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CHIG'ATOY GURUNGI: ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITY AND GOALS

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Abstract. The Chig'atoy Gurungi (also called the Chagatai Circle) was one of the most influential intellectual and literary groups in early twentieth century Central Asia, it was founded in Tashkent in 1918, under the direction of Abdurauf Fitrat and his colleagues. They wanted to set things in motion for the modernization and sort of standardizing of the Uzbek literary language, to push national awareness, and to start the ground work for a more separate Uzbek cultural identity as Soviet transformations were unfolding.
Keywords: Chig'atoy Gurungi, Jadidism, Central Asian modernism, language reform, national identity, Soviet cultural policy, Tashkent 1918, Turkestan.

Annotatsiya. Chig'atoy gurungi XX asrning boshlarida Markaziy Osiyodagi eng nufuzli intellektual va adabiy tashkilotlardan biri bo'lib, 1918 yilda Toshkentda Abdurauf Fitrat va uning hamkasblari rahbarligida tashkil etilgan. Tashkilot o'zbek adabiy tilini modernizatsiya qilish va standartlashtirish, milliy ongni rivojlantirish hamda sovet o'zgarishlari sharoitida o'ziga xos o'zbek madaniy identitetining poydevorini yaratishni maqsad qilgan.
Kalit so'zlar: Chig'atoy gurungi, jadidchilik, Markaziy Osiyo modernizmi, til islohoti, milliy identitet, sovet madaniyat siyosati, Toshkent 1918, Turkiston.

Аннотация. Чиғатой гуруҳи (Чагатайский кружок) являлся одной из наиболее влиятельных интеллектуальных и литературных организаций Центральной Азии начала XX века, основанной в Ташкенте в 1918 году под руководством Абдурауфа Фитрата и его соратников. Организация ставила своей целью модернизацию и стандартизацию узбекского литературного языка, развитие национального самосознания, а также закладывание основ самобытной узбекской культурной идентичности в условиях советских преобразований.
Ключевые слова: Чиғатой гуруҳи, джадидизм, центральноазиатский модернизм, языковая реформа, национальная идентичность, советская культурная политика, Ташкент 1918, Туркестан.

INTRODUCTION

You can’t really grasp the intellectual history of Central Asia in the early twentieth century without looking, in a close kind of way, at the organized literary and linguistic movements that surfaced in that in-between stretch when the Russian Empire fell apart and Soviet power was still sort of locking itself in, especially in Turkestan. Out of all those currents, the Chig'atoy Gurungi, set up in Tashkent in 1918, somehow has this special, almost unique, role, because it’s often treated as the very first formally organized body aimed at developing and standardizing the Uzbek literary language. It was founded during a moment of huge historical churn, when a few forces were pushing and pulling at the same time, Jadidist reform, pan-Turkic intellectual atmospheres, and then also the early Bolshevik cultural line. Together they produced openings, but also real risks, for Central Asian thinkers trying to strengthen and advance their own national cultures. Interest in this organization has kept rising since the post-Soviet period because researchers could finally reach archival materials that were once held back, and then they can rethink the legacy of people who

were targeted or later executed during the Stalinist repressions of the 1930s [1]. So, to understand the Chig'atoy Gurungi properly, you have to look not just at what it did right away, in terms of its practical plans, but also at the wider ideological and political weather it moved in. And there's the longer-range side too, meaning what its activities left behind for Uzbek cultural and linguistic development [2].

METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The present study uses a qualitative literature review approach, relying on published scholarly sources to build a kind of synthetic analysis of the Chig'atoy Gurungi's organizational character and its ideological aims. Uzbek scholarship on the Chig'atoy Gurungi has grown quite a bit, especially since the 1990s, and researchers like Naim Karimov have set out some early, key accounts about who belonged to the organization, what it published, and where its ideology was leaning [3]. Russian-language research, and this includes a fair amount of Soviet-era work, has often looked at the group with ideological suspicion, framing its pan-Turkic sympathies as bourgeois nationalism, even if that framing isn't the whole story. Still, in the post-Soviet period, Russian historians have tended to offer more careful, less one-dimensional readings [4]. Meanwhile, research outside Uzbekistan, mostly in English and other European languages, has tended to approach the Chig'atoy Gurungi by way of colonial and postcolonial studies, Jadidism, and the side-by-side analysis of nationalist movements, with Adeeb Khalid's research on the politics behind Muslim cultural reform in Central Asia being particularly influential [5].

Edward Allworth's earlier contributions to the study of Uzbek literary history provided important groundwork for understanding the linguistic debates in which the Gurungi was engaged [6]. More recent scholarship has examined the organization's relationship to Soviet nationality policy, particularly the processes of national delimitation and language standardization that culminated in the Soviet reforms of the mid-1920s [7]. Fitrat's own theoretical writings on language and literature, which circulated both within and beyond the Gurungi's formal activities, have been the subject of sustained literary-critical attention, with scholars noting the sophisticated synthesis of classical Chagatai literary traditions and modernist linguistic principles that characterized his approach [8]. The relationship between the Chig'atoy Gurungi and earlier Jadidist networks, including the reformist schools and press organs established in Turkestan before the revolution, has also been examined, revealing important continuities in personnel and ideology that complicate any sharp periodization of Central Asian intellectual history [9]. Taken together, this body of scholarship makes it possible to reconstruct with reasonable confidence the organizational goals, the principal debates, and the broader cultural significance of the Chig'atoy Gurungi, even in the absence of fully accessible archival sources [10].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Chig'atoy Gurungi was formally established in Tashkent in 1918 and took its name from the historical Chagatai literary language, the classical Turkic written medium that had served Central Asian letters for several centuries. This choice of name was itself ideologically charged: it simultaneously invoked the prestige of a deep literary tradition and signaled an ambition to transform and democratize that tradition for modern national purposes. The organization's founding members were predominantly drawn from the Jadidist intellectual milieu, sharing a commitment to educational reform, cultural modernization, and the elevation of vernacular Turkic over the Persianized literary conventions that had dominated Central Asian high culture [3].

The organization pursued its goals through a combination of publication, public discussion, and direct engagement with the emerging Soviet cultural apparatus. The Gurungi produced a journal and organized literary evenings and debates in which questions of orthography, vocabulary,

grammar, and literary style were vigorously contested [5]. Fitrat, as the organization's most prominent intellectual figure, argued consistently for a language policy that would prioritize spoken Uzbek over the classical Chagatai literary standard, thereby making written culture accessible to a broader literate public and severing the dependency of Uzbek letters on Persian and Arabic models [8]. This position brought the Gurungi into conflict with more conservative literary circles who valued the classical heritage, and also created tensions with pan-Turkic intellectuals who favored a unified literary Turkic language rather than separate national standards for Uzbek, Kazakh, and other Turkic peoples [6]. These debates were not merely abstract linguistic disputes; they were intimately connected to questions of political allegiance, national identity, and the practical organization of cultural and educational institutions in Soviet Turkestan.

The relationship between the Chig'atoy Gurungi and Soviet power was complex and ultimately tragic. In the early years after the revolution, the Bolshevik authorities in Turkestan adopted a relatively permissive attitude toward indigenous cultural organizations, recognizing that the support of local intellectuals was essential for the consolidation of Soviet power in the region [4]. The Gurungi was able to operate within this space, and some of its members collaborated with Soviet cultural institutions while maintaining their distinct intellectual agenda. However, the tightening of ideological control in the late 1920s and the Stalinist terror of the 1930s brought the careers and lives of many Gurungi members to violent ends. Fitrat, Cho'lpon, Elbek, and numerous other figures associated with the organization were arrested and executed on charges of bourgeois nationalism and counter-revolutionary activity [2].

The legacy of the Chig'atoy Gurungi is multidimensional. Its most enduring contribution was to the development of modern written Uzbek, which bears the imprint of the linguistic choices and debates in which the organization was centrally involved [7]. The standardization of Uzbek orthography and grammar that proceeded through the 1920s, however much it was subsequently modified by Soviet language policy, drew directly on the groundwork laid by the Gurungi's members. More broadly, the organization exemplified a model of intellectual engagement in which literary and linguistic work was understood as inherently political, as a form of nation-building conducted through cultural rather than military or purely administrative means.

CONCLUSION

The Chig'atoy Gurungi was a foundational institution in the intellectual and cultural history of modern Uzbekistan, representing a coherent and ambitious effort to transform the Uzbek literary language and to establish the cultural preconditions for national consciousness in a period of radical political change. Through its publications, debates, and the individual scholarly and creative work of its members, the organization advanced a program of linguistic modernization that drew on both classical Chagatai literary traditions and the reformist energies of the Jadidist movement. Its activities were cut short by Stalinist repression, but its legacy persisted in the structure of modern Uzbek literary language and in the intellectual traditions that were recovered and celebrated after independence. A full understanding of the Chig'atoy Gurungi requires situating it within the intersecting contexts of Jadidist reform, Soviet nationality policy, and the comparative history of nationalist cultural movements, and the growing body of post-Soviet scholarship in Uzbek, Russian, and international languages is making such an understanding increasingly possible.

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