

Kyrgyz in China: History, Philosophy and Oral Tradition

(The study of philosophical, historical and ethnographical aspects of the Kyrgyz living in Tarbagatai, Kyzyl-Suu and Fu-Yu)

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Summary. This research is aimed to investigate the cultural and spiritual aspects of the Kyrgyz ethnic population living in China, namely in three sites: Tarbagatai, Kyzyl-Suu (Xinxiang province) and Fu-Yu (Heilunjiang province, proximity of Harbin). It is the interdisciplinary research on cultural aspects of Kyrgyz with the focused interest to the oral tradition of Kyrgyz in China, and its connection to their religiosity, philosophy and history. We have deliberately chosen the three places where Kyrgyz live in China not only for the lack of consistent research on that topic, but as well for the its specificity regarding beliefs: Tarbagatai Kyrgyz community adopted a Tibetan Lamaism, Fu-Yu Kyrgyz kept the ancient form of the Tengri and shamanic forms of beliefs, and the Kyzyl-Suu Kyrgyz are Muslim. We would like to investigate some forms of oral tradition – small epics, parables and proverbs - in the connection to the religiosity, beliefs, and consequently philosophical outlook of Kyrgyz people living in those areas, to see to what extent some disparities in spiritual life led to the specificity of the traditional cultural product.

Background information. The Kyrgyz people are one of the 56 nationalities living in China, and despite the vastness of the territory and population of the country, the Kyrgyz people were able to maintain their ethnic identity. They have retained and developed their ethno-psychological and ethno-sociological characteristics, culture and customs, uniqueness and spiritual wealth. They are an invaluable chapter in the history of the Kyrgyz, and the research on the spiritual culture of the Kyrgyz living in China is a very relevant and important topic. The restoration of an ethnogenesis of Turkic people saw the assimilation of some Kyrgyz with Bashkirs in Itili; with the Nogais, Kazakh, Uzbek, Karakalpak and Uighurs in Crimea and Astrakhan; with (1) Kizhigs in Altai; with (2) Sahi in Mongolia and Yakutia, while the Kyrgyz of Fu-Yu continue to identify themselves as Kyrgyz. The total population of the Kyrgyz people in China is more than 220,000. Small groups of Kyrgyz live in Fu-Yu, Qiqihar, Heilongjiang province, in Tarbagatai, Kuldzha, Lobnor in Xingqiang, in Tibet and other regions. Among these, Fu-Yu and Tarbagatai stand out. The Kyrgyz people living there are very different from the Kyrgyz living elsewhere in China and Kyrgyzstan. According to historical source "Yuan-Shi", at the end of XIII century the Kyrgyz of Fu-Yu moved from Khibulai to Heilongjiang. Since then, this territory was inhabited by the Kyrgyz people with their number reaching 1500. As is evidenced by thousand year old historical

chronicles, the Kyrgyz were forced by Kalmucks to move from East Turkestan to a place called Orkoshor in Dolbordzhun, part of Tarbagatai. Currently the Tarbagatai Kyrgyz live in Dorbodzhun, which is now part of the Ili-Kazakh autonomous region. Their total number is 2057 (according to Xinjiang statistics published in 2000). In the 18th century the Tarbagatai Kyrgyz adopted Buddhist religion, and they have kept this tradition until this day. The Kyrgyz people in these areas as well as Kyrgyz of Fu-Yu have distinctive culture.

No research was conducted of the life of the Kyrgyz living in above mentioned areas. Despite the preservation of the national identity, their native language can be forgotten. Given the fact that they have some common roots with the Yenisei Kyrgyz, an immediate research of history, ethnography, language, daily life of these Kyrgyz should be undertaken.

During the trip to Kyzyl Suu (Ak-Chyi) we would like to meet with an outstanding «leaving legend», sory-teller, manastchy and historian **Jusup Mamai**. An outstanding and acclaimed «Manas» epic teller (Manaschy) and collector, he learned the epic from his brother Balbai Mamai (repressed during the culturul revolution). Jusup Mamai gathered all version of Manas epic existing among the Kyrgyz in China. He beholds the knowledge of the small epics not known or less known to the Kyrgyz of Kyrgyzstan: Bagysh, Toltoi, Tytan, Mamake Shopok, Kyobyogon Baatyr. Jusup Mamai proposes 8 parts of Manas (comparing to the 3 in Kyrgyzstan): Manas, Semetei, Seitek, Kenenim, Seyit, 'Asylbacha- Bekbacha', Sombilek, Chigitei.

The study of some unexplored data and archives of Russian missions in Kashqar and Urumqi (end of XIX- beginning of XX cent.) will bring as well light on live of Kyrgyz in those areas in historical perspective. The most interesting and not yet enough explored are the archives of the Russian Consul in Kashgar N.F.Petrovsky (1882-1903), contains detailed and rich description of the Kyrgyz population in China in the XIX-XX cent.

Research history: historical ethnography and religion in the Tarbagatai Kyrgyz is one of the unexplored areas of scholarly research in China. Except the research work of Kudaibergen Kijke uul - Sanjarchy (Sanjarchy is a person who devotes himself to study and preservation of the knowledge of the kin and kinship of the Kyrgyz) entitled "The Kyrgyz of Tarbagatai", no other research has been conducted. The historiography of the Tarbagatai Kyrgyz is limited to scanty and incomplete data. The works of foreign turkologists L. Benson and I. Svanberg "The Kazakh of China. Essays on the Ethnic Minority by L. Benson and I. Svanberg, Uppsala 1988" contain general information on Kazakhs living in China and only occasional mention of the Kyrgyz people. Meanwhile the language features of Fu-Yu Kyrgyz were investigated and a research paper was published by professor of China University of peoples of Central Asia, Hu-Zheng-Hua. In 1998, German turkologist Gundula Salk together with researcher of Xinjiang Scientific Public Academy Mambetturdu Mambetkun (China) described the language features in the work "Хейлоңжиаң кыргыздары" ("The Kyrgyz of Heilongjian"). This work refers to the characteristics and language structure of the Fu-Yu Kyrgyz, but it does not say anything about the philosophical and historical-ethnographic aspects of those people. In the works of Mambetasyn Toktaly " Жүңгө кыргыздары " (The Kyrgyz of Džungo) Xinjiang National Publishing House 2010 (in Arabic letters), which recently was published in Kyrgyz language, gives general information on the Kyrgyz people of Tarbagatai and Fu-Yu. But the work does not mention the historic and ethnographical situation and philosophical thinking of Kyrgyz living in the above-mentioned areas. The path of Chokon Valikhanov's expedition to East Turkistan was

repeated exactly 100 years later by well-known ethnographer of Kyrgyzstan Professor A. Asankanov. He visited the Kyrgyz of Tarbagatai and wrote a monograph "Kyrgyz people in Xinjiang (China)", where he gives an overview of the topic. However, there is no information on the Kyrgyz people of Fu-Yu.

The relevance of scientific research. The depth of philosophical, historical and ethnographical perspective has not yet been explored while the importance of the topic is obvious.

Research methods: 1. *Use of historical sources.* The Chinese Chronicles "26 taryhynda" provide information about the Kyrgyz people. These sources describe the socio-economic situation, traditions, religions and beliefs of modern Kyrgyz in Fu-Yu and Tarbagatai since ancient times. The research paper of the scholar G.V. Suprunenko "*Документы об отношениях Китая с Енисейскими кыргызами в источниках IX века «Ли-Вэй-Гун Хойчан илин-дзу» (Собрание сочинений Ли-Вэй-Гуна) //Изв. АН Кирг. ССР, серия общественных наук-т.2.-вып.3.-Фрунзе – 1960*, provides general information about the sources. Thanks to the efforts of the Kyrgyz living in China "The Kyrgyz in the Chronicles Hanzu" was published by Xinjiang People's Publishing House, 2004. However, not all the scientific papers and information related to the Kyrgyz people of the two areas were identified while the mentioned sources provide only limited information.

2. *Library Research and work with archived materials:* Work in the library of the University of the Peoples of Central Asia (Beijing, China). During the research, the works in Kyrgyz, Kazakh and Uighur languages available in this library will be used. Work in historical archives of St-Petersburg (CGIA) and Moscow (RGVIA), National library of Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek), and Kazakhsytan (Almaty).

4. *Field materials will be collected* in order to study ethnography, ethno-cultural and historical situation together with philosophical knowledge of the Kyrgyz in Fu-Yu, Tarbagatai, and Kyzyl-Suu. Interviews with the Kyrgyz - members of relevant communities. Video and Photo documentaion. Interviews with the eminent holders of the ancient oral tradition, as f.ex. Jusup Mamai. Interviews with the researchers and experts in Beijing based University of People of Central Asia.

5. *Analyses of data. Content analysis. Comparative analysis. Philosophical analysis. Performance analysis.*

In order to study the oral epic samples the project intends to resort to the comprehensive analysis that will combine oral-formulaic theory and performance theory. This comprehensive analysis will include several steps: 1) the analysis of the performance of oral epic (vocal, intonational and gestural components) and its interaction with the audience, 2) the analysis of compositional elements, formulas and imagery, and 3) the comparative analysis that aims at comparing the collected samples with the epic tradition.

Dissemination. Writing from 2 to 3 academic articles. Participate in CASI and ESCAS Conferences with intermediate results. Produce a video documentary and photo exposition in AUCA and as well in the National Library or the State Museum of Art. Develop an elective course for the AUCA.