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The Ethnopolitical History of the Kyrgyz People in the Research of Chokan Valikhanov

The authors of the article comprehensively examined the political and ethnic issues of the Kyrgyz people in the research of Chokan Valikhanov. The scholar's studies on the history and culture of the Kyrgyz, including "The Issyk-Kul Diaries," "Notes on the Kyrgyz," and "the Sketches of Dzungaria," are deeply analyzed in the article. The analysis revealed Valikhanov's conclusions and views on the peculiarities of the Kyrgyz people's tribal system, ethnogenesis, ancient settlements, their locations, population size, examples of oral literature, customs, and traditions. Special attention was given to the scholar's use of folklore like legends, epics, and fairy tales as primary sources in the writing of the history of nomadic peoples. The authors highlighted Valikhanov's introduction of the Manas epic into scientific discourse and highly praise his meticulous and artistic translation of the episode "The Death of Koketai Khan and His Funeral" into Russian for the first time. In his works, Valikhanov illustrated both the similarities and differences between the languages and cultures of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz peoples with specific examples. The main goal of the article is to present Valikhanov's contributions to the study of the history and culture of the Kyrgyz people, his conclusions, and scientific novelty based on concrete source in the context of contemporary research. The authors assert the following: Based on Valikhanov's research, the governance system of the Kyrgyz people is defined, and his views on the formation of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz peoples demonstrate the dialectical method employed in his study. He formulated a constructive theory on the tribal composition of both peoples, proving his conclusions through comparative analysis of Chinese sources, archival documents, and oral literature. The authors identified that, alongside pastoralism, agriculture, urban life, and craftsmanship, multiple cultural and economic practices coexisted within Kyrgyz society. In comparison to sedentary societies, they emphasize that nomadic societies, such as the Kyrgyz, developed oral literature over centuries, and Valikhanov correctly highlighted the distinct historical and cultural features of the Kyrgyz people as a nomadic group for the first time.

Keywords: Shokan Valikhanov, Abilgazy, Kyrgyz, Issyk-Kul, Dzungaria, Bukhara, Central Asia, Aksu and Turfan.

Introduction

The historical, cultural, and ethnolinguistic affinities between the Kazakh and Kyrgyz peoples have long invited scholarly inquiry. As Turkic-speaking, nomadic societies, the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz have coexisted for centuries as neighboring and fraternal communities, bound by deep-rooted commonalities in language, oral tradition, customary law, religious beliefs, and socio-political organization. These enduring bonds, forged through shared heritage and sustained interethnic interaction, provided the foundation for the scholarly interest of Chokan Valikhanov (1835–1865), who undertook pioneering studies on Kyrgyz ethnogenesis, tribal structure, and cultural memory.

A product of the Kazakh steppe himself, Valikhanov was uniquely positioned to engage in ethnographic research on kindred nomadic groups. His intellectual formation was profoundly shaped by the oral traditions transmitted by his grandmother Aiganym and father Chingis Valikhanov, both of whom instilled in him a familiarity with Kazakh epic literature, genealogical lore, and historical consciousness. This indigenous epistemological grounding, combined with his formal training in Russian academic institutions, allowed Valikhanov to bridge vernacular knowledge systems with scholarly modes of inquiry, enabling a nuanced and methodologically innovative approach to the study of Central Asian peoples.

Between 1856 and 1857, Valikhanov conducted two major expeditions into Kyrgyz-inhabited regions, focusing primarily on the Issyk-Kul basin and the Central Tien Shan mountain range. These field investigations culminated in a series of landmark works — "Dnevnik poyezdki na Issyk-Kul" (The Issyk-Kul Diaries, 1856), "Zapiski o kirgizakh" (Notes on the Kyrgyz, 1856), and "Ocherki Dzhungarii" (Sketches of Dzungaria, 1860). These texts represent some of the earliest systematic efforts to document Kyrgyz oral epics, tribal

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genealogies, mytho-historical narratives, and geographical knowledge. Through this corpus, Valikhanov articulated an integrated ethnographic portrait of the Kyrgyz, one that encompassed their origin myths, spiritual and material culture, political organization, and migratory patterns.

A key contribution of Valikhanov's ethnographic analysis was his elucidation of the Kyrgyz dual tribal division into "right" and "left" wings — a structural motif he traced back to the foundational Oghuz Khan narrative, wherein six sons give rise to tribal bifurcation. In his correspondence with the noted orientalist I.N. Berezin, Valikhanov remarked that this symbolic and organizational division persisted among the so-called Kara Kyrgyz, with the Bugu clan comprising the right wing and the Solto clan the left — a pattern he connected to broader political traditions observed in Bukhara and among Eastern Turkic polities [1; 167].

Although many of Valikhanov's writings on the Kyrgyz remained unpublished during his lifetime, preserved only in archival repositories, they gained scholarly visibility in the mid-20th century. Among these is the unfinished manuscript "Zapiski o kirgizakh", originally intended for submission to the Imperial Russian Geographical Society. His fieldwork formed part of a broader military-scientific expedition led by Colonel M.M. Khomentovsky in 1856, which aimed to chart the Issyk-Kul region while gathering ethnographic data. Internal documentation from the expedition — particularly official reports attributed to Khomentovsky — exhibit stylistic and substantive congruence with Valikhanov's personal journals, suggesting his direct authorship or editorial influence.

Valikhanov's initial encounter with the Kyrgyz occurred in the second half of May 1856, when he joined Khomentovsky's expedition. His route extended from Alakol through the Central Tien Shan and Issyk-Kul regions. He crossed the passes of the Ile Alatau, traversing the Kungei and Terskei Alatau ranges, conducted surveys along the northern and eastern shores of Issyk-Kul, and ascended the Jyrgalan River valley to reach the Central Tien Shan massif, from where he was able to observe Khan Tengri [2; 34].

This study examines Chokan Valikhanov's contributions to the ethnography of the Kyrgyz within the broader context of 19th-century Russian imperial knowledge production. It interrogates how Valikhanov's hybrid positionality — as both a native informant and an academically trained orientalist — enabled him to mediate between indigenous epistemologies and the scientific discourses of the Russian Empire. By situating his writings within the frameworks of comparative ethnography and colonial knowledge co-production, this paper not only foregrounds the methodological and epistemological innovations of Valikhanov's work, but also contributes to wider debates on the intellectual legacy of native scholars embedded within imperial institutions.

Materials and Methods

The main materials of this article are the works of Chokan Valikhanov. This study draws upon the foundational theoretical insights of Chokan Valikhanov and pre-revolutionary Russian scholars, integrating their contributions within a broader historiographical framework. To analyze the political and ethnocultural history of the Kyrgyz, a comprehensive suite of historical research methods has been employed. These include comparative-historical analysis, historical typology, descriptive interpretation, scientific synthesis, and the systematic organization of historical data. The research also applies a critical dialectical approach to political-historical processes, serving as both a methodological and epistemological basis for the interpretation of historical phenomena.

Particular emphasis has been placed on the civilizational perspective, especially within the emerging global field of personality studies. The study foregrounds the intellectual legacy of individual historical actors most notably Valikhanov by situating their contributions to science, culture, and civilizational development within their historical contexts. The article maintains internal coherence by ensuring that its arguments, sources, and interpretative frameworks are logically interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

Kazakh historian Q.M. Atabaev, in his methodological and source-critical work, characterizes Sh. Ualikhanov's scholarly contributions as pioneering within the nascent tradition of Kazakh historiography. He writes:

"Chokan Valikhanov was the first Kazakh scholar to offer a scientifically grounded perspective on the indigenous historical knowledge of his people. Source studies as an academic discipline begin with the systematic collection and publication of historical records. In this regard, Ualikhanov played an essential role by identifying, translating, and introducing a wide array of historical materials particularly those concerning Kazakh and Kyrgyz history into Russian-language academic circulation. His source-critical approach, methodological rigor, and evaluation of historical texts retain enduring relevance for contemporary source studies" [3].

Among scholars who have significantly contributed to the development of historical theory and methodology in Kazakhstan, A. Kuzembayuly is particularly noteworthy. Writing in the early years of Kazakhstan's independence, he engaged with complex problems in personality studies and theoretical-methodological questions, often building upon the work of Academician M. Kozybayev. In his article "Academician M.K. Kozybayev on the Theoretical Issues of Kazakh History," Kuzembayuly noted:

"A key theoretical challenge lies in the critical evaluation of historical figures. In some cases, marginal figures have been elevated to the status of national heroes, while genuinely significant contributors remain obscured. In the post-independence period, M. Kozybayev played a crucial role in restoring many Kazakh intellectuals to their rightful place in national historiography" [4].

Another important contribution comes from E. Abil, who has examined both the content and methodological structure of historical scholarship in Kazakhstan. In his article "Theoretical and Methodological Problems in Studying Ancient and Medieval History," he critiques the limited theoretical engagement in large-scale academic syntheses:

"In the five-volume History of Kazakhstan, compiled by Kazakh scholars, the primary focus was on empirical description rather than on the critical development of theoretical and methodological frameworks. Although the first volume addressed certain aspects of ethnogenesis, it failed to systematically articulate the research paradigms necessary for understanding the dynamics of early and medieval nomadic societies" [5].

These assessments collectively highlight a persistent gap in the establishment of a robust theoretical-methodological school within Kazakh historiography. This lacuna can be attributed to the legacy of Soviet-era scholarship, where historical inquiry was subordinated to ideological imperatives. As a result, the independent development of methodological approaches was curtailed, impeding the maturation of theoretical discourse in historical science.

This article, therefore, contributes to the ongoing effort to reframe historical research in Kazakhstan within a more autonomous and critically engaged theoretical paradigm — one grounded in both indigenous scholarly traditions and the methodological standards of global historical science.

Results

In his seminal work *Notes on the Kyrgyz*, Chokan Valikhanov presented a detailed ethnographic and linguistic account of the self-identification and external classifications of the Kyrgyz people. He noted that the "Kara Kyrgyz" (Black kyrgyz) referred to themselves either simply as Kyrgyz or Kara Kyrgyz, and that this designation was broadly recognized among the Turkic-Muslim populations of Central Asia. Among the Kazakhs, who employed visual ethnomarkers, the Kyrgyz were often distinguished as *aqqalpaqtylar* ("white-cap wearers") or *qaralar* ("the blacks"). In contrast, Russian imperial administrative terminology designated them as *dikokamennye* ("wild stone-dwellers") or *zakamennye* ("those beyond the mountains"), thereby delineating them from the steppe Kazakhs through spatial and civilizational signifiers. Valikhanov further remarked that although the Chinese sources referred to the Kyrgyz as *buruut*, this term was not recognized by the Kyrgyz themselves [6; 8].

Valikhanov documented that the Kyrgyz historically occupied an expansive territory, with their settlements in the mid-nineteenth century stretching from the northern shores of Lake Issyk-Kul to the mountainous districts of Badakhshan, and from Sozak in the west to Aksu and Üch-Turfan in the east. He emphasized the decentralized sociopolitical organization of the Kyrgyz, noting that their tribal dispersion across remote highland zones particularly in the Bolor Mountains had significantly undermined traditional kinship-based cohesion. As he observed:

"There is no political unity among the Kyrgyz who inhabit the inaccessible ravines of the Bolormountains and its outlying regions across China, Kokand, Karategin, Ghissar, and Badakhshan. The sheer remoteness of their settlements has rendered traditional kinship ties effectively obsolete" [6; 8].

Employing a combination of cartographic, ethnographic, and oral-historical methods, Valikhanov reconstructed the migratory and settlement patterns of the Kyrgyz. He identified their core habitation zones along the mountain ranges between the upper Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers and the Altai highlands, extending both northwards through the Tien Shan and Alatau systems and southwards toward the Hindu Kush, via the Muztau and Belurtau ridges [6; 9]. Given the geographic fragmentation of Kyrgyz clans, he contended that any systematic demographic enumeration was virtually impossible.

One of the key findings in *Notes on the Kyrgyz* was Valikhanov's attempt to reconcile divergent origin theories. Drawing on both indigenous oral histories and Chinese documentary sources, he pointed to a lack of scholarly consensus regarding the Kyrgyz homeland. Kazakh informants typically identified the Issyk-Kul

basin as the Kyrgyz ethnogenetic center, while Chinese sources associated the buruut with the region between Andijan and Kashgar. Valikhanov synthesized these accounts in a pragmatic conclusion:

“Both views are valid. The majority of Kyrgyz clans are concentrated near Andijan and across the mountain ranges extending north to the Chu River, westward to Shyrshyk, eastward to the Chinese territories of Aksu, Üch-Turfan, and Kashgar, and southward to Badakhshan. It is across these territories that the Right and Left Kyrgyz wings, as well as the tribes collectively known as the “Thirty Sons,” traditionally migrate” [6; 9-10].

In “Notes of the Society” (Записки Общества), Valikhanov critically engaged with the migrationist hypothesis advanced by scholars such as Johann E. Fischer and Aleksey I. Levshin, who posited that the Kyrgyz had migrated from southern Siberia. He found this thesis incompatible with the oral traditions of the Kyrgyz, which recounted alternative and more localized narratives of origin. His critique thus marked one of the earliest scholarly attempts to challenge diffusionist models with indigenous epistemologies.

Valikhanov’s conclusions continue to inform Kyrgyz national historiography. His assertion that the Kyrgyz represent one of Central Asia’s most ancient ethno-cultural formations has been reiterated by contemporary Kyrgyz scholars. For example, the History of the Kirghiz SSR a foundational Soviet-era multi-volume publication argues that Kyrgyz ethnogenesis occurred in regions long occupied by their ancestors, spanning a timeframe from the third to the second millennia BCE through the early modern period. Importantly, it draws a distinction between the Yenisei Kyrgyz and the modern Kyrgyz, concluding:

“The formation of the Kyrgyz as an ethno-political community took place in regions they had inhabited since antiquity. This process spans from the third to the second millennia BCE and culminates in the sixteenth century... The Yenisei Kyrgyz are not direct ancestors of the contemporary Kyrgyz; their ethnic lineage derives primarily from the Khakas. The complexity of the issue lies in the historical record, which reveals that two distinct groups bearing the name “Kyrgyz” lived simultaneously in Southern Siberia and the Tian Shan-Pamir-Altai regions” [6; 50].

In his ethnographic inquiries, Chokan Valikhanov underscored the centrality of oral tradition as a primary medium for reconstructing the historical origins and migratory trajectories of the Kyrgyz people. He emphasized: “The fact that the Kyrgyz have long inhabited the mountainous regions near Andijan and extended their nomadic movement as far as Kashgar is evident from the oral traditions of the Kara-Kyrgyz tribes... In resolving such questions, the most crucial source is the ancient oral narratives such as myths, epics, and heroic legends preserved by the people themselves” [7; 59].

Valikhanov subjected these oral accounts to critical scrutiny and found no evidence to support the hypothesis of a Kyrgyz migration from Siberia to Central Asia. He reasoned that such a momentous displacement would have left discernible traces in collective memory — particularly within folklore and heroic epics — had it occurred within the past two centuries. The absence of such recollections, he argued, undermines the validity of this theory.

Valikhanov placed particular epistemological value on folk traditions as repositories of historical consciousness and vehicles of cultural continuity. Recognizing the resilience of oral transmission among nomadic societies, he regarded legends, myths, and epics not merely as literary artifacts but as vital sources for ethnogenetic inquiry. Among the most salient of these traditions, he noted:

“One of the oldest and most remarkable legends among the Kara-Kyrgyz concerns their origins. They unanimously trace their lineage to a red dog, though the symbolic interpretation of this figure varies.”

In analyzing Kyrgyz mythology, Valikhanov delineated two chronological strata: pre-Islamic narratives and those emerging under Islamic influence. He gave particular attention to the widespread legend deriving the ethnonym “Kyrgyz” from kyrkkyzdar (“forty maidens”). According to this account, a khan’s daughter, accompanied by forty female companions, gave birth to Kyrgyzbai — the purported progenitor of the Kyrgyz people. The descendants of these maidens, known as the Otuz-ullchlik, were believed to have settled in the regions extending beyond Andijan toward Kokand, where their lineage persists [6; 52].

Drawing from field observations, Valikhanov further noted that the Kyrgyz historically lacked institutionalized forms of monarchy or aristocracy. Their governance was patriarchal, centered around the authority of tribal elders. He acknowledged the methodological complexity of reconstructing the early and medieval histories of nomadic groups, citing the paucity and fragmentary nature of textual sources. While Chinese dynastic chronicles offer some of the earliest references to Turkic-Mongol tribes, more coherent historical narratives only appear from the 11th century onward in Islamic historiography.

Valikhanov’s conception of ethnogenesis in Central Asia was remarkably nuanced. He recognized the dynamic nature of tribal identities, shaped by ecological pressures, intertribal conflict, and geopolitical up-

heaval. As he observed, ethnonyms often emerged from processes of confederation, wherein multiple groups adopted the name of a dominant tribe. He cited the Huns, Uighurs, and Mongols as illustrative cases of such transformations. Forced migrations and external pressures, he argued, complicated efforts to establish linear continuities in ethnic history [6; 14].

In navigating the historiographical challenges posed by Chinese sources, Valikhanov was especially critical of phonetic distortions resulting from sinographic transliteration. He noted:

“The Chinese render foreign names with phonetically similar characters, resulting in inconsistency. Although chronicles from the Tang and Yuan dynasties contain valuable material, their disordered presentation hampers accurate historical reconstruction.”

While acknowledging the historical utility of Chinese annals — particularly those from the Yuan period — Valikhanov privileged Islamic and other Eastern sources for their greater internal coherence and ethnographic specificity. He cited N.Ya. Bichurin’s 1829 Russian translation of *The History of the First Four Khans of the House of Genghis* as an important contribution to the study of Turkic nomadic polities.

Valikhanov’s theory of Turkic ethnogenesis posited that the fragmentation of the Mongol Empire and ensuing internecine conflicts among Chinggisid lineages gave rise to new ethno-political formations. These emergent identities included both sedentary and nomadic groups — some adopting new ethnonyms such as Uzbek, Noghai, and Kazakh, and others, like the Kyrgyz, Manghit (later Karakalpak), and Uriankhai, taking shape in the eastern regions.

Valikhanov was acutely aware of the epistemological significance of folklore in the reconstruction of nomadic history. He affirmed the Kyrgyz as a branch of the ancient nomadic populations of Inner Asia, while simultaneously acknowledging the diversity of scholarly interpretations regarding their origin. Drawing from Chinese sources, he noted the historical designation of the Kyrgyz under various ethnonyms — Qian-Kun, Khakha, and Kilikidzil. He wrote:

“Klaproth, relying on Tang dynasty records, identified their habitat as the Yenisei region; Abel Rémusat and Viztel associated them with Indo-European peoples, while Ritter hypothesized that the Kyrgyz arose from a fusion of Indo-European Wusun and Turkic Hoi-Hu tribes. The Chinese distinguished contemporary Buruuts (Kyrgyz) from the Kilikidzil and traced their ancestry to the Polu people who inhabited the Tibetan highlands during the Tang period.”

Valikhanov recounted how, in the 17th century, Russian explorers encountered a Turkic group called “Kyrgyz” active in the Kuznetsk region, particularly between Tyumen and Kuznetsk. This group appears to have vanished by the century’s end. Scholars such as Fischer, Levshin, and Klaproth hypothesized that they were the Yenisei Kyrgyz, relocated to Central Asia through arrangements between the Russian court and the Dzungar Khanate. This interpretation found support in Ritter’s *Geography of Asia*, but was contested by Iakinf Bichurin. The latter refuted the equivalence of the Yenisei and contemporary Kyrgyz, citing phonetic discrepancies (kărgiz) and cultural divergence, and instead regarded the Yenisei group as descendants of the Dzungars.

In summarizing his findings, Valikhanov concluded: “The Kyrgyz do not recognize the name “Buruut” and are puzzled by its use. Nor do they possess any recollection of migration from another region. On the contrary, they are unanimous in asserting that they are the indigenous inhabitants of the Andijan mountains” [6; 56].

In his historical chronicle, *Shajara-i Tarākima*, Abu’l-Ghazi Bahadur Khan posits that the Kyrgyz (or Kirgiz) trace their lineage to Qyrghyz, a grandson of the mytho-historical figure Oghuz Khan. He further notes that over time, the proportion of individuals descending directly from this primordial ancestor had significantly declined. As he explains, various groups particularly those of Mongol origin facing ecological pressures such as pasture scarcity, assimilated into Kyrgyz society and adopted the Kyrgyz ethnonym, despite maintaining an awareness of their distinct genealogical backgrounds. According to Abu’l-Ghazi, the Kyrgyz eventually organized themselves into two principal tribal divisions and settled near the Kem-Kemjuts, along the banks of the Selenga and Ikar-Murun rivers [6; 61].

Abu’l-Ghazi also records that the Kyrgyz referred to their chieftains by the title *inal*. During the reign of Chinggis Khan, one such leader, Urus, is identified as an *inal*. This narrative is elaborated upon by Chokan Valikhanov, who observes that when Chinggis Khan partitioned his empire among his sons, the territories inhabited by the Kyrgyz were granted to his youngest son, Töle. Valikhanov initially cites the year 1254 for this event, later revising it to 1253, aligning with the testimony of William of Rubruck — the Franciscan envoy of King Louis IX of France — who, during his 13th-century mission to Möngke Khan, located the Kyrgyz north of Karakorum.

The identification of the Ikar-Murun River remains contentious within scholarly discourse. Gerhard Müller and Johann Fischer, in their “Sibirische Geschichte”, speculate that the Ikar-Murun may refer to the Yellow River (Huang He), implying a Kyrgyz migration from Inner Asia to southern Siberia in the wake of the Mongol conquests. In contrast, Julius Klaproth, drawing on the Yuan Shi (the official annals of the Yuan dynasty, 1280–1367), refutes this theory. He locates the people designated as Ki-li ki-zsi — a phonetic rendering of Kyrgyz — firmly between the Yenisei and Angara Rivers.

Synthesizing these divergent views, Valikhanov affirms the historical presence of the Kyrgyz in southern Siberia: “There can be no doubt that the Kyrgyz once resided in southern Siberia. Even today, the Buryats refer to ancient burial mounds along the Onon, Shilka, and Argun rivers as kyrgyz-gyr, or “Kyrgyz dwellings.”

He postulates that the Kyrgyz sphere of influence may have extended as far south as the Argun frontier — a claim substantiated by a memorandum from the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs dated January 1852.

Valikhanov laments the fragmentary nature of sources concerning the subsequent historical trajectory of the Kyrgyz, particularly their interactions with the Oirats. By the early 17th century, Russian Cossack expeditions reported the presence of Kyrgyz communities along the Abakan, Chu, and Tom Rivers, often cohabiting with or situated adjacent to the Mongol-dominated territories of the Uriankhai and Dzungars. Throughout this century, the Kyrgyz appear sporadically in Siberian chronicles — engaging in raids on Kuznetsk and Tomsk, forging strategic alliances with the Telenguts, Uriankhai, and even the Dzungar khontayshis. In 1606, a Kyrgyz prince named Nomcha petitioned the Russian Tsardom for vassalage, dispatching emissaries to negotiate terms. However, the abuse of these envoys incited retaliatory incursions against Tara and Tomsk. A year later, in 1607, the Kyrgyz formally pledged allegiance to the Russian crown, only to shift allegiance in 1642 to the Dzungar ruler Batur, and later, in 1657, to Altyn Khan Lobzang of the Uriankhai. During this turbulent period, Kyrgyz settlements spanned from the Abakan to the Yus Rivers, extending westward to the Tom River, eastward to the Yenisei, and southward to the Sayan Mountains [6; 62-63].

By the close of the 17th and beginning of the 18th centuries, references to the Kyrgyz under this ethnonym disappear from Siberian administrative records. Fischer speculates that the Dzungars forcibly resettled the Kyrgyz, possibly relocating them to regions near the Tibetan plateau or even the Hindu Kush. Levshin, in his “Opisanie kirgiz-kaysatskikh ord i stepey,” attributes this migration to a clandestine agreement between the Russian imperial government and the Dzungar khontayshi. Valikhanov rejects this theory, undertaking his own examination grounded in oral history and archival evidence [8; 180].

Valikhanov also addresses the semantic confusion surrounding the ethnonym *Burut*, which Chinese sources often use to denote the Kyrgyz. He suggests that this is analogous to the Russian colonial practice of referring to the Kazakhs as “Kirgiz.” Despite the valuable data presented in Abu'l-Ghazi's chronicle, Valikhanov is struck by the lack of corroborating accounts concerning a mass migration of the Kyrgyz. As he notes: “Abu'l-Ghazi completed his chronicle in 1074 AH (1663/1664 CE), which roughly corresponds to the period attributed to the Kyrgyz migration. It is difficult to imagine that such a momentous event as the forced relocation of an entire Turkic people would have escaped his notice.”

He further argues that the warlike and fiercely autonomous character of the Kyrgyz renders it implausible that they would have acquiesced to such a displacement without resistance. Even under the formidable rule of Galdan Tseren, the Dzungars failed to subjugate the Kara-Kyrgyz. If such a migration had indeed occurred, Valikhanov asserts, it would have left an indelible mark in oral tradition — epic poems, origin myths, and lamentations commemorating ancestral homelands such as the Abakan and Yus valleys.

While the *Manas* epic does contain episodes of northward migration by the Nogay clans following the death of the legendary Koketai Khan, Valikhanov argues that this episode pertains to a separate ethnopolitical formation. Based on linguistic markers and thematic structure, he situates the Nogay Legends in the 15th century and interprets them as expressions of Kyrgyz historical consciousness affirming their deep-rooted presence in the Tien Shan region [6; 66].

In his efforts to elucidate the ethnogenesis and early settlement patterns of the Kyrgyz, Valikhanov drew upon a wide array of sources, placing particular emphasis on indigenous oral traditions. Among these, he treated native Kyrgyz epics as especially valuable. According to the *Manas* epic, the Kyrgyz traditionally migrated along the banks of the Chu and Talas rivers. In Kazakh oral narratives, they are said to have traveled as far as the Ayagöz River. Interestingly, in the *Manas* epic, the eponymous hero is at times described as a warrior from Andijan and at others from Samarkand, underscoring the fluidity of identity in oral epic tradi-

tions. Nevertheless, these narratives consistently highlight peaceful and neighborly relations between the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs.

In Kazakh legends, the era when they coexisted with the Nogais is often portrayed as a “golden age,” with recurring expressions such as “when fortune smiled upon both the Nogai and the Kazakh.” Kyrgyz historian I.B. Moldobaev, in his detailed analysis of the Manas epic, identified over ten ethnonyms shared by the Kazakh and Kyrgyz peoples, thereby reinforcing the thesis of deep-rooted ethno-cultural proximity. These include major tribal names such as Qypchaq, Qongyrat, Zhediger, Qataghan, and Dulat, as well as clan names like Nogai, Alshyn, Sary, Sary Uisun, Abak, Tazdar, It Emgen, Agyntai, Balyqshy, and Qyzyl Qurt, among others [9; 59]. These findings support the argument that the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, as historically related Turkic peoples, have long shared common linguistic and cultural features.

Despite recognizing their affinities, Valikhanov made a clear distinction between the two groups. In his “Ocherki Dzhungarii,” he cautioned against conflating the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, arguing that they constituted distinct ethnic entities. He observed: “The Great, Middle, and Little Hordes of the Kyrgyz-Kaisaks constitute what is referred to as the Kazakh people.” In contrast, the group referred to by the Chinese as *bürüt*, and by Russians as *dikokamennye* or “Kara Kyrgyz,” represents an entirely separate people. According to Valikhanov, the two groups differed markedly in language, origin, and customs. Even their physical appearances bore distinguishing characteristics. To underscore his point, in 1856 he sketched a portrait of the Kyrgyz leader Boranbai Manap [10; 334].

Valikhanov was also the first among European scholars to document the internal socio-political structure of the Kyrgyz. He observed that they were divided into two major divisions or “wings”: the “Right Hand” and the “Left Hand.” He estimated the Kyrgyz population to be approximately 300,000. He collected oral genealogies detailing the tribal affiliations within these divisions, noting the descent from founding ancestors and the structure of lineages and clans. He compiled genealogical charts for major tribes, documented their seasonal migration routes, and systematically analyzed their political relations with neighboring polities such as the Qing Empire and the Khanate of Khoqand [11; 78].

In her article *Tribal Structure of the Kyrgyz Based on the writings of Valikhanov*, Kyrgyz scholar Ch. Turdalieva conducted a comparative analysis of Kyrgyz tribal organization [12]. Drawing on Valikhanov’s materials, she demonstrated that ethnic and genealogical processes within tribal structures developed at different rates and in various directions. For instance, the disintegration of the Esengul branch of the Sarybagysh tribe led to the emergence of smaller subgroups such as Manap, Zheti, and Uruk. Turdalieva also emphasized the remarkable stability of certain tribal subdivisions over centuries. She concluded that Valikhanov’s documentation of the geographical distribution, numerical strength, and nomenclature of northern and southern Kyrgyz tribes constitutes valuable evidence for the historical unity of the Kyrgyz people.

In his ethnographic and historical investigations, Chokan Valikhanov offered a meticulous account of the territorial distribution and socio-political organization of the Kyrgyz tribes across Central Asia. Drawing upon both personal observation and prior travel literature, Valikhanov recorded that the region encompassing Little Bukhara (Küçük Bukhara), as well as the broader expanse from Kashgar to Aksu and Turfan, was inhabited by descendants of the Chongbagysh, Sherik, and Naiman tribal lineages. In the environs of Sarykol, he identified significant concentrations of Naiman and Qypchaq groups, reinforcing the notion of deep historical continuities in tribal settlement patterns across the eastern fringes of the Kyrgyz world.

A notable aspect of Valikhanov’s field observations concerns the so-called “Kara Kyrgyz” mountain-dwelling communities that had largely maintained political autonomy from both the Khanate of Khoqand and Qing China. These groups, while nominally acknowledging external suzerainty through symbolic tribute, functioned as *de facto* autonomous entities. Nevertheless, Valikhanov noted an increasing cultural assimilation into the linguistic and behavioral norms of Khoqand society, suggesting a gradual erosion of cultural distinctiveness even among the more isolated segments of the Kyrgyz population.

Valikhanov’s attention to the historical geography of Kyrgyz settlement extended to the Talas and Chu river basins, which he identified as ancestral homelands of the Sayak and Solto tribes. He further remarked on the persistence of ancient Kyrgyz lineages in the remote, glaciated ranges of the Kunlun Mountains. There, he reported, small kinship groups continued to live in relative isolation. Citing the accounts of British travelers such as Alexander Burnes and Thomas Wood, Valikhanov emphasized that these highland communities were markedly distinct in both physical appearance and way of life from the Issyk-Kul Kyrgyz, suggesting complex processes of differentiation within the broader Kyrgyz ethnos.

In his seminal Notes on the Kyrgyz, Valikhanov systematically mapped the seasonal and territorial distribution of various Kyrgyz tribes. He observed that the Issyk-Kul basin, despite its central role in Kyrgyz cosmology and cultural memory, functioned primarily as a wintering site. The name “Issyk-Kul,” he explained, comes from a Tatar term meaning “warm lake,” referring to its distinctive hydrological trait: it remains unfrozen even in the harshest winters. During his expedition to the region, Valikhanov documented local oral traditions regarding the lake’s origins and mytho-historical significance. Drawing on Abu’l-Ghazi’s Genealogy of the Turks, he reiterated the notion that Issyk-Kul had long been viewed as a cradle of Turkic civilization. According to these accounts, the lake was associated with Yafes, the son of Noah and mythical progenitor of the Turks. It was also said to have served as a wintering site for the legendary Oghuz Khan. Moreover, prior to the rise of Chinggis Khan, the area surrounding Issyk-Kul along with the adjacent Chu and Talas valleys had been settled by the Kankly (Qangli), an important Turkic group of the pre-Mongol era.

Valikhanov’s inquiries were not limited to ethnogenesis and territoriality; he also conducted a comparative analysis of political authority among the Kyrgyz and Kazakh populations. In this regard, he paid particular attention to the institution of the manap — tribal leaders among the Kyrgyz whose authority, according to his account, was both extensive and coercive. “At present,” he wrote, “the power of the manaps within their tribes is virtually absolute: they exercise complete dominion over the common people, whom they may sell or even execute. In this respect, they differ significantly from the sultans among the Kyrgyz-Kaisaks (i.e., the Kazakhs), whose authority, while once legally sanctioned, was historically moderated by councils of elders and communal assemblies” [13]

He further traced the origins of the manap title to a judge of the Sarybagysh tribe named Manap, underscoring the functional evolution of tribal leadership from judicial to political-military roles. Valikhanov’s detailed documentation of tribal emblems (tamga) and battle cries (uran) provides valuable ethnographic material, offering rare insight into the symbolic repertoire and mechanisms of identity formation within Kyrgyz society. His work constitutes a foundational contribution to the study of Kyrgyz historical memory, internal structure, and political culture in the pre-colonial period.

Discussion

Scholarly interest in the life, intellectual legacy, and select works of Chokan Valikhanov began during his own lifetime. The historiography of Valikhanov studies can be traced back to 1904, when the Russian Geographical Society published Volume 29 of its proceedings as a separate monograph titled “Collected Works of Chokan Chingisovich Valikhanov,” edited by N.I. Veselovsky [14].

During the Soviet period, Valikhanov’s biography and scholarly contributions were studied intensively, particularly between the 1950s and the mid-1980s. A major role in compiling and editing his works was played by the academician A.Kh. Margulan, under whose supervision the five-volume Collected Works was published between 1961–1972 and again in 1984–1985.

The Kyrgyz people were the subject of pre-revolutionary studies by a number of Russian researchers, including I.G. Andreev, A.I. Levshin, M.I. Venyukov, V.V. Radlov, and N.A. Aristov [12]. Within this scholarly context, Valikhanov is widely recognized as a foundational figure in Kyrgyz historiography. The renowned Turkologist A.N. Kononov remarked that “from a historical-philological perspective, the first to study the Kyrgyz people was the distinguished Kazakh scholar Chokan Chingisovich Valikhanov” [11; 77]. At that time, the pre-nineteenth-century history of the Kyrgyz remained largely unexplored.

Valikhanov encountered information about the Kyrgyz in the writings of researchers such as Voronin, Nifontyev, P.P. Semenov-Tian-Shansky, P.A. Likhachev, Y.V. Khanikov, and others [15; 54–56]. Through a comparative analysis of sources particularly the writings of Abu’l-Ghazi Bahadur Khan, Chinese chronicles, archival materials, and oral traditions — he established both the antiquity and autochthony of the Kyrgyz as a Turkic people.

Valikhanov’s name frequently appears in scholarship on the Manas epic, which he was among the first to study scientifically. The historian Abdulkadir Inan emphasized that it was thanks to Valikhanov that the Manas epic became known to the academic world [16]. This view is echoed in contemporary studies such as Ferhat Temir’s The Manas Epic in the Works of Kazakh Scholars and Hasan Ozdemir’s article on legends related to Korkyt Ata, both of which highlight Valikhanov’s essential contributions.

During the Soviet era, several Kyrgyz scholars made important contributions to the study of Valikhanov’s legacy. Notable among them are A.A. Sadykov, I.B. Moldobaev, and R. Kydyrbaeva, all of whom emphasized the importance of his work on Kyrgyz history. Among more recent contributions is that of

Ch.D. Turdalieva, who defended both a Candidate of Historical Sciences dissertation titled *The History and Culture of the Kyrgyz According to the Works of Ch.Ch. Valikhanov* and a doctoral dissertation entitled *The History and Culture of the Kyrgyz in the Works of Western Travelers and Researchers (19th-20th Centuries)* [13]. In both studies, Turdalieva devotes considerable attention to Valikhanov's scholarly legacy.

Since Kazakhstan's independence, there has been a resurgence of academic interest in Valikhanov's work, with a fresh analytical perspective. For example, S.S. Dzheenbekova's article "Everyday Life of the Kyrgyz in the Research of Chokan Valikhanov" [17] evaluates the ethnographic and historical insights his writings provide on daily life. Similarly, D.B. Saparaliev's article "Kazakh-Kyrgyz Relations in the 17th-18th Centuries in the Scholarly Works of Ch. Valikhanov" and S.Ch. Umurzakov's study "Valikhanov as a Geographer-Explorer of" [18] are noteworthy for their detailed examinations of Valikhanov's contributions across disciplinary boundaries. These studies collectively affirm that Valikhanov laid the groundwork for scientific research on Kyrgyz history, society, and culture, situating him as a pioneering figure in Central Asian historical scholarship.

Chokan Valikhanov's research represents a pioneering and comprehensive examination of the political-ethnic, spiritual-cultural, and historical-geographical dimensions of Kyrgyz society. Among his many contributions, he drew scholarly attention to the prevalence of ancient fortifications across Kyrgyz territories, interpreting them as material evidence of a historically sedentary population. Synthesizing archaeological observations with textual sources, he argued that the early inhabitants of these regions had attained a high level of cultural development [19; 58-59].

As historian D. Dulatova aptly observed, Valikhanov's approach to the ethnogenesis of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz peoples was rooted in a dialectical methodology. His critical analysis produced a coherent theoretical model for understanding the formation and internal organization of both peoples, especially their tribal and clan structures [20].

Conclusions

In his investigation of the ancient and medieval history of the Kyrgyz, Valikhanov achieved several foundational scholarly outcomes. He gave particular emphasis to the tribal composition of the Kyrgyz, employing comparative methods that integrated Central Asian chronicles such as the works of Abu'l-Ghazi Bahadur Khan with Qing Chinese sources, Russian archival materials, and the oral epic tradition. His rigorous comparative approach enabled him to substantiate the autochthonous presence of the Kyrgyz in their historical territories.

Valikhanov's ethnographic sensitivity is especially evident in his treatment of the *Manas* epic, which he regarded as a central artifact of Kyrgyz cultural identity. By translating the episode "The Death and Funeral Feast of Kokotay Khan" into Russian, he was the first to introduce this monumental work to a broader academic audience, thereby inaugurating its place in the scholarly canon.

Through anthropological observation and linguistic-cultural analysis, Valikhanov was among the first to argue for the distinct ethnonational identities of the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz. He underscored their divergent anthropological traits, while also documenting the shared cultural substrata shaped by nomadic lifeways.

Importantly, Valikhanov challenged the reductive perception of the Kyrgyz as purely pastoral nomads. He provided the earliest systematic account of the coexistence of animal husbandry with other socio-economic practices such as agriculture, urban settlement, and artisanal production. In doing so, he presented a more nuanced portrait of Kyrgyz society as one characterized by cultural and occupational plurality.

Valikhanov's studies also demonstrated the importance of geographic context in shaping Kyrgyz social and economic organization. He portrayed pastoralism as the dominant form of livelihood but situated it within a broader environmental and historical framework. For the first time in scholarly literature, the complex social hierarchy and internal political institutions of the Kyrgyz were described in systematic terms. Finally, Valikhanov's work highlighted the centrality of oral literature as a dynamic and enduring cultural institution within Kyrgyz society. In contrast to sedentary civilizations, he viewed the oral tradition as an adaptive strength of nomadic peoples, preserving historical memory, ethical norms, and communal values across generations.

In sum, Chokan Valikhanov laid the intellectual groundwork for modern Kyrgyz historiography and ethnography. His legacy endures as a model of interdisciplinary inquiry combining ethnology, linguistics, geography, history, and textual criticism into the lived realities of a Central Asian people at the intersection of empire, tradition, and change.

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Шоқан Уәлиханов зерттеулеріндегі кыргыздардың этносаяси тарихы

Мақалада авторлар Шоқан Уәлиханов зерттеулеріндегі кыргыз халқының саяси-этникалық мәселелерін кешенді түрде қарастырған. Ғалымның кыргыз халқының тарихы мен мәдениетіне арналған «Ыстықкөл күнделіктері», «Қыргыздар туралы жазбалар және «Жоңғария» очерктері зерттеулері мақалада терең талданған. Талдау барысында Ш. Уәлихановтың зерттеулеріндегі кыргыз халқының ру-тайпалық жүйесінің ерекшелігі, этногенезі, ежелгі мекені, олардың орналасуы, халқының саны, ауыз әдебиетінің үлгілері, салт-дәстүрі мен әдет-ғұрпы туралы тұжырымдары мен көзқарастары анықталды. Ғалымның көшпелі халықтардың тарихын жазуда олардың аңыздарын, жыр-ертегілерін төл дерек ретінде пайдаланғанына назар аударылды. Авторлар Уәлихановтың «Манас» жырын ғылыми айналымға енгізіп, оның «Көкетай ханның өлімі мен оның асы» атты бөлімін тұңғыш рет орыс тіліне аса дәлдікпен, көркем аударуына ерекше мән беріп, жоғары бағалайды. Оның шығармаларында қазақ пен кыргыз сияқты бауырлас халықтың тілі мен мәдениетіндегі ұқсастықтар мен айырмашылық нақты мысалдар арқылы көрсетілген. Мақаланың басты мақсаты — ғалымның кыргыз халқының тарихы мен мәдениетін зерттеуге қосқан үлесін, тұжырымдары мен ғылыми

жаңалыктарын казіргі заман тұрғысынан нақты деректер негізінде көрсету. Қорыта келе, авторлар төмендегідей тұжырым жасады: Ш. Уәлиханов зерттеулері негізінде қырғыздардың басқару жүйесін анықтады, қазақ және қырғыз халықтарының қалыптасу мәселесі жөніндегі көзқарастары оның зерттеуінің диалектикалық әдіспен жасалғанына көз жеткізілді. Екі халықтың ру тайпалық құрамы жөнінде сындарлы теория жасады, тұжырымдары мен қорытындыларын қытай деректері, мұрағат құжаттары және ауыз әдебиетінің үлгілерімен салыстырмалы талдау жасау арқылы дәлелдеген. Авторлар қырғыз қоғамында мал шаруашылығымен қатар, егіншілік, қала, қолөнер сияқты бірнеше мәдени-шаруашылық түрлері қатар дамығанын айқындады, отырықшы қоғаммен салыстырғанда көшпелі қоғамның ерекшелігі ретінде ғасырлар бойы ауыз әдебиетінің дамығандығын, сонымен қатар, тұңғыш рет көшпелі халық ретінде қырғыздардың тарихы мен мәдениетінің ерекшеліктерін дұрыс көрсете білді деген қорытындыға келді.

Кілт сөздер: Шокан Уәлиханов, Әбілғазы, қырғыз, Ыстықкөл, Жоңғария, Бұқара, Орталық Азия, Ақсу мен Тұрфан.

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Этнополитическая история кыргызов в исследованиях Чокана Валиханова

В статье рассматриваются политические и этнические проблемы кыргызского народа в исследованиях Шокана Валиханова. Авторами проанализированы труды ученого по истории и культуре кыргызского народа, такие как «Дневник поездки на Иссык-Куль», «Записки о кыргызах», «Очерки Джунгарии». В ходе анализа данных исследований Ш. Валиханова были выявлены особенности родо-племенного строя кыргызов, их этногенез, древняя среда обитания, размещение, численность населения, образцы устного творчества, традиции и обычаи. Обращается внимание было уделено тому, что ученый при написании истории кочевых народов, использовал в качестве первоисточников легенды и поэмы. Авторы оценивают введение в научный оборот эпической поэмы Валиханова «Манас», особо отмечая первый точный и литературный перевод ее раздела «Смерть Кукотай-хана и его поминки» на русский язык. В его произведениях на конкретных примерах показаны сходства и отличия языка и культуры кыргызского и казахского народов, которые являются друг другу братьями. Основная цель статьи — показать вклад ученого в изучение истории и культуры кыргызского народа, его выводы и научные открытия, являются достоверными первоисточниками с точки зрения современной науки. Авторы данной статьи приходят к выводу, что на основании исследований Ш. Валиханова была определена система управления кыргызского народа, а его взгляды на формирование казахского и кыргызского народов обусловили проведение его исследований с использованием диалектического метода. Он разработал конструктивную теорию о родоплеменном составе двух народов, обосновал свои выводы и заключения с помощью сравнительного анализа китайских данных, архивных документов и образцов устной литературы. Авторы определили, что в кыргызском обществе, наряду со скотоводством, развивались несколько культурно-хозяйственных форм, такие как земледелие, ремесло и городская культура. Также пришли к выводу, что устное творчество, как отличительная черта кочевого общества по сравнению с оседлым, развивалось на протяжении веков и впервые правильно отразило историю и культуру кыргызов как кочевого народа.

Ключевые слова: Шокан Уалиханов, Абылғазы, Кыргызстан, Иссык-Куль, Джунгария, Бухара, Центральная Азия, Ақсу и Тұрфан.

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