviet nation-building “local populations in Central Asia learned to manipulate the language of nationality to advance their own interests.”¹²⁴ Indeed, reading the minutes of the meeting on national delimitation, one is struck by how these demands are deliberately shaped to highlight a specific “weakness” of the perceived nations and to make this “weakness” fit into the language of nationality. I have argued in this chapter that Kyrgyz political and cultural elites of the period had to consolidate their forces and approach the national delimitation creatively in order to win a national-territorial autonomy for their community. In the previous chapters of my dissertation I have also demonstrated how this community was imagined throughout the late imperial period. The process of national delimitation of the early-Soviet period cannot be examined separately from the imperial period in the history of Central Asia. It was during the imperial period that Kyrgyz poets and intellectuals formed and crystalized various visions of the Kyrgyz community, and then expressed those visions in their poems, essays, and historical writings.

These poets and intellectuals developed their visions of the Kyrgyz community within the imperial setting as a solution to the problems that came with the Russian conquest of the region. They created these visions as an answer to the challenges presented by the changing world around them. Thus, for some educated members of the community, Islam was an integral part of their vision, while for others, education and modern knowledge were at the center of their views. Some viewed their community as consisting solely of the members of their own “northern” tribes; while for others, it allowed for a merger between the Kazakh and Kyrgyz communities.

¹²³ Hirsch, “Toward an Empire of Nations”; Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics*; Loring, “Building Socialism”; Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*.

¹²⁴ Hirsch, “Toward an Empire of Nations,” 213.

Possibilities for the development of the Kyrgyz community, as perceived by the poets and intellectuals, were endless up to 1916. After the revolt of 1916, dislocation and trauma became an important marker of their identity and a major part of their vision as a community bound by tragic fate. But with the Bolshevik takeover and consolidation of power in the early 1920s, the only vision that came to be realized was the project of the “Kyrgyz” nation, drawn up by Moscow and worked out at the meeting on national delimitation.

Conclusion

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Kyrgyz were a scattered community of tribes, with no particular attachment to any territory or political entity. As the Russian Empire advanced into Central Asia, these Kyrgyz tribal groups were gradually brought under Russian rule, the last in 1867. The fifty years of Russian imperial dominance that followed imposed a radically different set of conditions on northern Kyrgyz society. In many ways this new situation had negative consequences for the Kyrgyz. The empire divided the nomads into administrative units, tying them to the land; it created a new tribal bureaucracy, undermining the traditional system of governance; and it began a process of peasant colonization, thus depriving the Kazakh and Kyrgyz nomads of the pasturelands crucial to their sustenance. But there were positive changes as well. The empire brought much needed peace and stability to the northern Kyrgyz tribes; it exposed them to new experiences, and created new opportunities for cultural and social interaction.

Kyrgyz views of their community were developed in this imperial setting. At first Kyrgyzness was positioned against the Russian “other,” and its dimensions were sketched out only subtly, in the negative space created as Kyrgyz poets, such as Qalyghul, Arstanbek, Moldo Qylych, and Aldash Moldo, began to criticize the Russians and “their ways.” Although their poetry did not offer a complete and clearly articulated set of ideas, it started a conversation about what it was to be Kyrgyz. The view of Kyrgyz self and community identification which gradually emerged was connected to traditional social structures, culture and lifestyle, and characterized by specific practices, behaviors, and moral values. Islam was always a part of this identity; in the beginning it played a subordinate role, but by the early twentieth century, the Kyrgyz *aqyns* increasingly put religion at the heart of Kyrgyz identity, as they explained the

struggles of nomadic society as the results of religious apostasy. Social criticism reached its most developed form in the poems of the *zamana* genre. The genre emerged as a reflection on the changes brought by Russian rule. Perhaps the most critical of these changes was the disintegration of the nomadic lifestyle, as intense Slavic peasant colonization made it impossible for many Kyrgyz to sustain themselves by traditional means.

This literary and cultural milieu laid the groundwork for the first generation of Kyrgyz intellectuals, such as Ishenaaly Arabaev, Osmonaaly Sydykov, Belek Soltonoev, and many others. Their formative years coincided with the period of cultural upheaval of Central Asia, when traditional ways of learning were called into question, and new and methods of education which claimed to be more modern and effective emerged in the region's *mektebs* and *medreses*. The growth of urban centers in southern Semirech'e attracted Muslim intellectuals, merchants, and craftsmen from across Central Asia and Russia, and the movement of people facilitated the movement of ideas. Some of these ideas were expressed in the emerging regional print media, which itself represented a major change in the intellectual landscape for the northern Kyrgyz. Although few northern Kyrgyz intellectuals wrote for these publications, many more of them were readers. Through this new medium, they became aware of the larger Muslim community, and to consider their own place in it. In their travels, as well as via the print media, they also absorbed a new appreciation for particular forms of knowledge and education, influenced at least in part by European frames of reference. But the most important thing the Kyrgyz intellectuals took from their Muslim peers was an awareness of just how powerful collective memory and a sense of shared past could be in uniting their people. Thus inspired, these intellectuals began to collect and record the histories of their people, employing the style of their predecessors, the oral poets. They used the origin myths of their ancestors to write histories of their community,

supplemented with their own visions of Kyrgyzzness. Drawing inspiration from the literary heritage of the oral poets, the new Kyrgyz intellectuals offered their own social and political critique of the time they lived in, and painted their own picture of what Kyrgyz society could and should become.

This examination of social upheaval and cultural development among the Kyrgyz in the late-imperial and early-Soviet periods is important, because it shows that the idea of the Kyrgyz nation promoted by the Kyrgyz cultural and political elite during the creation of the Kara Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast in 1924, was a direct product of the historical experiences and socio-cultural transformations of the late-imperial period. It suggests that to understand the motives of Central Asian intellectuals during the process of national delimitation in the 1920s, it is necessary to consider how their views of their community were formed and evolved under particular historical circumstances. As such, this dissertation casts doubt on existing interpretations, which view the Kyrgyz nationalism of the 1920s as shallow and inauthentic, by locating the emergence of the Kyrgyz national idea in the literary culture and intellectual history of Central Asia of the late-imperial period. A particular error made by previous studies was to dismiss the Kyrgyz oral tradition as a source of identity, a historical misreading that this dissertation seeks to correct. By tracing the evolution of the idea of Kyrgyzzness in the poems of Kyrgyz *aqyns* over time, this dissertation identified themes, concepts and techniques that the first generation of Kyrgyz modernizing intellectuals would later draw from and build upon.

Unlike the Kazakhs, the Kyrgyz of the late nineteenth century lacked a strong western-educated nationalist intelligentsia; and unlike the sedentary urban populations of Turkestan, they also lacked a robust tradition of Islamic learning. As a result, it fell to the Kyrgyz oral poets to begin to develop, debate and circulate notions of Kyrgyz identity. It was only at the turn of the

twentieth century that the modernizing Kyrgyz intellectuals would emerge. This was a transitional generation, made up of men who were well-versed in the oral traditions of their ancestors, but also exposed to the concepts and attitudes of modernity through education in reformed Muslim religious institutions. In the 1910s, these Kyrgyz intellectuals could not have predicted that within some fifteen years their community could have national-territorial autonomy. They had various visions for their community, which came under threat during the revolt of 1916, but instead of dividing, the revolt became a uniting force for the northern Kyrgyz, by creating a strong bond between them through grief and loss.

And in the 1920s and 1930s, these concepts were further solidified by the Soviet state's drive to create ethnically homogenous communities united in a compact territory, and engaged in the production of their own "national" cultural and political institutions. Thus, Kyrgyz intellectuals took an active part in the publication of the first Kyrgyz language newspaper, *Erkin Too*, in November of 1924. They received their own Academic Center, later the National Academy of Sciences, with Arabaev as its head and contributed to the process of codification of their national language. They led the efforts of collecting oral literature and published their own Kyrgyz language primers. They staged plays in their national theater and wrote national poems and novels. Their pre-soviet intellectual baggage came to forge this time a Kyrgyz identity which was to be "national in form, but socialist in content."

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