THE STUDY OF UZBEK CLASSICAL LITERATURE IN UZBEKISTAN (1924–2014)¹

Broadly speaking, the field of Uzbek classical literary studies began to develop at the beginning of the 1920s, and for almost a century now, a wide range of research on the subject has been conducted, its area of study having been clearly defined and its characteristic features scientifically analyzed from an historical perspective. Since these two latter aspects of definition and historical analysis are crucial to the study of classical literature, the present article will deal with them in detail.

Making up the chief sources of Uzbek classical literature are the poetry (mathnawi) of Muhabhat-nama by Khorazmi (14th century) and other mathnawis, written in the genre of namah, and the huge amount of verse composed by such poets as Lutfi (1366–1462), Atai (early 15th century), Sakkaki (14th–15th centuries), Ali-Shir Navai (1441–1501), Zahir al-din Muhammad Babur (1583–1430), Mahammad Salih (1455–1535), Nishati (18th century), Uwaysi (18th–19th centuries), Munis Kharazmi (1778–1829), Muhammad Riza Agahi (1809–1874), Kamil Khorazmi (1825–1899), Avaz Otar (1884–1919), Muqimi (1850–1903), and Zakirdjan Furqat (1859–1913). It was in the 1920s that several scholars were drawn to the scientific study of Uzbek literature as a significant part of the literary tradition of the Muslim East, and it is in this sense that the development of the field takes its roots from this period.

The field of Uzbek literary studies to be explored here includes the research conducted during both the periods of Soviet rule and national independence. Sociopolitical changes within the Uzbek republic, the work of scientific literary institutions and transformations in world literature studies were the basic factors which determined the formation of Uzbek literary studies during the Soviet period. It is clear that Russian Turkology had a huge impact on the works of such scholars in the field as A. Fitrat, M. Salihov, A. Sa'di, O. Hashim, V. Mahmud, and J. Baybulatov.

The research done to date may be divided into the following periods, the first three of which characterized the Soviet era.

THE FORMATIVE PERIOD: 1920S AND 1930S

This period was characterized by two distinct areas of research. The first area is related to the collection of primary classical literary sources and the publication of research introducing them. Specimens of the oldest Turkic literature (1927) and Specimens of Uzbek literature (1928) by A. Fitrat are the most important works in this area. However, despite the fact that in the latter's introduction the author stated his work would consist of two volumes, the second is not known to us. The first contains fragments from the "tribal literature" (folklore) to the Baburnama (Babur's memoirs), written in old Uzbek (Chagatai).

The second area of research characterizing this period is the scientific biographical study of the classical Uzbek poets and their literary heritage. Here Fitrat's research also stands out as the most precise and comprehensive for this period, as shown by the titles *On Navai's Persian poetics and his Persian Divan*, *Qutadghu bilig*, *Ahmad Yassaviy*, *The Chagatai literature*, *Hibat al-haqayiq*, *The Uzbek poet Turdi*, *Muhammad Salih*, *On the poetry "Farhad and Shirin*," and *Mashrab* [Fitrat 2000].

There are some noticeable differences in the approaches adopted by the scholars of this period: Fitrat emphasizing nationalist ideas in the old literature of the Turkic language,² O. Hashim's Marxist interpretation and J. Baybulatov's vulgar-socialist position related to the sociopolitical life of the formative period.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM: 1934–1960

During this period, priority was given to the works of Ali-Shir Navai

(1441–1501), the Turkic poet, politician, linguist, mystic, and painter, due to the celebration of the 500th anniversary of his birth planned within the USSR, including the publication of a collection of his works. This trend continued following World War II, and in 1960 P. Sh. Shamsiyev [1952, 1961] published a critical text of *Xamsa*, and X. Suleymanov [1955–61] edited the academic publication of *Xazayin al-maani*. All told, 15 volumes of Ali-Shir Navai's works have been published as the result of textual studies in the field. Also noteworthy is the research of S. Ganiyeva [1956], which was dedicated to the study and compilation of critical texts of the manuscripts comprising Navai's anthology, *Madjalis al-nafais*.

An important factor in the scholarly attention given to the works of Ali-Shir Navai was the policy of the Soviet government to allow a group of poets to be scientifically studied, in order to show that the likes of Nizami Gandjavi from Azerbaijan, Abd al-Rahman Djami from Tajikistan, Shota Rustaveli from Georgia, and Ali-Shir Navai from Uzbekistan could be understood in the same light as the Pushkins, Lermontovs, Gogols, and Tolstoys of Russian literature, as long as the interpretation was based on party ideology. On the other hand, the study of court and religious literature was considered dangerous and thus forbidden [Sirojiddinov 2011a:15].

EXPLORATION AND INTERPRETATION: 1960–1991

During this period the works of the Uzbek poets were studied on a more equitable and scientific basis, including the exchange of opinions about the impact of communistic ideology on the field. For example, for the first time ideas about "classical" literature and the methods of creativity applied by its authors appeared in the research [Hayitmetov 1959, 1961, 1963; Qayumov 1961], while E. Rustamov [1963] analyzed the lives and works of Turkic poets active prior to Ali-Shir Navai.

From the 1970's on, importance was laid upon the study of the problems inherent in poetic analysis and methods of comparative study, as exemplified by the research done by B. Valixoʻjayev [1974], L. Zohidov [Zohidov 1970], N. Abdullayev [1974], R. Kabulova [1979], N. Mallayev [1974, 1976], I. Sultonov [1973], A. Rustamov [1979], S. Erkinov [1971], and A. Hayitmetov [1970].

During these three periods under the Soviet regime, the literature of the Muslim East was classified as either A) progressive or B) reactionary.

The former included those poets who were regarded as expressing ideas of humanism, although the religious elements of their works were expurgated and the narrative geared to the ideological position of the Soviet government. For example, the research concentrated on the greatest poet of Chagatai literature, Ali-Shir Navai and other poets, such as Gulkhaniy and Makhmur, whose works included ideas critical of kingship.

There were two types of the reactionary literature: 1) the literature of palace-aristocrats and 2) religious-clerical literature. The poets who were part of the royal court's literary milieu within the palace were condemned as its apologists, and thus were not studied. In the case of 2), Chagatai literature has always been related to Muslim East beliefs and thus should have been studied in the context of the Islamic tradition. However, such an approach would have presented a challenge to the USSR's commitment to state atheism. Secular aspects of classical literature were preferred to religious, and the study of Chagatai literature, despite its deeply religious character, was no exception.

The religious works of Navai, Babur, and other poets were simply ignored, in favor of Navai's satiric ghazals, owing to the fact that the latter could be enlisted in support of the ideology of those in power. Despite the assertion that there were progressive ideas in history, they were depicted as secondary or inferior to the ideas of Marxist-Leninism. This is why the analysis of the works of Chagatai literature during the Soviet era was always shrouded in the clichés created by the Communist Party. Since Muslim East literature, which expresses feelings and thoughts through symbols and signs, needs to be considered as sophisticated art, the simple portrayals exemplified by such clichés failed to inspire their readers. For example, the ideas of Sufism have been explained by such symbols as may, maykhona, soqiy, and gul. Nevertheless, scholars studying under the pressure of communist ideology were forced to interpret the philosophy as merely secular in nature, emphasizing the anticlerical ideas of Ali-Shir Navai as expressions of his atheism. Despite the clear differences that obviously exist between anti-clericalism and atheism, Soviet ideology demanded that both be treated as absolute equivalents.

The experts in literature under the Soviet regime never spoke positively about either genres of "reactionary literature," preferring instead to study them "critically." It is now very clear to us that literary figures in Middle Ages "were not able to open the ideas of communism due to the fact that no opportunity existed." To turn historical figures into Soviet citizens and to find ideas in their works related to the convictions of the Soviet government was the main duty of literary study.

After 1960 sections dealing with such ideas as *hamd*, *na't*, *munojot* (religious introductions) in the works of Ali-Shir Navai and other poets were simply edited out, while the works of such important literary figures as Husayniy, Feruz, Qul Ubaydiy, Shayboniykhon, Amiriy, and representatives of religious literature such as Huvaydo and Sufi Allahyar were just ignored, all in the cause of state atheism.

Consequently, the study of literature in the Soviet Union during 1960–1991 served mainly in the cause of political indoctrination. While research of a truly scientific-academic nature declined, it was rather journalistic discourse that aided in the indoctrination of the ideas promoted by the Communist Party, for scientific facts were not required in such discourses. Scientists who did not want to be involved in the Soviet political machine turned to the study of pure themes in literature. For example, they took up the problems of poetics, history, translation skills, textual criticism, and the study of primary sources [Sultonov 1973; Iskhoqov 1965, 1983; Rustamov 1979]. Such work remains important, while the research done to promote Soviet ideology is now outdated.

It should be noted that the quantity of research devoted to Uzbek classical literature widened in scope during the 1980s [Vohidov 1983; Jumayev 1983; Iskhoqov 1983; B. Hasanov 1981; S. Hasanov 1981]. Texts of Chagatai literature were published; and although there was the impact of politics, for the first time a comprehensive history of Uzbek literature was published in five volumes [Oʻzbek adabiyoti tarixi 1978–80]. In addition, A History of Uzbek Literature in two volumes [Hayitmetov and Kedrina 1987–89] and Catalog of the Institute of Manuscripts [Katalog fonda instituta rukopisey 1989] also came out. These were important accomplishments which pointed to significant facts of the history of literature in need of study.

POST-INDEPENDENCE: 1991-PRESENT

From the time of Uzbekistan national independence in 1991 to the present day, we have been given the opportunity to study the classical literature according to pure scientific principles, without political interference or the insistence on one tried and true methodology. It is now deemed important to study religious and Sufi ideas in the works of the classical poets.

Needless to say, over the past quarter of a century in Uzbekistan the situation in the humanities has changed dramatically. During these years of national independence the study of Uzbek classical literature can be

characterized by the following six features.

1. The Study of Religious Literature

As already mentioned, literary study during the Soviet era was confronted by atheist propaganda promoting the prohibition of all organized religions or anything that was associated with them, in order to avoid ideological competition with communist ideas. It was necessary to ignore the factor of religion, despite the fact that it had occupied the highest place in the history of the spiritual life of the people since antiquity. Communist ideology intended to eliminate such religious influence through constant criticism. If we consider that in Central Asia people have always been very religious, and accordingly continued to author many theological works over the centuries, in addition to a huge body of religious literature, it is understandable why the Soviet authorities both banned and severely criticized that literature. Consequently, a great number of manuscript works written in Arabic script, which dominated the written heritage of Central Asia, were lost.

In addition, any writing, including poetry, produced before the 20th century, always had some relation to religion, even if not a specific traditional religious tract. Since independence, the study of previously banned religious literature and mystical poetry have become popular topics among literary critics, who now are free to choose methods other than the Soviet era's exclusively secular approach. In this sense, during the last twenty-five years a great deal of research has involved the literary mystical current of *tasawwuf* in Islam—Sufism [Haqqulov 1991; Komilov 2009].

During the Soviet era, the loss of the centuries-old tradition of religious analysis or Sufi poetry led to a very superficial examination of classical literature. That period saw the rise of so-called "experts" on religious poetry, who were unfamiliar with Oriental languages, the history and theoretical issues surrounding Islam, as well as its theology, who could not read the primary sources, so were forced to gain their knowledge about Islam and Sufism from Russian sources, and thus lacked any experience in the analysis of the literature's Islamic environment. Many of these "experts" were satisfied with merely criticizing the religious and mystical literature based on the principles of atheism [V. Zohidov 1971]; and their findings came to represent the state of the art in the academic industry, in spite of its obvious journalistic bent.

The worst consequence of the secular analysis of religious and Sufi literature was that it ignored the element of aesthetics, the artistic features of the texts. For example, mystical poetry came to be studied as part of a religious tradition, not a literary one. The art form of poetry began to be considered only as a medium of information, propaganda, and apology for Islam. The literary text was artificially forced to "follow" Sufism [Eshonboboev 2013]. The aesthetic approach began to limp behind or was sometimes merely forgotten. Such a way of studying religious poetry partly passes in terms of style and approach. Unfortunately, only a small number of specialists in literature was seriously engaged in the study of religious literature.

Today Islamic studies of the poetic texts (often in their apologetic form) now compensate for the many years of the atheistic approach of the Soviet era, although there were some scholars of that period who did not want to politicize literature and chose to write on topics far removed from politics, like poetic skill and the theory of translation. Now during the period of independence it is they who are the pioneers in the theory and history of Sufism in Uzbek poetry [Komilov 2002, 2009; Iskhoqov 2002] intended to show the Sufi aspects of Uzbek literature.

2. Rejuvenation of Classical Poets

The return to textual analysis has led post-Soviet period literary specialists to engage in a rehabilitation of those poets who wrote on religious and Sufist themes and in so doing were criticized during the Soviet period as propagandists of religion. They included poets that wrote in Turkic, such as Ahmad Yasavi (d. 1166), Mashrab (1640–1711), and Sufi Allahyar (1644–1724). Now there are literary critics who have started to warm their hands on the creativity of such poets. For example, Ahmad Yasavi, who had been constantly criticized in Soviet studies as a mystic poet and apologist for Islam, has almost became a national hero of the Turkic people of Central Asia. In the post-Soviet period there was a need for a charismatic hero, criticizing the Soviet era, whose rehabilitation would show the negative qualities of communist ideology and literary policy of the USSR. In this sense Yasavi became the symbol of the rebirth of the nation and the religion of Islam to the Turkic people of Central Asia.

Dozens of papers and theses have been written about Yasavi, his poetry, and teachings, but unfortunately also lack depth of analysis [Haqqulov 1991, 1995; Eshonboboev 2013]. For example, poetry without textological analysis attributed to A. Yasavi has been declared as his legacy. Such studies lack an academic knowledge base. Such emotional "science" of this kind is hard to give way to academically substantiated

research.

3. Aesthetic Analysis of the Texts

In contrast to the body of research literature published during the Soviet era, which was engaged in presenting ideological and politicized views of the heritage of the past, the traditional values of Oriental literary interpretation based on the text itself (not outside it) is slowly returning.

4. Publication of the Full Fiction Heritage

Since independence, the full Uzbek poetic heritage (predominantly religious or Sufi poetry) has begun to be published, a movement which was forbidden during the Soviet era when releases suffered from abridgement under government censorship. Despite this new freedom from expurgation, much of the publications are being released by non-professionals who consider it their duty as a representatives of Central Asian societies. The Arabic-script sources of Uzbek classical literature have created a serious problem in the process of transliteration into modern alphabets, and in the hands of people with insufficient expertise, literary texts of earlier eras began to be published in a distorted or reduced form due to self-imposed censorship on the part of the transcribers.

5. Textology and the Study of Primary Sources

The post-Soviet renaissance is now faced with the problem of how to work with primary sources. Consequently, scholars have begun to pay more attention to such aspects as textual criticism and the literary study of the sources. However, the difficulty and complexity of working with primary sources means that only a very small number of younger people are going into these specialties, many more preferring to engage in modern literature, which is more readily available and does not require complicated preliminary steps, such as the study of handwriting, requiring separate training, and gaining knowledge of the Arabic alphabet, Oriental languages, and historical background, before one can engage in literary analysis.

6. Inertia of Soviet Methodology

No matter how hard the post-independence generation has tried, it has not been easy to overcome the shortcomings of the Soviet scholarly tradition. Various world schools of literary textual analysis have been successful in penetrating the Uzbekistan literary-science space; however, there are still literary specialists who received their training under the Soviet regime and persist in analyzing works of art in terms of the clichés of communist ideology. At the time of independence and the disappearance of a prescribed state order, it was natural for even these Soviet-trained scholars to declare in the literary press, "We do not need Soviet scientific methodology. Give us a new methodology." However, since they were accustomed to the Soviet scientific system in which research methodology was determined "from above," it was very difficult to escape the old ways in practice. Consequently, it has been difficult for many to "grow" to the understanding that the methodology does not have to be preordained and that each scholar (or scientific school) has the right to interpret the text in his/her own way. This problem indicates that the Soviet methodology is still very much alive in contemporary literary research. Within such a situation, we must look to the younger generations of scholars adopting the standards and achievements of international literary science.

The present post-independence stage of the history of Uzbek literary studies has now been rewritten with new scientific principles [Yusupova 2013]. Poets which were not studied in the past are now being taken up, and new methods are being utilized to research their work. Take for example, the scientific criteria chosen by such scholars as B. Valixoʻjayev [1993], M. Ganixonov [1994], B. Qosimxonov [1991], A. Hayitmetov [1996], N. Komilov [2002, 2009], Y. Is'hoqov [Iskhoqov 2002], A. S. Erkinov [1998], Sh. Sirojiddinov [2011a, 2011b], and others.³ In addition, the *Encyclopedia of Bahur* has already been released [Zahiriddin Muhammad Bobur Ensiklopediyasi 2014], and one dealing with Navai is being compiled.

In conclusion, the study of Uzbek literature utilizing scientific criteria was first attempted in the 1920–1930s. In spite of certain limitations specific to the Soviet Union, a large body of research literature was created. Now, during the period since national independence, classical Uzbek literature is being explored via new and different methods. Today, one of our most important duties is to study the works of the Uzbek classical poets based on the original texts in order to maintain their original form and meaning.

NOTES

1 For these reviewers, the term "Uzbek classical literature" is a 20th century term referring to Turkic/Uzbek literary works dating from Central Asian antiquity to the revolution of October 1917. However, in the West the literature written in old Uzbek is called Chagatai literature and its language, the Chagatai language. Historically, Chagatai literature is placed between 1350 and 1850. Since this article is intended for English readers, we use the term "Chagatai literature" interchangeably with "Uzbek classical literature."

- 2 After the USSR was established, a national identity was searched for every nation included in the union. In this process the publication of national literature started.
- 3 Akbarova 1997; Alisher Navoiyning adabiy mahorati masalalari 1993; Alisher Navoiy 1991; Muhiddinov 1995; Ostonaqulov 1993; Ravshanov 1997; Rajabova 1996; Suvonqulov 1995; Hamidov 1991; Haqqulov 1991; Bobokalonov 2012.

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