

## Introduction (English)

Gulnara Aitpaeva and Marc Toutant

---



**Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/asiecentrale/3192>

ISSN: 2075-5325

**Publisher**

Éditions De Boccard

**Printed version**

Date of publication: 10 March 2015

Number of pages: 31-45

ISBN: 978-2-84743-112-4

ISSN: 1270-9247

**Electronic reference**

Gulnara Aitpaeva and Marc Toutant, « Introduction (English) », *Cahiers d'Asie centrale* [Online], 24 | 2015, Online since 12 February 2016, connection on 21 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/asiecentrale/3192>

---

# Introduction

Gulnara AITPAEVA & Marc TOUTANT

By focusing on the societal challenges reflected in Central Asian literary production, this new issue of the *Cahiers d'Asie centrale* would like to bring answers, as well as new kinds of questions regarding the way the various societies and peoples of this geographic area have depicted their history throughout time.

Well before the appearance of Islam, the Silk Road was the means whereby not only goods transited through the major caravan cities, but also elements of civilisation, such as the Uyghur religious literature which reflected a plurality of influences: Buddhist, Manichean and Nestorian. Thereafter the new spiritual experience that came with the spread of Islam, the transformations brought by the cataclysm of the Mongol invasion, and the rise of the Timurid Empire, were all upheavals that shaped the area. The further course of events showed that these were not the last, and the rivalry between the British Empire and the Russian Empire for supremacy in the region would soon reshape the future of these societies. To many of the questions that are raised by this complex historical process, literature could give answers in an effective way, and at least help historians, anthropologists, sociologists and other researchers in their own field.

The poetry and prose writings of what has been labelled Central Asia were produced in a variety of languages in an area roughly defined as the region bounded to the East by the Tarim Basin in China, to the West by the Caspian Sea, and to the South by the Amu Darya (Oxus River). This region includes not only the five republics of the former Soviet Union

(Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan), but also Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Mongolia, Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, and parts of Russia and China (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region). The literary works produced in this large area represent a considerable amount of materials, both oral and written, which would maybe require more attention than they are actually given thus far, at least in the Western academic world, despite what has already been achieved by a handful of eminent scholars whose names will be mentioned in the following pages. Nonetheless, given the scarcity of publications in the field, the fact that the *Cahiers d'Asie centrale* is devoting a single issue to this matter is something that deserves due attention.

This current volume is the result of international cooperation between young and advanced scholars from different countries and research traditions. Nearly half of them are from Central Asia, mainly from Kyrgyzstan (Aitpaeva, Kojčuev, and Proâeva) and Uzbekistan (Erkinov, Mirzaeva). Needless to say that in this kind of endeavour it is important to hear the voices of readers who have a privileged access to Central Asian works. It is also critical to provide different perspectives on the same topic with contributions written by authors coming from the outside world, and particularly in the present case from France (Papas, Toutant), Germany (Baldauf), Italy (Bernardini), and the United States (Holt, Hodgkin). In their contributions, these authors employ, cite, and often synthesise a wealth of source materials, including manuscripts that have not been studied so far, local archives and other documents which remain unpublished, as well as more easily accessible written sources ranging from works composed by writers (playwrights, novels, short stories, poems, articles) to reports and contemporary texts published by the administrative authorities.

With the view of studying the way literature can be used as a source of historiography, and more generally speaking with the aim of assessing the interconnectedness of society and literature, we have devoted specific attention to the issue of the relationships between culture and power. In this regard we have tried to cover the historical timeline just as much as we could without any restriction, being dependent only on the areas of specialisation of the various contributors. Thus, the period covered extends from the fifteenth century up to the present day, beginning with the end of the medieval times, when the Timurid renaissance achieved the production of

its finest hours of the on-going symbiosis of Turkic and Persian elements, and ending with the situation of contemporary Kyrgyz literature looked at from the point of view of its various relationships with its geopolitical environment.

### **The End of the Medieval Period: The Last Timurid Era**

One of the factors that most strongly determine the character of the literature of Central Asia has been the interaction of Turkic and Iranian populations and cultures throughout the region. In the fourteenth century the conversion of the Golden Horde to Islam led to the creation of a new Turkic literature closely modelled on Persian. That new literature was created mainly in Khwarezm, a region in present-day Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Soon the establishment of the Timurid dynasty facilitated the development of Chaghatay (Eastern Turkish) literature, which echoed the literary style of works that had been produced in Khwarezm. During the reign of the last great ruler *Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara* (1467-1506), Herat enjoyed a period of remarkable artistic ferment, making the capital city the centre of a Timurid renaissance. It is a fact that the later Timurid period (second half of the fifteenth century) has universally been acknowledged by historians as representing the pinnacle of patronage of the arts. The court of Bayqara was assessed as a model for cultural imitation for other contemporary dynasties such as the *Aq Qoyunlu* (hordes of the White Sheep, 1378-1501), a confederation of Turkmen tribes which ruled in Eastern Anatolia and Western Iran up until the Safavid conquest in 1501-1503. Up to now, many studies have been devoted to talented figures of the Timurid court such as the renowned painter *Kamāl al-Dīn Bihzād* (1450-1535) and the great Persian poet ‘*Abd al-Raḥman Jāmī* (1414-1492). Unfortunately works dedicated to the famous Chaghatay author *Mīr ‘Alī Shīr Nawā’ī* are still lacking in Western languages. By devoting two articles to the greatest representative of Chaghatay Turkish literature which, thanks to him, reached its apogee in the second half of the fifteenth century, this issue would like to help redress the balance somewhat.

*Niẓām al-Dīn ‘Alī Shīr*, later called *Mīr ‘Alī Shīr*, with the pen-name of *Nawā’ī* (1441-1501) was already regarded by his contemporaries as the greatest poet to have ever written in the Turkish language. Mastering the rhetorical means of Persian and Turkish languages, *Nawā’ī* was recognised

as a master in both genres of the lyric *ghazal* [lyric poems compiled in *dīwān*] and the *mathnawī* [extended verse narrative]. The first contribution of this volume is precisely devoted to a unique manuscript of ‘Alī Shīr Nawā’ī’s *dīwān* (c. 1471) kept at the National Library of Egypt. This manuscript which is renowned amongst experts in the arts, but far less known by Chaghatay literature researchers, was presumably copied in Shiraz, one of the central cities of the Aq Qoyunlu state. Aftandil Erkinov calls this manuscript the “Aq Qoyunlu Venerators *Dīwān*” because admirers of Nawā’ī’s poetry from the Aq Qoyunlu environment organised this collection of poems before the Timurid poet began to compile his first *dīwān*.<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, there are several reasons which make the study of this manuscript so critical. First, this manuscript seems to be, at least for the moment, the only copy of a *dīwān* to have been prepared by readers living in the Aq Qoyunlu state. Secondly, the language of Nawā’ī’s poems was slightly adapted to the Oghuz dialect of the Turkic language which was widespread in the Aq Qoyunlu environment. Furthermore, the manuscript was copied by ‘Abd al-Raḥman Khwārazmī (who wrote poems under the pseudonym Anīsī), a member of the Khwārizmī family who competed in the art of calligraphy with Sultān ‘Alī Mashhadī and developed its own *nasta’liq* style against him. Last but not least, the Aq Qoyunlu *dīwān* helps to give a depiction of Nawā’ī’s creative stage from 1466 to 1471.

By analysing the grounds that could explain the composition of this specific compilation of poems, Erkinov puts forward several hypotheses. Fundamentally he asserts that Anīsī who was familiar with the *Ilk Dīwān* could have wanted to create a compilation of poems of his own version, taking a personal path, notably by adapting the Chaghatay text to the language of his own surroundings, namely Oghuz-Turkic. Rivalry between different schools of calligraphers could thus have been an impetus for creating the “Aq Qoyunlu Venerators *Dīwān*”, and reworked this way, the poetry of the Timurid court polymath could have been seen as a means to epitomise the splendour of the rival dynasty. To what extent this artistic competition reflected the political agenda is a question for which the author only indicates paths for further reflections. Nevertheless Erkinov’s first contribution

<sup>1</sup> The case already happened at the Timurid court with the compilation of the *Ilk Dīwān* by the famous calligrapher ‘Alī Mashhadī.

to this volume brings another significant piece in the study of the historical relationships between the Timurid court and the Aq Qoyunlu rulers.

Marc Toutant's article also deals with Nawā'ī's work, but this time the paper is concerned with the Chaghatay poet's *mathnawī* production. In this genre Nawā'ī's fame rests upon his *Khamṣa* (1483-1485), a collection of five poems, intended as a poetic response to the *Khamṣa* of the Persian poet Niẓāmī Ganjawī (1141-1209), as well of this of Amīr Khusrau Dihlawī (1253-1325). Nawā'ī's *Khamṣa* epitomises the complexity of the relationships between the Timurid creative process and the Persianate cultural complex. The history of the evolution of intellectual life in medieval Central Asia is closely linked with the problem of the literary imitation problem. Although this assumption is usually taken at face value, we still have an extremely vague picture of these practices. Actually, what has been called a 'Timurid renaissance' was the result of an intensive imitation process through which the Timurid court consciously immersed itself in the media and standards of the Persianate cultural complex. With one of the central issues facing the Timurid ruler being the need, as foreign Turkic conquerors, to establish themselves as legitimate rulers in the Iranian monarchical tradition. Timurid calligraphy, painting, decorative arts, and architecture all give convincing testimony of the dynasty's energetic and conscious cultivation of Persianate art forms. In order to show the way the Chaghatay poet was prone to use the Persian tradition, the author of this article focuses on a rewriting of a famous Niẓāmī's anecdote (*hikāyat*) in which Nawā'ī, the Timurid statesman, does not refrain to give Ḥusayn Bayqara, the Timurid ruler, the main role. This unprecedented move in the *Khamṣanawīsī* [the tradition of writing *Khamṣa*] calls for an investigation that goes beyond the literary issues. Reading this rewriting with a closer look at its cultural context, Toutant then attempts to reveal what is at stake in this lesson of justice for the Timurid prince, taking into account Nawā'ī's involvement in the Naqshbandiyya brotherhood.

To conclude this first section devoted to the Timurid court and its influence, Michele Bernardini investigates the poetry of Jāmī's famous nephew 'Adullāh Hātifī (d. 1521). Also belonging to the prestigious poetic circle at court of the Timurid sultan Ḥusayn Bayqara, and spending most of his time outside the city in his native village of Kharjird-i Jam where he served as the custodian of the Qāsim-i Anwār mausoleum built by Nawā'ī, Hātifī was

one of the greatest Persian poets of that period. Depicted as a *mathnawī-guy* [*mathnawī*-writer] by chroniclers because he specialised in that genre, he was even called the most prominent *mathnawī* writer of his time by Khwāndamīr in *Ḥabīb al-siyar*. The several editions of his *Khamsa* in the Ottoman Empire and in India give another evidence of his widespread fame. Like Nawā'ī, he wrote *mathnawī* in imitation of four books of the two *Khamsa* (that is, those of Niẓāmī and Khusrau Dihlawī) – these being the *Laylī wa Majnūn*, *Khusrau wa Shīrīn*, *Haft Manẓar* [The Seven Sceneries], a *Timurnāma* (in imitation of the *Iskandarnāma*), and a *Futūḥāt-i shāhī*, but Hātifī died before completing this last piece. Tackling one of the tales of the *Haft Manẓar* (1492) and using it as a testimonial of the society of that time due to its realistic and straightforward style, Bernardini who is a translator and one of the best connoisseurs of the poet's work explores in his article the way Hātifī decided to rewrite a famous narrative of Amīr Khusrau Dihlawī's *Hasht Bihisht*.

### The Early Modern Period: Times of Uncertainty

In a certain sense, the fall of the Timurid Empire corresponds to the end of the medieval period in Central Asia. From a relative chronological viewpoint, these times could be described both as post-classical and pre-colonial. It is a kind of transition, when other great Muslim empires were in decline and the region was beginning to fear the threat of the powers of infidels.

Some texts display a Central Asian society which was facing a time of uncertainty, and Kharābātī's *mathnawī* is certainly one of them. By presenting this long verse narrative written in Eastern Turkestan by Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah Kharābātī (1638-1730) and copied just a few years later after the author's death in a manuscript almost ignored by Western readers, Alexandre Papas shows how this mystically oriented didactic poem reflected a period of anxiety when the literary and religious elite turned themselves towards values of renouncement as defended by the *qalandarī* tradition. In fact, within the religious climate of pre-modern Central Asia, a certain elite tried to revisit the *malāmatī* tradition, a tradition going back to this Muslim mystic group active in ninth-century Greater Khorasan which believed in the value of self-blame, assuming that being held in good self-esteem would only lead to worldly attachment. In the Fergana valley this

*qalandarī* revival was already embodied in the works of the famous poet Mashrab (1653-1711), which depicted a society whose former medieval certainties, at least those inherited from the Timurid legacy, the Mongol prestige, and the Sufi brotherhoods were beginning to crumble. Since Mashrab and Kharābātī lived in the same period, it is not surprising that the writings of these two Sufi poets shared this subversive and mystical dimension so characteristic of these times. But perhaps one of the reasons that makes the study of Kharābātī all the more interesting is that through his work, the author presents an ambiguous face, that of one who does not refrain from promoting radical mystical ideas while at the same time always remaining accessible to the ordinary believers, a posture in fact close to that of a “sedentary dervish” to quote Papas’ own words.

### **The Russian Colonisation: A Constrained Dialogue**

History bears witness that Mashrab and Kharābātī’s anxiety was somehow justified. If the Russian conquest of Central Asia during the nineteenth century led to a transitional literature, in which traditional literary practices began to give way to modern national literatures and precipitate the fusion of native and Russian elements, it also damaged the region’s Islamic cultures.

Examining the evolution of the poetic repertoire of the *maddāḥ* (panegyrists who used to sing praise or laud uttered for the Prophet and his companions), Aftandil Erkinov’s second article deals with the Russian control over the activities of these storytellers who, in their lifestyles, were very close to dervish *qalandar* and considered themselves to be servants of Allah. So far there has been very little information concerning the Central Asian *maddāḥ* from a literary perspective. Thus the study of the evolution of their repertoire is all the more important in that it gives testimony to the social transformations of that part of the population and the directions of the Russian imperial policies in that area. From the end of the nineteenth until the beginning of the twentieth century, especially after the Andijan uprising in 1898, the governing elite was worried by the influence that these people could exert over the population. Subsequently the authorities of the Governorate-general of Turkestan exercised censorship over their repertoire and their activities. The archives showed that there was a constant dialogue between the *maddāḥ* and the Russian authorities, with which the former



were obliged to cooperate in order to perpetuate their tradition and to earn a living. Therefore, the *maddāh* repertoire underwent profound changes, the most significant being the evolution towards a more popular, local and Sufi form of religious eulogy instead of eulogising the Muslim prophets.

### **The Soviet Era: Disjunction and Development**

The overview of the aforementioned articles shows the intrinsic connections between the ruling elite and the development of Central Asian literature. In the history of the arts, there have been a number of paradigms attempting to explain interconnectedness of literature and society. At one end of the spectrum, there is a theory of ‘art for art’s sake,’ while a theory of ‘engaged literature’ is at the opposite end. It is curious that both theories emerged initially among the French intellectuals and then spread around the world. Later on, another French scholar Pierre Bourdieu, integrated these two theories through the concept of ‘literary field’ and showed that the opposite theories are in fact “two different principles” of the economic and political hierarchisation. Bourdieu claims that literature is related to the society as “microcosm is related to macrocosm” and therefore, “social trajectories” can be always traced in the literature. The twentieth century became a time of rapid and radical changes in social trajectories for many Central Asian countries. These changes were stipulated by the 1917 Revolution and subsequent establishment of the Soviet Union. The changes in social trajectories were so rapid that the concept of “accelerated development of literature,” proposed by Georgij Gačev in 1960s, were applied to explaining the development of literature in some Central Asian countries (Gačev 1964 & 1975, p. 86). The main overarching direction of change can be defined as “heteronomous hierarchy principle” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 24) or, more precisely, as total domination of political authority over field of literature.

This state of things is well illustrated by Ingeborg Baldauf’s contribution about Uzbek poetry from the 1910s to the early 1930s. By 1932 Uzbek poetry, which had been a liberal occupation of intellectuals in the pre-1917 Revolution period, was turned into an educational tool by activists, ideologists and politicians, so that literary life became a dependent part of the political field. As Soviet rule became consolidated by the mid-1920s, political authorities started to re-shape the cultural field according to the needs and desires of the new ruling class. Baldauf’s paper convincingly shows

how during this period the new literary circles aimed at educating their members with a clear emphasis on ideological soundness. It reveals how the Uzbek press abounded in fierce articles which just aimed at denouncing potential enemies of the regime, and eventually how literary criticism was “turned into a weapon of attack on literati and, consequently, of self-defence in a relentless fight that, from 1930 to 1938, would extinguish most of the Uzbek literati community.” Literature as a whole was now defined as a tool at the service of the proletariat. Poets and writers had to support the Party and its socio-political campaigns, whereas talented poet such as Choʻlpon were to face the most violent assaults launched by supporters of the regime. Here were some of the effects of this ‘education,’ which was soon accompanied by the emergence of new theoretical principles such as the notion of *tip* (positively stereotyped characters and events), a concept lying at the core principle of socialist realism.

In 1929, when Soviet culture was at its beginning, Aršaluis Aršaruni published an article on the literature of Soviet Middle Asia. He claimed that the literature of all countries in the region was undergoing the process of “initial accumulation of proletarian values.” Aršaruni noted that such accumulation was expressed in an incredible mix of notions and pointed out the main tendency: “The combination and interlacement of notions such as the October Revolution and jihad, Lenin and Allah, the anniversary of the October Revolution and Eid, the old Lenin guard and *murīd* show that proletarian ideology built upon a real economic basis (i.e. land and water reform, national delimitation), and inflicted a crushing blow upon the old culture, traditions, Sharia and [the former] dominant ages” (Aršaruni, 1929). Indeed, both, literature per se and literature studies were undergoing this accumulation stage. Socialist realism as a term was introduced in 1932 and in 1934 it was proposed as a main method on the First All-Union Congress of Soviet writers. It defined the development of literature in the region for the next eighty years. The method of socialist realism was putting down roots with varying success in the region due to the fact that national literatures were in different stages of their development at the time of the revolutionary change (*idem*). Literatures with advanced literary traditions such as Uzbek and Tajik ones experienced what Dimitrij Likhačev called “disjunction and deceleration” (Likhačev, 1969). For the literatures that had emerged not long before the establishment of the Soviet State, such as

Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Turkmen ones, socialist realism became the framework and basis for rapid development.

In her article, Katharine Holt focuses on the early stage of this development. The author brings together the representatives of literatures with different traditions in order to explore the process of the inclusion of Central Asian national writers in the institutions of the central Soviet literary establishment. The paper assumes that the reasons and ultimate goal of this inclusion was to meet and sustain the concept of a multinational Soviet literature. Taking into account that Soviet culture was a literature-centred one, the notion of Soviet multinational literature carried the core ideas of Soviet ideology. The author focuses on and pairs up two widely known literary figures: the poet Abulqasim Lahuti, the representative of Tajik people, and the Kazakh poet-improviser Džambul Dabaev. Holt studies the two poets as “isolated individuals,” however she focuses entirely on those works that were employed to pursue Soviet ideological goals. Lahuti and Džambul were paired together to explore their operational differences in “representational authority in the Soviet literary system,” but more for showing commonalities in their positions in 1935 and 1936 within official Soviet discourse. According to the author, both poets possessed a great ability to be responsive to the expectations of the central establishment and to become its “trusted representatives.” Holt points out the special responsibilities of Lahuti and Džambul to present, through their non-translatable “physical being,” all Eastern republics of Soviet Union and suggests that their physical appearance became “a complementary, equally important text.” The concept, worked out by Holt, greatly contributes to developing the notion of Russian target culture, which used various ways and approaches to promote its goals and further eradicate vernacular traditions.

Samuel Hodgkin takes another approach, which opens up “the incredible breadth of socialist realism’s appeal.” The author explores how the genre of tragedy was transformed and adopted in national theatres of three Soviet republics, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan, under Stalin from the late 1930s to the early 1940s. What these three cases have in common are adaptations of the classical Persianate romance plot, *Farhād and Shīrīn*, during the period of high Stalinism. National librettists of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan created art forms that were innovative for their cultures. As a literary scholar, Hodgkin focuses on the librettos and examines the process

and models of transposition from the single Eastern plot to European forms of operetta and opera. The author challenges two widely known top-down accounts: the emphasis on the Russian impact in the process of transferring genres and forms from the centre to Soviet republics; and the concept that “the European neoclassical matrix organises Soviet artistic production.” He makes a shift from the Russian and European fields of influence to “the Persianate cultural sphere” and suggests that the creative works of the national librettists carry “alternate neoclassicism.” Instead of recognising “a single totalised narrative,” Hodgkin undertakes in-depths analysis of each adaptation. This approach allowed the author to reveal the vernacular and idiosyncratic specifics in each case and made a shift in studying the art of high totalitarian period from its usual homogeneous palette to a more heterogeneous one. The paper shows that “genre memory” (Bakhtin, 1963, pp. 158-160) works even under strong totalitarian circumstances. The initial genre’s semantics in combination with Stalin-type Soviet cosmopolitanism and local modernity create a basis for transposing models while transferring the same classical model into various national cultures. This article is valuable for the revelation and manifestation of these models’ diversity within socialist realism.

The method of socialist realism also appears in the article of Zulkhumor Mirzaeva. During this period it is interesting to see how literature was at stake in the relationship that developed primarily between the USA and the USSR after World War II and that was to dominate international affairs for decades. In fact, the Cold War resulted in a clash of very different beliefs and ideologies and formed the basis of an international power struggle with both sides vying for dominance, exploiting every opportunity to impose their ideas by any means, including the literary field. In her article, Mirzaeva outlines how Uzbek literature became one focal point of the ideological struggle between East and West. From the 1960s to the 1980s, a group of Uzbek scholars was formed to fight against Western scholars who specialised in Uzbek literature (‘Sovietologists’), in order to protect the interests of the Soviet ideological system. Since the interpretative work done by these non-Soviet writers was considered to be of governmental importance, Uzbek literary pieces were studied only in the light of their ideological potential. As a result, the process of finding political opposition in literature divided researchers into the camps of ‘Sovietologists’

and 'Foreignologists.' By shedding light on these mutual interactions of domestic and international scholarships, Mirzaeva helps understand how an issue like twentieth-century Uzbek literature turned into a battlefield that strengthened the Iron Curtain as well as the lack of mutual understanding between Soviet and Western scholars.

### **Perestroika and Independence: New Trajectories and Challenges in the Literature of Kyrgyzstan**

The next article is devoted to the last period of Soviet history. As it is generally known, the perestroika [restructuring] of the Soviet Union launched by Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s triggered the collapse of the USSR and made great changes in the political map of the world: fifteen independent states arose instead of one mighty country. In literature studies of Central Asian countries, the brief perestroika period remained in the shadow of both the Soviet heyday and the glamorous independence years. Although perestroika has been very important as a time of transformations and shifts in the public consciousness that shaped the future, only recently have literature studies turned their focus to that period. In her paper, Gulnara Aitpaeva analyses processes in the prose fiction of Kyrgyzstan (back then it was Soviet Kirgizia) between 1985 and 1991. The author claims that prose fiction in the Kyrgyz language was the first social field that clearly articulated a changing social consciousness in Soviet Kirgizia during perestroika. The author argues that freedom and audacity had been entering the literary field as a necessity and began swaying the rigid systemic ties. It resulted in a change of the literary field's frame and a breaking up of the field's homogeneity. Aitpaeva notes the emergence of new symbolic capital in the prose of that period represented by themes on the Manas epic and ancient national history. At the same time, the previous links and priorities were still strong and functioning actively. Emphasising the unique diversity and co-existence of the mutually exclusive ideological concepts in Kirgizia's prose of the perestroika period, the author claims that it was the literary field where, overcoming pressure and inertial resistance of the authorities, the concepts were crystallised. Idiosyncrasies of creative thinking allowed Kyrgyz writers to overcome standards and principles of Soviet ideological production before historians and other intellectuals did so. One of the author's major claims is that Kyrgyz prose of the perestroika period, being a part of the sphere for social activism, performed its socialising function i.e.

influenced further development of the society. The models and constructs that were crystallised in Kyrgyz literature during perestroika remained popular with the politicians of independent Kyrgyzstan. The author concludes that twenty-five years after its first introduction, the symbolic capital of Kyrgyz literature during perestroika has devolved into lucrative economic capital and no-lose political capital.

Just like the 1917 Revolution radically changed the trajectories of society's and literature's development, the collapse of the Soviet Union also triggered great changes, although of different nature. One of the greatest evolutions pertained to the role of the Russian language, and its corollary change in demographics i.e. the outflow of ethnic Russians and the diminishing bulk of Russian-language literature. If in Soviet times, scholarly works on literature in Central Asia tended to show, as a rule, their connection with Russian literature, the works produced in the independence period tend to overlook and underplay those connections. As a consequence, Russian literature and works of Russian-language writers in the region are greatly understudied. This collection contains two papers focusing on Russian-language literature that was produced since independence in Kyrgyzstan. To a certain extent, these papers fill the above-mentioned gap. Bakhtiâr Kojčuev and Èleonora Proâeva write on the post-Soviet Russian-language literary field in Kyrgyzstan. Both of them analyse and focus on the same processes and sometimes the same authors. As a result we have two stand-points on the same period and object, which reward us with a comparative perspective. Both papers can be interesting for understanding literary and social processes in post-Soviet countries through the analysis of Russian-language literature in Kyrgyzstan.

Bakhtiâr Kojčuev, in his article, makes a fair claim that there are very few analytic reviews of the modern literary processes in Kyrgyzstan and that none addresses Russian discourses of the late twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries. 'Russian discourse' can be understood in this proposed context as a literature written in or translated into Russian language. The most serious geopolitical condition and challenge for the Russian discourse in the post-Soviet era is the changing role and geographic usage range of the Russian language. Kojčuev attempts to review the extensive bulk of Russian-language literature published in Kyrgyzstan in the last fifteen years. Structured as an analytic review, the paper encompasses poetry

as well as prose. It covers literary works of ethnically diverse writers of different generations including the world-famous writer Chingiz Aitmatov and writers of a newly-emerging female prose genre and emigrant poetry. At the same time, it should be noted that Kojčuev does not use ethnicity as a classification principle. The concept of identity is for Kojčuev mostly an individualistic and creative one. Besides the language, the analysed sample is united by a postmodernist paradigm with its eclecticism, genre and style diffusion, and the use of visual materials to meet the demands of the mass culture. The author claims that the common peculiarity of Kyrgyzstan's modern Russian-language literature is the expression of the crisis at the turn of the century and the motif of the decline of the culture. However, Kojčuev's review shows that decline for one generation is also a natural environment and a deep cultural quest for another one. Representatives of each generation reflect on *their* culture, which allows a continuation and diversity of the Russian discourse in Kyrgyzstan.

Rather than focusing on the Russian discourse at whole, Éleonora Proâeva's paper analyses works of Russian writers through the lens of their ethnic and cultural identities. While Kojčuev stays within a frame of conventional literary studies by employing such notions as theme, plot, motive and prosody, Proâeva scrutinises works of Kyrgyzstan's Russian writers through their identities. Unlike Kojčuev, Proâeva does not work with such wide-spread and extensive paradigms as modernism, post-modernism or others in her work. Her highlighting and combination of ethnic and cultural components of the writers' identities allow the author to focus on the phenomena of post-Soviet literature. It was not by accident that Proâeva used post-colonialism theories to support her observations. Based on an analysis of ethnic and cultural components, the author distinguished such types of writers' identities as Soviet, Russian, New Asian and Asian Russian ones. Based on the comparison of the proposed creative identities' proportions, the author makes a major claim that "the current situation of the Russian literature in Kyrgyzstan [...] does not suppose a principle of domination but rather a multicultural principle of mutual influences." This claim correlates well with the conclusions, to which Kojčuev has come using different methodology and analysing broader range of materials. Together these two papers make a great contribution to the understanding of the under-studied field of Kyrgyzstan's Russian-language literature.

The collection of papers presented in this volume has covered a long historical period. Every article somehow touches upon important social issues in their respective societies. But these studies have one thing in common: they all illustrate the appropriateness of an interdisciplinary dialogue in the development of new approaches to understanding the Central Asian cultural history, and more specifically, the relationships established between culture and power in these societies. By using literature as a lens, the editors of this new issue of the *Cahiers d'Asie centrale* hope to show that the art of literature could provide significant sources that should not be neglected by any specialist interested in studying in depth a part of this fascinating history.

## References

- ARŠARUNI Aršaluis, 1929, *Khudožestvennaâ literatura Srednej Asii* [Fiction Literature of Central Asia], *Krasnaâ niva* 16, pp. 10-11 [<http://www.art-initiatives.org/?p=2681> accessed in May 2013].
- BAKHTIN Mikhail, 1963, *Problemy poëtiki Dostoevskogo* [Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics], Moscow: Sovetskij pisatel'.
- BOURDIEU Pierre, 2000, «Pole literary» [The Literary Field], *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 45, pp. 22-87.
- GAČEV Georgij, 1964, *Uskorennoe razvitie literatury: na materiale bolgarskoj literatury pervoj poloviny XIX v.* [Accelerated Development of Literature: on the Basis of the Bulgarian Literature of the First Half of the 19th Century], Moscow: Nauka.
- , 1975, *V uskorennom dviženii literatury* [In the Accelerated Movement of Literature], in Abdyldabekov (ed.) *Čingiz Ajtmatov: očerki, stati, recenzii o tvorčestve pisatelâ* [Chingiz Aitmatov: Essays, Articles and Reviews on the Writer's Creation], Frunze: Kyrgyzstan.
- LIKHAČEV Dimitrij, 1969, *Budušee literatury kak predmet izučeniâ* [The Future of Literature as a Subject of Study], *Novy mir* XLV(9), pp. 167-184 [[http://www.lihachev.ru/pic/site/files/fulltext/0406\\_Budusee\\_literaturi\\_1969.pdf](http://www.lihachev.ru/pic/site/files/fulltext/0406_Budusee_literaturi_1969.pdf) accessed in June 2014].