



KYRGYZ STUDIES OF *KUTADGU BILIG*: A ROAD TO NATIONAL CULTURAL HERITAGE STATUS*

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Abstract

Kutadgu Bilig has been one of the academic interests of Kyrgyzstan for over half a century. The study of its linguistic features, philosophical concepts, and comparative translation has reached a certain level of fruition. Specifically, the production of dozens of research papers revolved around Kyrgyz associations with *Kutadgu Bilig* in terms of language, history, and culture, discussing whether the work is part of the cultural heritage owned by more than one Turkic people and how the Kyrgyz people should see this literary masterpiece. Under governmental interventions, long years of persistent studies and intense debates ultimately led to Kyrgyzstan's official recognition of the work as part of the Kyrgyz national intangible cultural heritage, not the shared Turkic heritage as thought earlier.

Key words: Kutadgu Bilig, Research, Kyrgyzstan, Literary Heritage.

KIRGIZ ÇALIŞMALARI AÇISINDAN *KUTADGU BİLİĞ*: MİLLİ KÜLTÜREL STATÜSÜNE DOĞRU BİR YOL

Özet

Kutadgu Bilig, yarım asırdan daha uzun bir süre boyunca Kırgızistan'ın akademik ilgi alanlarından biri olmuştur. Dilsel özellikleri, felsefi kavramları ve karşılaştırmalı tercümelemleri yönündeki çalışmalar, belli bir doyum noktasına ulaşmıştır. *Kutadgu Bilig*'in tek bir Türk toplumundan çok daha fazlası tarafından sahiplenilen kültürel mirasın bir parçası olup olmadığı ve Kırgız halkının bunu nasıl edebi bir başyapıt olarak görmesi gerektiği tartışılırken, *Kutadgu Bilig* ile ilgili dil, tarih ve kültürel açıdan yazılan onlarca araştırma makalesi ürünü, Kırgız kuruluşların (makamların) etrafında oluşmuştur. Devlet müdahaleleri altında uzun yıllar süren ısrarlı çalışmalar ve yoğun tartışmalar, daha önce düşünüldüğü gibi Türk mirası olarak değil, Kırgız millî somut olmayan kültürel mirasının bir parçası olarak Kırgızistan tarafından resmen tanınması sonucunu doğurmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kutadgu Bilig, Araştırma, Kırgızistan, Edebi Miras.

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This paper examines *Kutadgu Bilig*, a long didactic poem written by Uyghur poet Yusuf Has Hajib (Yūsuf Khāṣṣ Ḥājib) in 1069/1070 AD. Three manuscripts of the work are extant today: 1) the Herat (Vienna) copy, written in the Uyghur alphabet; 2) the Cairo copy, written in the Arabic script; and 3) the Fergana copy

The first study of *Kutadgu Bilig* is generally believed to be a report published in the magazine *Asia* in 1825, its author being A. Jaubert (1779-1847). Since then the poem has caught attention from Turkic linguists around the world.

From the early 20th century, in terms of *Kutadgu Bilig* studies, the Soviet Union gradually climbed to the top of the nations, which studied it. Kyrgyzstan, which inherited the tradition of oriental studies from the Soviet Union, also accomplished a great deal in studying the work. Most of these achievements, however, remain little known to the Chinese community due to insufficient academic exchange between China and Central Asia. An overall review of Kyrgyz literature concerning *Kutadgu Bilig* is one of significance to academia and academic history. For Chinese related research and exchange, an essential understanding is needed of how the Kyrgyz research community took the leap from discussing historical references with the “shared cultural heritage theory” to advocating for the poem’s exclusive status as part of Kyrgyz intangible cultural heritage.

1. Kyrgyz Studies of *Kutadgu Bilig*: An Overview Research Background and Characterization

As a former USSR member state, Kyrgyzstan produced few insightful papers and books on *Kutadgu Bilig* topics until the 1950s. Related research was rare for a literary piece that seemed too remote from real life to be given the attention it deserved. Despite this setback, quite a few Kyrgyz researchers “immersed” themselves in work from the larger Russian academic community, which to some extent affected their academic vision and thinking. Among them is the renowned Kyrgyz linguist Konstantin Kuzmich Yudakhin (Юдахин Константин Кузымич). His *Introduction to S.E. Malov’s Monuments of Ancient Turkic Writing: Texts and Research* is hailed as the key to the treasure box that is *Kutadgu Bilig*. Unfortunately, this book had a limited print run and contained such a wide cross-section of disciplines that its precise influence is impossible to ascertain. Such research and communication processes were confined to a small elite group that was proficient in Russian and was interested in the Turkic languages and cultures. Under the tightly-controlled political framework of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan inevitably found it very difficult to pursue its academic aspirations. Naturally, the Kyrgyz academic climate improved when Khrushchev created a freer environment with a de-Stalinization policy enacted in the mid-1960s. Their nationalist sentiment aroused, the Kyrgyz elite turned their attention to issues concerning their national history and culture. They looked into the Orhon-Yenisey runic inscriptions of the Middle Ages as well as *Kutadgu Bilig*, the *Dīwān lughāt al-Turk*, and the like, hoping to find these works’ innate connection

to traditional Kyrgyz culture. It was around this time that the studies of *Kutadgu Bilig* began to emerge. Based on the way in which *Kutadgu Bilig* is connected to the Kyrgyz language, history, and culture, these research projects primarily involved intensive studies and long debates as to whether the work should be regarded as a part of Turkic national heritage and how the Kyrgyz people ought to think of it. The quality of research, however, varied across the academic scene. A. Narynbaev, K. Aida, Y. Asanaliev, and K. Ashyraliev, among others, were patient and honest in their studies while others impetuously churned out papers in their hot pursuit of ethnic and linguistic findings to accentuate the pro-Kyrgyz concept. Unfortunately, the latter phenomenon prevailed over a considerably long period of time.

2. Research Stages

This paper delineates three stages of *Kutadgu Bilig* studies beginning from *An Introduction to S.E. Malov's Monuments of Ancient Turkic Writing: Texts and Research* (1952) by K. Yudakhin (К. К.Юдахин), namely 1952-1989, 1990-2003, and 2004-2015. This paper also refers to Yusuf Has Hajib as Yusuf Balasaghuni because he was born in the city of Balasaghun and therefore is so addressed in Kyrgyzstan.

3. 1952-1989: The Road to the Climax of Debate

From 1952 to 1989 stretched a period of time when Kyrgyzstan was experiencing twists and turns in *Kutadgu Bilig* studies which revolved around the linguistic and ethnic features of the poem. About 30 monographs and introductory articles were produced in 37 years. Their strengths and weaknesses are all significant when cast against a backdrop of ideological, political, and nationalist influences at the time.

K.K. Yudakhin, a member of the Uzbek Academy of Science (1952) and the Kyrgyz Academy of Science (1954) of the Soviet Union, was noted for his compilation of the Russian-Kyrgyz Dictionary and Kyrgyz-Russian Dictionary. Between the 1920s and the 1950s this Kyrgyz linguist grew parallel with great minds such as I.A. Batmanov (И. А. Батманов) and S.E. Malov. However, both his name and the *Introduction to S.E. Malov's Monuments of Ancient Turkic Writing: Texts and Research*,¹ his major production concerning *Kutadgu Bilig* studies, remained little known.

“The Origin of Our Literature” published in *Kyrgyz Culture* on January 1st, 1967, revealed what would later become a major discussion about the scope and nature of shared cultural heritage in Kyrgyzstan. It is necessary to know the whole process because it embodied a major stage of *Kutadgu Bilig* studies in the said state. The debate also developed a close connection to

¹ Yudakhin's work published in 1952 (Рецензия на книгу С.Е.Малова «Памятники древне тюркской письменности») is used as a textbook for college history majors and other related courses.

the positions and perspectives Chinese researchers adopted on the topic. This paper attempts to offer the following review of various outlooks and results in specific historical settings where the discussion took place.

Following Artykbayev's writings came a heated debate in the Kyrgyz academic community. Two schools of thought rose in stark contrast to each other. The school that supported the editor consisted of Kyrgyz historian Ое. Караев (Ө.Караев), writer Т. Сыдыкбеков (Т.Сыдыкбеков), and literary critic J. Tastemirov (Ж.Таштемиров). The contrarians included linguist E. Abdyl daev (Э.Абдылдаев), philosopher В.Аманалиев (Б.Аманалиев), and Dr. N.Nazaraliev (Н.Назаралиев).

The following are three points of contention from Kyrgyz linguist Abdyl daev against Artykbayev's claim.²

1. *Kutadgu Bilig* by Yusuf Balasaghuni was not of multi-ethnic origin but rather a Uyghur literary legacy by no means related to the Kyrgyz.
2. It is unrealistic to think that "*Kutadgu Bilig* was written in a language as easy for the Kyrgyz people to understand as for Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and Uyghurs" because many other literary classics are characterised by common linguistic features of the Turkish languages. It is not right to recognise them as of the same origin only based on some commonalities.
3. The city of Tokmok only dates 100 years. No compelling evidence has been found of the exact location of the ancient city of Balasaghun.

Kyrgyz historian Ое. Караев argued by writing that the controversy arose primarily because the Kyrgyz academic community found different answers to the question of whether the Kyrgyz lived around the Tianshan Mountains in the 10th and 11th centuries. Using Perso-Arab Muslim historical references,³ Караев refuted E. Abdyl daev's "pro-Uyghur theory" by citing the following reference in favour of Artykbayev's argument: Russian historian V. V. Bartold withdrew his earlier statement that the Kara-Khanid Khanate was established by the Uyghurs of the Yaghma tribe. Up till now no evidence has lent credence to the assumption that the majority ethnic group of the Karakhanids were Uyghurs. More solid evidence is also needed to support the view of the Yaghma tribe being the founder of the Kara-Khanid Khanate. Therefore, the argument against Artykbayev by accrediting the Uyghurs as the progenitor of this Turkic

2 Э. Абдылдаев: Орток адабий мурас маселеси[N]. Кыргызстан маданияты, 1967, 10-февраль. 15-6.

3 See Ө. Караев: О. Арабские и персидские источники IX–XII вв. о киргизах и Киргизии [M]. Фрунзе, 1968, 62–636. By citing the literature of the 9th to 12th centuries, including *Hudūd al-Ālam*, it is concluded as follows: Although the foregoing historical literature mainly states that as early as the 9th and 10th centuries the Kyrgyz made a living mostly by raising horses, farming, making handicraft, and hunting, the Arabic literature of the 9th to 12th centuries does not give a detailed account of Kyrgyz towns, settlements, and streets in the medieval times. However, the oriental literature may reveal traces of Kyrgyz urban settlement culture emerging simultaneously with the development of nomadic culture in Kyrgyzstan.

dynasty is fundamentally weak. Conversely, some evidence may be found to show the opposite. First, the Kyrgyz back then were the majority Karakhanid people living in the west and east of present-day Kyrgyzstan and the areas in between. Further, Russian historian B.B. Grigoriev (В.В. Григорьев) pointed out in his work, *the Karakhanids in Transoxania Recorded in Muned Jim bashy* (Карханиды в мавераннахаре по Мунед джим башы),⁴ which was published in 1874: “The new state established in the areas of Kyrgyzstan during the 10th century was named after its founder, Qara Khan;⁵ this establishment is thus referred to as Kara-Khanid Khanate. A notable amount of literature, including the *Epic of Manas* (Манас Дастаны), repeatedly referred to this man as the progenitor of the Kyrgyz.”⁶ Based on his view, Karaev concluded: “*Kutadgu Bilig* belongs to the Turkic peoples as much as it belongs to the Kyrgyz.”⁷

With Karaev’s strong support as described earlier, Artykbayev presented “Literature: the Only Basis Upon Which We Can Rely” in *Kyrgyz Culture* on March 31, 1967, based on two papers by A. Valitova (А.Валитова) that can be summarised as follows:⁸ The social, political, and cultural attributes of a civilisation shared among the Turkic peoples in Central Asia were reflected in *Kutadgu Bilig*; the work was not written in Uyghur but rather the Karakhanid language, a written Turkic literary script used across Central Asia. Further, echoing the thoughts of A.N. Bernshtam (А.Н. Бернштам), Artykbayev insisted that “there are records of Kyrgyz activity around the Tianshan during the 11th century.”⁹ Lastly, he challenged the major argument quoted by Abdylдаev, namely Malov’s “pro-Uyghurs theory,” by saying that it was even difficult for Malov to decide if the poem was indeed written in Uyghur or Arabic. He only assumed that perhaps the poem was first written in Arabic and then presented to Bughra Khan after it was copied into Old Uyghur for a broader readership.

Two weeks after the publication of the aforesaid article by Artykbayev, on April 14, philosopher Dr. B. Amanaliev wrote against Artykbayev and Karaev, among others. He believed that the views these researchers presented “seem to be based on a conjecture which lacks historical evidence and which is uncharacteristic of the Kyrgyz nation in terms of its literary

4 Григорьев В. В. «Карханиды в мавераннахаре по Мунед джим башы» [М]. Санкт-Петербург, 1874, 6-6.

5 The Author’s Note: This word initially appeared in Grigoriev’s book mentioned in the previous note.

6 The Author’s Note: Qara means “great” in Turkish; “Qara Khan” means great king. A mythical character in the Kyrgyz epic *Manas* also appeared in the Siberian epic *Lezgi* (Шорский) as the leading character (see «Шорский героический эпос» Кемерово 2010) As such, an identification of the ethnicity of the Karakhanid Khanate based on the name of some character in oral literature after the dynasty is not convincing.

7 О.Караев: Тарыхый кабарлар менен таанышканда [N]. Кыргызстан маданияты, 1967, 10-март.

8 А. Валитова.: Юсуф Баласагунский и его «Кутадгу билик» [D]. Москва, 1951, 19 б; К вопросу о классовой природе Караханидского государства [С]. Т. I., 1.-Ф.: Киргизский филиал АН СССР, 1943.

9 See Турдубаев Назыгул: Жусуп Баласагун жана анын «Кутадгу билик» дастаны, Б— 2006-17-б, in which the source was not specified. The author of this paper found the source in А. Бернштам, Источники по истории киргизов XVIII в. // Вопросы истории, 1946 - номер 11-12. - С. 128; See А. Н. Бернштам: «История кыргызов и Кыргызстана с древнейших времен до монгольского завоевания» <http://siteistok.host.net.kg/bibliotek.htm>

language.”¹⁰ Furthermore, as a historian, Karaev was so determined to figure out “whether or not there was Kyrgyz activity around the Tianshan in the 10th and 11th century” that the geographic concern seemed to be the crux of the controversy. But this is only one facet of the problem. The poem was written in a language that seems closer to Old Uyghur, which led Malov to think that “*Kutadgu Bilig* is the most ancient literary classic that reflected the Islamic culture and ideology of the ancient Uyghur people.”¹¹ Finally, B. Amanaliev sharply pointed to the religious issues Artykbayev and Karaev had overlooked. “If the language used to write these literary classics was the same one the Kyrgyz used in their own writings during the 10th and 11th centuries, it would indicate that they had adopted the Arabic script and converted to Islam. But the fact is that the Kyrgyz accepted Islam and began to use Arabic only in recent history.”¹² In his work, Amanaliev cited supporting arguments from a number of historians, including H.Valikhanov (Ч.Валиханов), F.Poyarkov (Ф.Поярков), A.G.Serebrennikov (А.Г.Серебрянников), V.P.Nalivkin (В.П.Наливкин), and G.S.Zagroskij (Г.С.Загрозский).

Despite his compelling argument, Amanaliev did not bring an end to the debate; rather he added fuel to it. A few days later on April 28, Kyrgyz poet J.Tastemirov (Ж.Таштемиров) and history teacher Z.Belikova (З.Беликова) made their voices heard through *Kyrgyz Culture* in support of Artykbayev. In addition to the statements synthesised earlier, they quoted passages about Turkic tribes in *Dīwān lughāt al-Turk* by Muhammad al-Kashgari. It was on this basis that they declared, “Not a single national entity emerged in Muhammad al-Kashgari’s time,” as opposed to Amanaliev’s pro-Uyghur theory. In his article “About Legacies from Our Ancestors” published in the same newspaper on June 23 that year, Sydykbekov, “the People’s Meritorious Writer” of the USSR, listed certain ancient words of colloquial Kyrgyz to justify his assertion that the language of *Kutadgu Bilig* can be traced to Kyrgyz origin. Finally, as to Amanaliev’s and Abdyl daev’s claim that “*Kutadgu Bilig* does not belong to the Kyrgyz,” Sydykbekov concluded that it was groundless and that any one who agreed with it was an “unfaithful dog.”

Most of Kyrgyzstan’s history and literature textbooks were based on a USSR perspective, meaning that the Kyrgyz didn’t have a writing system until the October Revolution, a great historical event which clearly changed the fate of the people and led them to develop a fully functioning language of their own.¹³ This movement also marked a historical turn which stifled the popularity of Artykbayev’s advocacy for his shared heritage theory. He once again turned to face the consequences of his argument and tried to make a good case for himself. In *The*

10 Amanaliev: Талаш жемиштуу болсо [N]. Кыргызстан маданияты, 1967, 14-апреля.

11 С.Е.Малова: Памятники древне тюркской письменности [M]. Москва, 1951.

12 The Author’s Note: About the history of Kyrgyz written literature, see Койлубаев.К.К: Жазгыч акындардын чыгармачылыгы, 吉尔吉斯共和国民族科学院语言文学院和伊塞克湖国立大学联合出版, 2010年, 比什凯克. 第4-12页. This book explicitly states, “The history of the Kyrgyz using Arabic alphabets as their own language dates the 18th century. An earlier record of their written language is very likely, but only the existing literature is reliable. It was around that time that the Kyrgyz literary world witnessed a new phase of development –or in other words, the advent of their written literature.”

13 See Турдубаева Назыгул: Жусуп Баласагун жана анын «Кутадгу билик» дастаны [M]. Бишкек, 2006: 64 -6.

Journey of Criticism (1970), an anthology he worked on as editor-in-chief, he included one of his essays, “On the Issues of Learning Our Ethnically Shared Literature,” challenging the official acknowledgement of written Kyrgyz as emerging in the early 20th century. He stressed that the Kyrgyz developed the Orhon-Yenisey script as early as the fifth to ninth centuries, but it was reduced to an oral form in the unsettling times of invasion by Genghis Khan. However, one fact should not be forgotten: The Kyrgyz later re-established their written language, but the oral form of the language existed long before the October Revolution to serve as a basis on which our written literature would later be created, most notably *Kutadgu Bilig* and the *Dīwān lughāt al-Turk*.

Between the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, *Kutadgu Bilig* studies in Kyrgyzstan sank into a state of stagnation; little, if any, achievements were made. But the Translators’ Foreword of a group translation of *Kutadgu Bilig* by the Institute of Ethnic Literature, Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences, published in May 1984, explicitly pointed out that the poem was a Uyghur literary classic originally written in Old Uyghur. This shook the Kyrgyz academic community awake from its 15-year long sleep. Another round of debate began. This time the focus was A. Narynbaev, a renowned philosopher and Academy of Science member whose clear positions and sharp insights easily caught attention of the research community. He did more than list Yusuf Balasaghuni as one of the Uyghur thinkers in his entry of the *Kyrgyz Encyclopaedia* which was published nationwide in 1985; he wrote an article entitled “*Kutadgu Bilig*: A New Version,” which was consecutively published in the sixth and seventh issues of the Kyrgyz newspaper *Communist Flag* celebrating the Beijing-based publication of a modern Uyghur version of the ancient poem. Based on the findings of the renowned archaeologist B. B. Grigoriev,¹⁴ the author argued:

The Uyghur literature preceded other well-known Turkic sources – like runic literature – as the origin of Turkic history and linguistics. [...A]s most Turkic researchers believed, the Kara-Khanid Khanate was a state ruled by the Uyghurs related Karluks, specifically two Karluk tribes, Chigils and Yaghmas.

While discussing the philosophical thoughts contained in *Kutadgu Bilig*, Grigoriev expounded in particular:

Yūsuf Khāṣṣ Ḥājib, a thinker of the medieval times, made a significant contribution to the social advancement of the Central Asian and Turkic civilizations as well as the development of philosophical and moral thoughts. Under the influence of *Kutadgu Bilig*, outstanding Uyghur thinkers delivered a great number of masterpieces in the world of morality, such as *Atabet ül-Hakaayik* by Edib Ahmed Yükneki...

14 See Григорьев В.В.: «Карханиды в мавераннахре по Мунед джим башы»[М]. Санкт-Петербург, 1874, 6-6.

The Chinese translators' foreword and Narynbaev's article sent a seismic wave through the cultural circles of Kyrgyzstan. A remarkable event was *Kyrgyz Culture* publishing "The Spiritual Foundation of the Nation" on February 6, 1986. In this article the accomplished writer Ch. Aitmatov (Ч. Айтматов) argued:

[...]The narrative poem by Yusuf Balasaghuni and the Epic of Manas prove that the spiritual wealth of our ancestors has been passed down through centuries by two connecting cultures on the basis of one language – written literature created by farming settlers and oral literature by nomads.

A few months later on May 15, 1986, *Kyrgyz Culture* published historian Karaev's article, "Yusuf Balasaghuni and His Times", an echo to Narynbaev's work. It reminded readers of the legitimacy of the shared heritage theory by denouncing the pro-Uyghur claim more explicitly than ever with reference to the facts that in the 11th century Uyghurs, then Buddhist followers, established two Uyghur Khaganates in what would become eastern Xinjiang today and that the *Dīwān lughāt al-Turk* recorded the war between the Karakhanids and the Uyghurs. Immediately after this publication, on July 24, the same newspaper published the work of C.Судыков (С.СЫДЫКОВ) entitled "What Do We Know about Yusuf Balasaghuni?" This article asserted that the poem was all written in the Turkic language – that is to say, it was written on the basis of spoken words from various Turkic tribes of the Kara-Khanid Khanate, and logically the Turkic descendants should be regarded as jointly inheriting the poem. On August 7, a man named A. Kasymzhanov (А. КАСЫМЖАНОВ) wrote "The Source of Intellectual and Moral Qualities" and also had it published in *Kyrgyz Culture*. He believed that the language of the poem bore resemblance to modern-day Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Kazakh, Uzbek, and Uyghur. Further, he reminded his readers that the Balasaghuni was born and raised in Kyrgyz culture because he was native to the land. Therefore, he concluded that *Kutadgu Bilig* should be accounted as part of the literary heritage shared by these peoples.

The works discussed earlier exemplify two theories on the origin of *Kutadgu Bilig*: pro-Uyghur and pro-multiethnic-origin among Turkic peoples. The shift of opinion began in 1988, when two well-known Kyrgyz Academy of Science members published their works. One of them, T.Sydykbekov, specialized in literature. His foreword to the modern Kyrgyz edition of the poem, which was translated by T.Kozybekov (Т.Козыбеков), shows the first sign of the transition from the pro-Uyghur theory to a view holding that *Kutadgu Bilig* is exclusively a part of the Kyrgyz national intangible heritage, as quoted below:

It's cultural heritage from our ancestors, be it a runic inscription on a stone or *Kutadgu Bilig* and the *Dīwān lughāt al-Turk*. We admit that we once paid little attention to it. [...] poet Naum Grebnev (Наум Гребнев) said, "*Kutadgu Bilig* belongs to you more than others not only because its author was born on your land but also because its characteristics and historical settings are similar to yours."

Also, Sergei Petrovich Borodin, a Soviet Russian Meritorious Writer and the author of *Stars Over Samarkand*, once exclaimed: “You Kyrgyz people are too weak! You don’t even dare to fight for the cultural heritage that you rightfully own! Don’t you know that a large part of ancient literary classics belong to you? Of all the Turkic peoples, only your ancestors created masterpieces like the Epic of Manas, and this is not so difficult to register. Don’t lose your heritage!”

.....

History has finally revealed itself. Though a little late, we have begun paying heed to our own ancient cultural heritage. Dear reader, the copy of *Kutadgu Bilig* you hold in your hands contains our modern-day language we rendered from our ancient tongue.

Around the same time, during his speech at the 5th USSR Turkologist Conference held in the capital of Frunze, the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences member and renowned writer Ch. Aitmatov changed his multi-ethnic theory to adopt a view that “*Kutadgu Bilig*, first and foremost, originated from the Uyghur people and preceded the development of written literature among other Turkic peoples.”¹⁵ These shifts of opinion show that Kyrgyz researchers never reached a rooted consensus as to the ethnic origin of the poem. The clash of views not only disrupted the normal course of academic research; it also prevented scholars from acquiring an objective mindset to analyse and criticise *Kutadgu Bilig* as they should.

In 1989, Artykbayev seized the opportunity to propose that Kyrgyz National University be named after Yusuf Balasaghuni. He began by collecting signatures from faculty and students. In the meantime, he wrote an article entitled “About Naming the University after Yusuf Balasaghuni” (September 14, 1989) and had it published in the newspaper, reiterating his claim that *Kutadgu Bilig*, though considered collectively owned, first and foremost is a Kyrgyz literary classic, based on the arguments in “*Kutadgu Bilig* and *Altun Yaruq Sudur*” by E.R. Tenisheff (Э.Р.Тенишев) and “On Yusuf Balasaghuni and His *Kutadgu Bilig*” by A. Kononov (А.Н.Конов).¹⁶ In a 1990 article, Artykbayev laid more stress on this claim and held against the Chinese Uyghur scholars who saw *Kutadgu Bilig* as part of their own cultural heritage. The conclusion Tenisheff drew in his work by comparing the languages of these ancient classics provided much needed support for Artykbayev and others to reject the shared heritage theory of the Uyghurs. More significantly, such mentality paved the way for the acceptance of the

15 “The Symposium of Turkologists” (featured news article, September 28, 1988), Communist Flag pp. 4 (Uyghur version, Alma-Ata)

16 Tenisheff made the following conclusion by comparison: The *Altun Yaruq Sudur* was undoubtedly Turkic-Uyghur, whereas the language of *Kutadgu Bilig* bears little resemblance to Uyghur. If we compare the works, we will find huge linguistic differences between the two texts [...] *Kutadgu Bilig* cannot be traced to a single Turkic people but rather is a literary legacy shared by all the Turkic peoples in Central Asia.” Kononov agreed with the hypothesis that the areas around Tokmok along the Chu River is where Balasaghuni was located, namely Yusuf Balasaghuni’s place of birth. See Турдубаев Назыгул: Жусуп Баласагун жана анын «Кутадгу билик» дастаны, Б— 2006-24-б.

“Kyrgyz intangible heritage theory” that followed. The cross-reference with a few Russian authoritative voices cemented the irrationalities of Kutadgu Bilig studies in Kyrgyzstan while making nationalism more dominant and protruding.

The result of research in this stage ultimately led to the granting of the high status of *Kutadgu Bilig* in the history of Kyrgyz literature. Thereafter the poem gradually entered the Kyrgyz educational system as well as the general public. No compelling conclusion had ever been drawn in *Kyrgyz Culture* since the publication provoked a dispute in 1967 as to whether *Kutadgu Bilig* should be regarded as part of the shared heritage of the Turkic peoples and whether the work was more deeply connected with Kyrgyz culture than generally thought. At first, from the deliberative process and its overall result, it may be thought that both sides had a calm and academically focused discussion. As time wore on, however, the supporters of the shared heritage theory caught the historical tide and gradually won the favour of public opinion. It may also be seen that by that time, some debaters had gone overboard in thinking that the questioning and potential denial of the connection between *Kutadgu Bilig* and the Kyrgyz ancestry was a betrayal to the nation. Finally, the debate had all the hallmarks of a powder keg. For this reason, the Abdyldaev-led camp waved the white flag and wrote no more published papers after being personally attacked by Sydykbekov.

4. 1990-2003: Transition and Settlement

Kyrgyzstan declared independence on August 31, 1991. A new stage of Kutadgu Bilig studies thence began; it was strongly characterised by epochal and national idiosyncrasies. Major achievements in this stage were new curricula for the history of literature and related textbooks. In fact, a movement was underway involving the inputs from these textbooks, the descriptions of college and secondary school courses, and revisions in the history of literature. While laying a new foundation for further study, all these changes reflected the conscious efforts of the advocates and executors of the movement to alter and add to the existing world of literature, to retell their history, and to seize the power of discourse.

It was in the early 1990s that Kyrgyz National University adopted a new Language and Literature Studies syllabus: *Kyrgyz Literature from Ancient Times to the 20th Century: A History*, compiled by A. Abdyrazakov (А.Абдыразаков), associate professor and director of the Kyrgyz Literature Research Office at said university. This new change incorporated two of the world’s remarkable works, *Kutadgu Bilig* and the *Dīwān lughāt al-Turk*, so as to secure their status in the history of Kyrgyz literature and thus influence public opinion accordingly. In other words, this was a teaching plan devised to support the Kyrgyz national intangible heritage theory.

Furthermore, in 2002 Artykbayev was awarded an executive order from the then President A. Akaev (А.Акаев) that the university be named after Yusuf Balasaghuni and that *Kutadgu*

Bilig, the *Dīwān lughāt al-Turk*, and all Turkic literary classics that followed be incorporated into the Kyrgyz educational system – a mission accomplished after 35 long years of struggle!¹⁷ The personal pride of such a glorious victory was apparently reflected in the winner's article "Don't Take Anything from Its Proved Owner," published in the newspaper *Knowledge of Happiness* on April 26, 2002.

The intellectual undertaking during this timeframe was unique to itself, showing a transition from disparate, personal interests to an officially organised program. This gradual shift may be considered rational in a post-independence political climate. More specifically, it is the result of academic alignment with the need for the government to develop a cultural image.

5. 2004-2015: Exchange and Beyond

The settlement of the debate over the language and origin of *Kutadgu Bilig* as discussed earlier silenced the older generation of scholars like Artykbayev, who were devoted to seeking justifications for their arguments. By this time the shared heritage theory had gradually given way to a powerful movement to claim the poem as part of Kyrgyzstan's intangible cultural heritage. Around this time, however, the international community for the most part sided with Malov, who postulated that the poem was of Uyghur origin. This divergence gave rise to the need for Kyrgyz researchers to deal with what they heard from the Chinese academic community on the topic. In 2010 the author of this paper, for example, finished her doctoral dissertation entitled "Kutadgu Bilig studies in China" and passed the oral defence in Kyrgyzstan in a situation where all candidates were required to make a case for the shared heritage theory while also making their own arguments.¹⁸ In this way, it was possible for the Chinese researchers to make their points without sounding too harsh for the Kyrgyz community.

Even though some Kyrgyz studies of *Kutadgu Bilig* tended to involve the Chinese perspectives and positions simply for the sake of being critical, such tendency was in fact contributing to academic exchange between the two countries. *Yusuf Balasaghuni and His Narrative Poem Kutadgu Bilig* by T.Nazygul (Турдубаева Назыгул) is an example of how some of the ideas from Uyghur researchers were introduced to the Kyrgyz community. In Chapter One of the book, under the second subheading "writings that twisted facts", the author referred to "Several Questions about Yusuf Has Hajib and Muhammad al-Kashgari", an article by Uyghur scholar

¹⁷ "Artykbayev's petition was co-signed by J.Junushaliev (Ж.Жунушалиев) and other scholars and then submitted directly to President A. Akaev on December 24, 2001, It was granted approval by executive order. One year after the order took effect, on May 15th, 2003, a ceremony was held to commemorate the renaming of the same university and the setting of a statue of Yusuf Balasaghuni; the President attended the event and in his speech thanked Artykbayev for his contribution to the cultural undertakings of Kyrgyzstan." (as cited in 图尔迪巴耶娃-纳兹古丽: 《优素福-巴拉萨衮和他的叙事诗〈福乐智慧〉》, 第39-52页; 比什凯克, 2006.

¹⁸ See (Кытай) Гульниса Жамал: Жусуп Баласагындын "Куттуу билим" дастанынын Кытайда изилдениши [М]. Бишкек, 2011.

Ghayratjan Osman from Xinjiang, as negating the victory which Artykbayev expressed in his article “Don’t Take Anything from Its Proved Owner” (2002). Osman’s conclusion that “Yusuf Has Hajib and Muhammad al-Kashgari were renowned Uyghur scholars,” Nazygul believed, was groundless along with ten other argumentative points that he made.¹⁹ She also tried to discredit Osman’s citation of Kyrgyz writer Aitmatov’s argument that “it is correct to see Yusuf Balasaghuni and Muhammad al-Kashgari, first and foremost, as owing their origin to the Uyghur people before they are said to precede the development of written literature among other Turkic peoples,” (Communist Flag, September 28, 1988) for this was the opposite to what Aitmatov said at the Soviet Kyrgyz 18th Congress in 1986.²⁰

Nazygul concluded:

That the language of this literary piece is akin to Uyghur has long been a heatedly debated topic. Uyghur researchers Vahidjan Gupur (Вахиджан Гупур), Askar Hussain (Аскар Хусейн), and A.Narynbaev (А.Нарынбаев) agree that *Kutadgu Bilig* was written in Old Uyghur.²¹ Those who believe that it was written in Medieval Kyrgyz include Academy of Social Sciences members B.Yunusaliev (Б.Юнусалиев), B. Zhamgyrchinov (Б.Жамгырчинов), and T.Sydykbekov (Т.Сыдыкбеков), as well as professors K.Artykbayev (К.Артыкбаев), J.Bakytgulov (Ж.Бакытгулов), and Z.Eraliev (З.Ералиев).

But she mentioned nothing about how distinguished Kyrgyz linguists Y.Asanaliev and K.Ashyraliev made it explicitly clear in their works that the poem was written in the old Uyghur language.²² Also note that she mistakenly listed Kyrgyz intellectual Narynbaev as a Uyghur in an attempt to trick her readers into believing that only Uyghurs from China were trying to take *Kutadgu Bilig* as their own, and that there was no such disagreement among Kyrgyz nationals.

19 Турдубаева Назыгул: Жусуп Баласагун жана анын «Кутадгу билик» дастаны [М]. Бишкек, 2006.

20 The Author’s Note: It is noted that according to “The Symposium of Turkologists,” a news article featuring in the September 28th, 1988 issue of the Communist Flag (Uyghur version, Alma-Ata), the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences member and renowned writer Ch. Aitmatov delivered an opening speech at the 5th Soviet Union Conference of the Turkologist Association held in Frunze. He said, “[...] One of the blemishes in the field of turkology is when Turkic researchers examine the languages, literary works, history, and the written literature in the Turkic world. They can’t resist a pervasive desire to nationalise all the literary legacies created by Yusuf Balasaghuni, Muhammad al-Kashgari, and everyone after them, thinking that Yusuf Balasaghuni and Muhammad al-Kashgari shared an ethnic pedigree with all Turkic peoples while pointing up to the emergence of their written literature around that time. But in my opinion, it is correct to see Yusuf Balasaghuni and Muhammad al-Kashgari, first and foremost, as owing their origin to the Uyghur people before they are said to precede the development of written literature among other Turkic peoples. This perspective can also apply to the Orhon-Yenisey heritage.” Osman quoted it right. Therefore, Aitmatov can be thought of as rectifying his earlier “shared heritage” theory.

21 Вахиджан Гупур, Аскар Хусейн. Тезисы уйгурской классической литературы [М]. Т. I, ч. 3. - Пекин, 1988 ; А. Нарынбаев. Из истории общественной мысли древних и средневековых уйгуров [М]. - Бишкек: Илим, 1984.

22 Асаналиев Ү., Ашыралиев К. Кутадгу билиг эстелигинин тилдик өзгөчөлүктөрү [М]. - Ф.: Илим, 1965.

Academic research as discussed earlier is essential to the intellectual life of any civilisation. Intellectual activities very likely lead to social and technological advancement because they can broaden human minds with earlier ideas and different perspectives. Regarding the origin of *Kutadgu Bilig*, Radlov rethought his old argument from a new perspective and began to question the “pro-Uyghur theory.” Aitmatov, too, experienced a transition from supporting the “shared heritage theory” to affirming that ‘it was first a part of Uyghur literary heritage’. The question of right and wrong is irrelevant here; rather, these studies are significant in that they improve the understanding of the literary classic. From this perspective, it may be reasonable to think that Nazygul’s work cited earlier, though one-sided, unconvincing, and poorly justified, nevertheless showed its value by informing Kyrgyz readers of the divergence among Kyrgyz intellectuals as well as different voices abroad.

After Nazygul, particularly in 2003, most of the Kyrgyz academic community finally became rational; only a few still span their research around the linguistic and ethnic issues of *Kutadgu Bilig*. Gradually arising was a new climate with greater sensibility than earlier. The increasing use of the Internet in place of traditional media for critical writings is one of the changes that followed. Further, works focused on *Kutadgu Bilig* studies began to appear in both traditional and online media, including “The evolution of political rights among Tianshan nomads between the 2nd century BC and the 12th century AD,” a post-doctoral project by T.D.Dzhumanaliev (Т.Д.Джуманалиев) in 2002 and a series of his online postings: “The transformation of political power among Tianshan nomads in the 10th and 11th centuries,”²³ “Problems with the Karakhanid State Building,”²⁴ and “The Kyrgyz Fergana Watershed Recorded in Literature.”²⁵ The research community also gradually reached a greater depth, a good example being “The Philosophical and Worldview Issues in the Narrative Poem *Kutadgu Bilig*” by Z.I.Galieva (З.И.Галиева).²⁶ Yet another change observed was an increasing number of PhD students who chose *Kutadgu Bilig* as the topic of their graduation papers (five of them passed defence and were published), which either resonated with Artykbayev’s old views or explored new ideas against the ideological bias that dominated the research scene as discussed earlier. These works include “*Kutadgu Bilig*, a Narrative Poem by Yusuf Balasaghuni, and its Turkic Translation” by Nazygul in 2001 and “An Analysis of Metaphoric Words in *Kutadgu Bilig*: On the Basis of Its English Translation by W. May”, an L.D. graduation project by Kasieva Askarbekovna Aida (Касиева Аида. Аскарбековна) at the Kyrgyz Academy of Science,²⁷ where the author of this paper attended her oral defence as a member of the audience.

23 Т.Д. Джуманалиев, Трансформация каганской власти у кочевников притяньшана в X-XI вв. //www.kyrgyz.ru/

24 Т.Д. Джуманалиев, Проблема становления государственности у караханидов. <http://www.kyrgyz.ru/>

25 Т.Д. Джуманалиев, Кыргызы Ферганской долины в письменных источниках. <http://www.kyrgyz.ru/>

26 З.И.Галиева, Вопросы философии миропонимания поэме «Кутадгу билик» //.-Б-С28-30. Аннотация: Ю. Баласагуни.

27 Касиева. Аида. Аскарбековна: Лексико-семантический анализ метафор “Кутадгу-билик”: на материале

Having discussed it thus far, it is noted that the scene of *Kutadgu Bilig* studies, after decades of being subjected to academic discordance from 1952, gained a place in Kyrgyz mainstream cultural discourse through government initiated or supported efforts, including seminars, commemorative activities, and publications. Compared to academic exchange between 1967 and 2000, the advent of the 21st century marked an even greater scale and strength of governmental and public consensus throughout the country: namely that *Kutadgu Bilig* is part of the Kyrgyz intangible cultural heritage.

Conclusion

The official recognition of *Kutadgu Bilig* and other Turkic cultural and linguistic legacies of ancient times as Kyrgyz intangible assets marked the end of over 50 years of dispute over the ethnic origin of the poem and related issues. K. Artykbayev made the greatest contribution to such an ideological breakthrough, first by writing a series of articles for the national newspaper *Kyrgyz Culture* as an advocate for the status of “shared heritage of Turkish literature,” and then by publishing books on the same topic, including *The Road to Critique* (1970), *A Truth Class* (1991), *The Secrets of Genius: Literary Studies and Image-Building* (the Kyrgyz Encyclopaedia on Literature, 1994), and *The Spiritual Heritage of Yusuf Has Hajib and Muhammad al-Kashgari* (1999), the last of which consists of dozens of papers addressing the prologue, notes, appendixes, and the postscripts associated with *Kutadgu Bilig* studies. The multitude of his works, whether introductory, critical, or popularizing, provides great help for the general reader to understand *Kutadgu Bilig*. More importantly, his advocacy for its incorporation into the textbooks of secondary and higher education served as a driving force to make the poem more widely and deeply known in the general and academic communities of Kyrgyzstan.

Nevertheless, the lack of sound arguments should also be noted in both stages of research transitioning from the earlier debates over the shared heritage theory to assertive justifications for the inclusion of *Kutadgu Bilig* in the Kyrgyz literary canon. To fill up the gaps, these faulty works, including the works of Artykbayev, abused historical references and even ignored the mistakes they had made. They cast a shadow over the cultural meaning of *Kutadgu Bilig* and should thus be given enough attention to avoid confusion.

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