



Central Asia:

Issues, Problems, and Perspectives

Sunatullo Jonboboiev/
Mirzokhid Rakhimov/
Reimund Seidelmann (eds.)



Cuvillier Verlag Göttingen
Internationaler wissenschaftlicher Fachverlag



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Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

1. Aufl. - Göttingen : Cuvillier, 2015

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Nonnenstieg 8, 37075 Göttingen

Telefon: 0551-54724-0

Telefax: 0551-54724-21

www.cuvillier.de

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1. Auflage, 2015

Gedruckt auf umweltfreundlichem, säurefreiem Papier aus nachhaltiger Forstwirtschaft.

ISBN 978-3-95404-976-9

eISBN 978-3-7369-4976-8



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INTRODUCTION

REIMUND SEIDELMANN

This second volume of research books summarizes results of the collaborative research project “Patterns of Regional and Interregional Cooperation: Central Asia, its Neighboring Countries, and Europe” (2012-2015) conducted by Bielefeld University / Germany, TU Dortmund University / Germany, and Giessen University / Germany funded by Volkswagen-Foundation / Germany and directed by Prof. Dr. Christoph Schuck, Prof. ret. Dr. Reimund Seidelmann, and Prof. Dr. Andreas Vasilache in cooperation with Prof. Dr. Sunatullo Jonboboev (University of Central Asia, Dushanbe / Tajikistan) and Dr. Mirzokhid Rakhimov (Academy of Sciences, Tashkent / Uzbekistan). The project aims at analyzing the political, economic, and social dynamics in Central Asia from a comparative and an inclusive regional perspective and continues Central Asian political studies in Giessen from 2004 onward and later in Bielefeld and Dortmund as well. Taking governance, transformation, and regionalization studies into account the project’s focus is on the dynamics of governance in Central Asia including its perspectives in the ongoing decade. In contrast to other studies on Central Asia this project understands Central Asia not as an isolated region but as interdependent with its neighbors, transregional organizations, and global politics. Therefore the research covers not only the five Central Asian countries but their neighbors such as Xinjiang / China, Kashmir / India, and Russia – plus EU-Central Asian relations – as well. In addition to the broadening of the geographical scope the project understands governance, political identity, and religion in a wider sense, i.e. as a multidimensional concept combining political, economic, socio-cultural, and ecological dimensions. And following a multi-actor approach the project interrelates the state with non-state actors and – subscribing to a multilevel approach – combines intra- with inter-state, regional with transregional, and transregional with global patterns and dynamics.

Following the line of earlier research and former cooperation projects about Central Asia and neighboring Xinjiang etc.¹ and in contrast to many other studies on Central Asia in the West this project and this second book gives special room for scholars from Central Asian countries and their neighbors, who have been raised after independence and after the beginning of transformation processes in the region and in its neighborhood. Understandably, their views and their identification with their countries and region might differ from projections of norms, models, and political priorities, which can be found in studies done from outside the region and sometimes imply unreflected interests of the development aid industry or concep-

¹ See for example Reimund Seidelmann/Ernst Giese (eds.), *Cooperation and Conflict Management in Central Asia*, Peter Lang Frankfurt etc. 2004.



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tual colonialism. Adding contributions from scholars, who have been involved in politics and diplomacy of Central Asian countries, supplement the picture. Thus, describing countries and developments and pointing to their and the region's problems is based on views from the countries and the region under study this book aims to encourage a dialogue of equal partnership between scholars from different regions, academic schools, and political views, which seems necessary and fruitful.

The book is the second publication of the project; it complements the first publication² of research results and gives special attention to the discussion of Islam and fundamentalism in Central Asia, Central Asia in relation to the international system, and the relations between Central Asia and the EU. This is reflected in the organization of the contributions in three parts:

- The first part continues the debate on Islam, fundamentalism, and political culture in Central Asia, which has already begun in the first book to provide the reader with more differentiated and serious studies of such issues, to demonstrate both the complexity of Islam, and to argue against fundamentalism from a Muslim perspective. The contributions of Sunatullo Jonboboev not only gives a comprehensive insight into Islam in Central Asia and in Tajikistan in particular but argues in favor of a modern interpretation of Islam. This is complemented by Mushtaq Kaw's overview about the history of the Central Asian education system – and the role of religion – and its today's challenges and problems. Serik Beimenbetov and Merjen Esenova provide the reader with country studies of the modernization dynamics in today's Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan with special reference to the role of religion.
- The second part describes the relation between the Central Asian region and its countries to the three most influential and important neighbors – China, India, and Russia – and the international community. Including such studies in this volume results from the understanding of Central Asia as not an isolated region but an interrelated – historically, geographically, economically, ethnically, etc. – multi-states actor, which is interrelated with its neighbors in general and object of their cooperation and power projection strategies in particular. In addition, the contributions in this part analyse the interrelation between national foreign policies, regional development, and the role of Central Asia both as object and subject of the international system. Mirzokhid Rakhimov gives an overview about Central Asia's role in the "Great Game" of international powers, Aijan Sharshenova analyses the interrelation between internationalization and regionalization of Central Asia, and Oybek Abdumuminov details the role of the United Nations in and with Central Asia. In addition, Yuyu Zhang underlines the importance of Xinjiang-Central Asian relations and Suhail Ahmad gives an historical overview about the role of good – and bad – governance in Kashmir, demonstrating in his study not only the complexity of the Kashmir

² Sunatullo Jonboboev/Mirzokhid Rakhimov/Reimund Seidelmann (eds.), *Central Asia Today: Countries, Neighbors, and the Region*, Cuvillier Goettingen 2014.



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conflict but the involvement of outside forces and powers in conflict management and solution as well.

- The third part looks at the special case of the relations between the EU and Central Asia from different angles and highlights specific problems, dynamics, and shortcomings. Nazira Momosheva's studies the case of Kyrgyzstan and Raushan Serik as well as Chiara Pierobon deals with Kazakhstan. Finally Gulbahor Iskandarova supplements the study of Mushtaq Kaw about the Central Asian education system with a discussion of the application of the Bologna Process in Central Asia. All these studies make clear how important the EU is as a player towards and within Central Asia.

As already underlined in the first volume of this research project the reader has to be reminded that the basic philosophy of this project is to encourage on the one hand independent thinking from different Central Asian and other viewpoints and on the other hand to understand, respect, and then to cooperate with the others in the spirit of constructive partnership. It is a general agreement under all book contributors that the Central Asian region and its neighbors need more bilateral cooperation with the EU as well as the widening and deepening of their regionalization and transregionalization processes. Although this view can refer both to the historic Silk Road structures and to the idea of creating a "New Silk Road" this is not easy to implement in view of diverging and sometimes conflicting interests, past and ongoing nation-centered nation-building dynamics, and the heterogeneity of political, economic, and socio-cultural structures, which constitute a condition for the further self-determined progress. Like the first project publication this book aims to contribute to an ongoing debate, which has to take the views of the countries of and around Central Asia adequately and seriously into account and which reflects the multitude of historic, geographic, economic, ethnic, and political factors and their dynamics. It understands Central Asian studies not only as one of many regional studies but aims at an interrelation of Central Asian country studies, regional dynamics, relations between Central Asia and its neighbors, and the international system. However and as underlined above, this research project and its publications is based on the view that Central Asian studies should not only be research about Central Asia but with the fullest participation of Central Asian scholars, who participate in the further developing of a self-determined Central Asia able and willing to pursue a constructive policy to its inside and outside, to the region and beyond, and to the global community.

The editors thank the contributors for presenting their analyses, VolkswagenStiftung for funding the project including this book, and the staff of Zentrum für Internationale Entwicklungs- und Umweltforschung (ZEU), Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen for their assistance in publishing.

Giessen, April 2015





Part I

Nationbuilding, Modernisation, and Political Identity in Central Asia





REASON AND FAITH IN CENTRAL ASIA: THE MODERN DISCOURSE AND THE CHALLENGES OF FUNDAMENTALISM

SUNATULLO JONBOBOEV

*“O Moses, wherefore have you driven my servant?
Your office is to reconcile my people with me,
not to drive them away from me.”*

Jalaliddin Rumi: Moses and the Shepherd

1 INTRODUCTION

The parabola in the epigraph belongs to Jalaliddin Rumi, the famous Persian poet (12th century), where he is discussing the case when revelation came to the Prophet Moses while Moses met the man, the shepherd in desert, worshiping God, but proposing to serve God in a way as usually do human beings. Addressing God, the shepherd was asking God “what can I do for you, for example, I can graze your cattle, part your hairs, do that and that (...)”. Moses prohibited the man to worship God in this way teaching that God does not need to be served in such human way. It assumed that the words above are the answer from God.

The meaning is that nobody has the right to be an arbiter between the people and the Absolute, to decide for them and moreover- if we include the contemporary context – to commit violence in the name of God and the Holy Scripture. Many ordinary people are disappointed with the current world development, with the existing social and political injustice, with devastating geopolitical clashes, which are destroying countries and old civilizations. It is sad that now the young generation, which did not get sufficient education and has no social protection, is waiting for the instructions coming from increasing and influential radical movement like Salafism / Wahhabism, the movement which has been transforming into the destructive once called “Islamic State”, terrifying the rest of the world by creating new government based on middle ages mentality and serving this type of thought sharia law. Currently they try to teach a new code of behavior for all humans, they demand to identify what is right and what is wrong in religious matters, and all lifestyle – especially in Islam – challenging the existing traditional Islam and democratic secular system of political and social order in Middle East, Central Asia, and even in the rest of the world. Bad news for Central Asia is, that many representatives of the youth are participating and getting training in the war in Iraq and Syria.

Some authors like William Connolly and Edward Lemon link radicalization of Central Asian youths with the strict secularist policy of states, where “secularism prioritizes non-religion



over religion. Despite claiming to pursue the goals of diversity and freedom, secularism slips into the realm of intolerance by asserting it as the only legitimate form of living”¹. Unfortunately, this is part of the truth but not all of the truth. One sees how much religious freedom people in Europe and Middle East enjoy, but still they produce a number religious extremists. Central Asia is not a direct nursery but the last destination of such radical religious programs.

The following is an invitation to think, i.e. its main purpose is to stimulate and motivate to think and be open for rethinking. These notions are very important for the contemporary Muslim world as it was emphasized recently by Egyptian President El-Sisi, who was inviting the religious authorities at Egypt’s historic Al-Azhar University to challenge the accepted and existing dominating code of thinking in Islam. He noted “(...) that thinking, I am not saying “religion” but “thinking” – that corpus of texts and ideas that we have sacralized over the centuries, to the point that departing from them has become almost impossible, is antagonizing the entire world. It’s antagonizing the entire world”.² Current Sisi’s urge was for religious revolution in Islam and to free the Islamic way of thinking from jihadi programs. Of course, this is not an easy task; this approach needs decades and fortunately if it would possible to be practically implemented, materialized. But nevertheless, his invitation to think has universal importance for all Muslims – including Central Asians. It should be noted that the invitation to think is not new phenomenon within the Islamic context. Many Islamic scholars are seeking for moderate and rationalistic view on Islam. One of prominent scholar advocating Islamic modernism, secularism, and humanism was Mohammed Arkoun.³ Also the liberal and humanistic traditions of Islam have deep roots in the Central Asian popular culture. So, the mission of modern intellectuals is to remove dichotomist way of thinking instead to implement integrative approaches.

So, the main task of this argumentation is to avoid panic and to think how to harmonize three main existing and contesting attitudes towards the cultural heritage in Central Asia or three diametrically different interpretations of cultural heritage, based on three types of solidarities: to Ethnos / Nation, to Umma, and belonging to Global human “village”:

- The secular and nationalistic, serving the national idea is to generate patriotic feelings, to bring up the generation of the citizens, who can be tolerable, endurable to the existing political systems in Central Asia through inspiring young people for devotion to national symbols, values, and the states.

¹ William Connolly “Why I am not a Secularist”. Edward Lemon, “Tajikistan Takes On the God Squad: www.bignewsnetwork.com/index.php/sid/229775341, last visited 01.02.2015.

² Sisi urges religious revolution in Islam to fight terrorism: www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/middleeast/article4317918.ece

³ Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common questions, Uncommon answers*, today, Westview Press, Boulder 1994. *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, London 2002. *Islam: To Reform or to Subvert*, London, 2006.



- The fundamentalist shows broader form of solidarity, belonging to global Islamic community, its exclusiveness to the pre-Islamic, Soviet heritage, and the period of independence.
- There is emerging another form of interpreting Cultural Heritage, which is more pluralistic, integrative, being universalistic by its nature, serving the idea how to inspire people for development and serving the idea of indigenous democratic development of the region.

Nevertheless of the broad debate of the topic mentioned, this argumentation limits the discussion to the interpretation of Islamic heritage in a radical and fundamentalist way within the academia, at the same time trying to examine some finding from local experiences. It shows options for coexisting and collaboration of three mentioned attitudes, transforming them from the object of contesting into the foundation for mutual respect and inspiration for the development. Such initiatives in Central Asia are striving for harmonization and transforming the common heritage as a source of producing new knowledge. The integrative and interdisciplinary curriculum of Aga Khan Humanities Project of the University of Central Asia, others new initiatives are used just as an example. Such initiatives need more support of local authorities and dissemination among the institution of academia. Discussing the issues regarding the tides of Fundamentalism in Central Asia and how integrated humanities curriculum, which can serve as a soft remedy, is just one option. For doing this one needs to identify what is the object of research: “Fundamentalism”, revivalism, or Islamic activism? Then it is important to know whether it is a religious project or a political one? After that one can move to the statement that fundamentalism is a challenge of nation-states in Central Asia and all over the world and it pretend to be the next ideological revolution within the nation-state – if the world is not able to find some sorts of immediate solutions. Education is such mechanism of transformation. So, the educational system and academia can cultivate the pluralistic integrated Humanities curriculum as a respond to raising religious fundamentalism and coming from it radicalism or the terrorism based or pretend to be an Islamic. As a part of such educational program one need to show the role of pluralism and diversity within the Islamic culture as minimum.

Contemporary students of secular and religious universities in Central Asia need to know that such pluralistic tradition exists within the Islamic culture; it has its clear phenomenon and prominent representatives. Though it is not easy task, within the organized courses it is possible to organize debates between different views and types of interpreting of Islam, showing that extreme form of interpretations of Islamic tradition is not total, but just one form of very rich thinking tradition in Islam. Modern rational discourses, reconsideration of Islamic thinking tradition (exoteric, esoteric etc.), implementing historical approaches and new research methodologies can to some extent limit the tides of fundamentalism in Central Asia. If not well-organized cultivating of rational Islamic studies together with modernist rational discourses within secular societies there is possibility for new ideological revolution as it happen



in Middle East. Conservative approaches and prohibition of such debates can contribute to and promote the process of radicalization of society.

Methodological approaches follow the idea that religious violence, radicalism, and extremism are clearly the heritage of Middle Ages and nowadays are not accepted or cannot be justified by any reasonable or logical arguments as tool for political discourse. If something is difficult to explain through logical justification, then it can be viewed as mystical phenomenon or just mental diseases. In case of fundamentalism, it should be noted, that at the moment the followers of this movement show weakness and not strength. As Slavoj Žižek notes, "(...) how fragile the belief of a Muslim must be if he feels threatened by a stupid caricature (S.J.) in a weekly satirical newspaper?"⁴ The reaction has been shown by the group committed political violence in Paris demonstrates not their superiority, but – in opposite – their inferiority.

The main methodological instruments for reading and analyzing publications for the topic, personal observations, interviews, discussion during the seminars, workshops, and reports conducted in Central Asia in recent years, when the author was responsible for the faculty development program are the views of the leading theorists and philosophers. The data has been summarized and verified during the final analyses. At the same time it was important to verify the application and contextualization of some popular theories, for instance, constructivist and post-structuralism, neo-Marxist epistemological, political, philosophical, cultural and religious studies theories, including developed by Juergen Habermas' theory of communicative action, the role of rational discourses for social and political issues, discussions on truth and objectivity (Habermas), sociology of knowledge, co relationship of knowledge and the power suggested by Foucault, Karl Mannheim, Sarah Amsler, Chad Thompson etc. In dealing with fundamentalism it is worth to assess the findings of some western scholars specialized on Islam, like Bernard Louis etc., and modern Islamic intellectuals, like Muhammad Arkoun (on Rethinking Islam), Abdurhaim Soroush (on correlation of Reason, Democracy and Islam), Riza Aslan (on the role of rationality and pluralism in Islam) etc. Finally, in order to touch upon the issues of self-censorships, self-marginalization it is healthy to examine the theory of domination of Edward Said, the theory of isolation, alienation developed by Michail Foucault, and the issues of Inclusion of the Others by Habermas.

It is worth to mention that the application of different theories developed in the particular socio-cultural environment into the social, political, and cultural lives of Central Asia is problematic as always: not all findings of classical or regional theories are relevant and applicable, some suggested paradigms are limited within the time and space, some of them can lead to the reduction of the phenomenal cases by the demand of imposing the old paradigms on

⁴ Slavoj Žižek on the Charlie Hebdo massacre: Are the worst really full of passionate intensity? www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2015/01/slavoj-zižek-charlie-hebdo-massacre-are-worst-really-full-passionate-intensity



new cases etc. Nevertheless, the useful adoption of some concepts from different theories does not obstruct further findings, the chosen integrated approach even allow to show some complexities of the problems we are facing in implementation of integrated curriculum in Central Asia. Now let one start discussing the history and epistemology of the culture of education in Central Asia and the importance of its reform for modern development of 'good' or in other words 'civil society' in this region.

2 CHALLENGES OF FUNDAMENTALISM IN CENTRAL ASIA: IN THE "LINES OF FAULTS" OR THE NEXT REVOLUTION WITHIN THE NATION STATE?

All of us see the dynamic of the contemporary world – it is moving now very fast. It is in the search for a new order since the existing forms of mutual international and intercultural communications are not sufficient. The current world movement is unpredictable; it gives people some hopes but sometime leads them to the real depression or even big severe tragedies. Generally artificially created and purposefully fabricated by the world powers there has been a politization of confessional-religious feelings during Cold War and in the last decades of the Cold War period – especially, to be more precise, during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, when first Mujahidin and then Taliban movements have been created by CIA and Saudi-Pakistan as alternative powers to battle with Communism and as replacement for ideological contention of developed and developing world, which became one of the main trouble for the new generations, polarizing the minds, and pouring the worlds into two-three pieces. This kind post-colonial description of world political configuration is also one of the main disturbances for the implementation of free-from-ideology development projects, for cultivating pluralistic views, and for overall cultivation of democratic values, protecting human rights, empowering individual initiatives, protecting emancipation of women, supporting the projects giving wider access for education of children in the world, challenging poverty and providing more people with good social welfare system etc. New political foretellers say that the world already changed and never be able to return back to the previous situation: according to the Huntington, the lines of faults are moving from the confrontation between nation-states or ideologies (liberal – communist etc.) towards the clashes of civilizations. The situation now changed – thinks Huntington – because the nations of non-Western civilizations are not any more the object of the Western colonial politics but together with the West started to move and to create the History. This author thinks that not the territories, the lands, and the economies but the values and the notion of identity is becoming the main object of contention.⁵ So – according these new foretellers – logically the Islamic fundamentalism is grist to the mill of new theory, namely the 'clash of civilization'. It seems that such kind pro-

⁵ Em. Huntington. The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order; 1996)



jections show very pessimistic approaches, have no any vision of human progress, and are happy with re-establishing the middle age's lifestyle and propagating it for the unknown (perhaps, hidden global) purposes. The chaos created by the old-fashion-minded fundamentalists and on the support of the world international criminal, financial, or political powers shows that how unpredictable and dangerous can be the outcomes of such political projections for the ordinary citizen in modern world, without the difference of faith, believes, belonging to different civilizations or club of interests.

Speaking precisely about Islamic fundamentalism one should be clear about the notion and use of this term, since namely and formally the origin of the word "fundamentalism", according to Bernard Lewis⁶, is a Christian tradition, this term and used by Protestant churches with literal divine origin to oppose the liberal modernist theologians. If one allowed running ahead, one can say that in Islamic context fundamentalism, if one can accept it, raises mainly not within theologians but it has mostly political implementation. John Esposito⁷ suggests using the term of 'revivalism' concerning Islam, but it is possible to speak about it as Islamic activism. Although some scholars – even within Muslim context – support the term of "fundamentalism" (as return to Islamic basics), which allow us to use all of them with the meaning of revivalism.

It is a well-known fact that the collapse of Soviet system brought Central Asian to the religious revival and nostalgic feelings about the Islam which can be viewed as 'natural' form of development after decades of ideological repressions of religion: new mosques are opening and new religious schools are establishing. According the 2010 data available from media, for instance, in Tajikistan 27 central mosques, 325 general mosques, and 3.334 Friday mosques are now functioning. If we calculate this statistics in another way this means that Tajikistan with more than a 7 Million (now 8.5 Million) population has one mosque for each 2.000 citizens. If the process of revival of Islam goes in Central Asia as local cultural-spiritual phenomenon but not as international and global project it can be easily understood and viewed as positive process.

Nevertheless, the lack of knowledge on religion and the evolving process of radical interpretation of Islam coming outside of the region, mainly Wahabism and Salafism from Pakistan and Arabic countries (particularly from Saudis) makes the religious revival very complicated. Some reports confirm that the most active role in radical revivalism and extreme form of fundamentalist interpretation of Islam is practiced by Jamoat Tabliq with a Salafi agenda. The Russian analyst Shustov confirms that:

⁶ Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.117, n.3.

⁷ John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (NewYork: Oxford University Press, 1992)



“(...) in last two years, the Tajik authorities have convicted several hundred Islamic activists, including members of the radical Jamoat Tabliq, many of whose leaders had received training in the madrasahs of Indonesia, Pakistan, and the United Arab Emirates”.

The Jamoat Tabliq has Salafi Jihadist goals and it wants to lead all Muslims back to “the true Islam” and ultimately secure “the Islamization of the entire planet.” He continues that there are currently “according to various assessments ‘about five to six thousand’ followers of this movement in Tajikistan.”⁸

Though some leaders of Islamic moderate revivalism in Tajikistan – for example, Haji Akbar Turajonzade, one of the religious leader of Tajikistan and former of opposition leader – reject radicalism among the followers of this movement and argue that they have just enlightenment mission and that there is no concern about ‘the entire planet’. This opinion is supported by Kadyr Malikov. He thinks that Tabliqi Jamaat is not radical, it is more close to esoteric teaching of Sufi Brotherhood with the mission of to enlighten⁹. Nevertheless, some researchers think that the big challenge for humanities and social disciplines, moreover, for existing nation-state and democracy in Central Asia is the fast-growing fundamentalism, Islamic activism, or extremism, which, according to them, can be the next revolution within the nation state with connection to religion. Some others assume that in reality it can be understood just as some type of search to find guarantee for political identities because of the total domination of Western countries in Middle East and in the world. Not many, but some participants of Aga Khan Humanities Project of UCA (AKHP)¹⁰ workshops in Central Asia explain the rise of religious extremism with new Great Games: they think that the superpowers fight terrorism in parallel to different forms of assistance and investment for the maintaining the security, social infrastructure, business in developing countries, and at the same time use hidden forms of wishes for domination in the region and initiating a double standard / game, including the push for religious extremists: the real aim of superpowers is to come close to the border of young Central Asian states and to start to explore the big oil and gas resources. Definitely this is not a deep but superficial explanation. The so-called “Arabic spring” in North Africa in recent years, which started with the slogans for democratization and liberalism, their opposition backed by some western powers, unfortunately transformed into the civil wars in Syria and Iraq, is the most dangerous political metamorphose and it needs a very careful explanation. In spite of all different explanations the fact is that the fundamentalist movement

⁸ Georgian Daily Independent Voice, http://georgiandaily.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=19822&Itemid=72

⁹ www.islamrf.ru/news/umma/islam-world/2218

¹⁰ Aga Khan Humanities Project, multicultural and multidisciplinary project cultivating pluralism and diversity people, culture and ideas, currently is part of the University of Central Asia. Previously it was part of Aga Khan Trust for Culture.



and trends are in the process of blowing and there is need to counter such development for the region with dominating secular style of life and juridical democratic political order.

3 EPISTOMOLOGICAL ASPECTS: TRADITIONAL EDUCATION AND HOPE FOR NEW INTEGRATIVE APPROACHES

To understand Central Asia and its intellectual potentials one needs to know the epistemology of its education and research and the diversity of tradition of knowledge production in this region. Even before the appearance of Russian and emerging Soviet system traditional Islam presented time to time diverse types of schools of thoughts and different sources of producing knowledge and fundamentalism was not as dominated one. It is possible to list some of them:

- Literal interpretation of tenets of Islam by main religious schools (madhhabs) of Islam: not going deep to the meanings: for example, the issue of polygamy in Islam would be interpreted word to word from the sacred books;
- Rationalistic and esoteric interpreting of Qur'an beginning from the 8th century, rationalistic school of Muttazilla (Group of rationalist religious thinkers in Islam); Kalam (rationalistic tradition justifying Islamic dogmas through logical argumentations);
- Esoteric traditions: Suffis (Ibn al Arabi, Jalaliddini Rumi, Abdurahmani Jami, Alisheri Navoi etc.), Anthropocentric school of thought, discovering moral and deep existentialist values of Islam as a culture of human perfection;
- Allegoric interpreting of Qur'an by the kalam of Ismailia's, justifying learning and discovering of the laws of nature and society as a main purpose of Qur'an and Islam; the Nature perceived by this school of thought as the Second book to be read and discovered by human being;
- Islamic philosophers-mashaiyun (eastern Peripatetic, the followers of Aristoteles in Islamic culture, like Abunasr al Farabi, Avicenna, Ibn Rushd etc; the teaching based on rationalistic interpreting of the laws of Nature and religious sources according to the ideas of Aristotle and neo-platonic);
- Islamic naturalists: Al Beruni, Al Khawarismi, Ibn Hazm, Tusi, Omar Khayyam etc.: this school of thought made one of the great contribution to the world civilization, especially on the sciences and technology, such as math, astronomy, medicine, geography, optics, history, anthropology etc.
- Orthodox – Ahmad Hanbal (780-855), who did not allow rational discourses and logic regarding religious issues; Hanbal rejecting reasoned religious rulings (Ijtihad) which he considered to be speculative theology (Kalam); his guiding principle was that the Quran and Sunnah are the only sources of jurisprudence, and are of equal authority and should be interpreted literally in line with the Ash'ari creed. Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328), the Wahabi and Salafi groups, emerging nowadays are the followers of Ahmad Hanbal;



- Radical interpretation – Abdulla Vahhab (1703-1792), one of the ideologists of Saudi Arabia and Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), one of the leader of Muslim brotherhood and the author of the concept of 'jahiliya', the state of so called 'ignorance', identifying the time of human history before the rise of Islam and modern time according to the view of the followers of Wahhabism;
- Liberal: Said Jamal al-Afghani (1838-1897), the role of Reason and Science in Islam, Abdulla Bubu (1871-1922), the time of Ijtihad is not over, Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), the evolution of Islamic thought; Muhammad Arkoun (1928-2010)-rethinking Islam, Abdulkarim Soroush (dynamic reason);
- Living Islam, which mix with the local cultural traditions of the people in Central Asia. One example of type of living Islam and esoteric knowledge will be demonstrated in the following.

Though this pluralistic culture worked just for few centuries, especially during the Golden Ages (10-11th century), moreover by the end of 19th century due to the collapse of Silk Road's traditional trade roots across this region Central Asia became as one of the most backward corners of the world. In addition to that traditional orthodox Islam was looking at innovation as bid'ah – or heresy, i.e. a big religious sin! – and the reformist movement initiated by Jadids (modernists) in the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century failed and this gave opportunity for Tsarist Russia to invade and then to modernize it, integrated this region into the industrial centers of Russia. The Soviets just continued the modernization of the region and the elimination of religious traditions from public sphere but providing relatively strong secular educational system and sciences.

It is clear that real and current educational poles in Central Asia are many, but one has to focus on two or three of them as they were formulated by some researchers. It was emphasizing by some researchers the novelty and courageousness of some emerging innovative initiatives, like the Aga Khan Humanities project's mandate¹¹, emerging from the integration of two fixed poles, which according to them were two radically different approaches towards the policy for educational reform in Central Asia: one is autochthonous regional culture originated from all traditional education and traditional authorities, including "pirs", "khalifa", "myurids", "tribal leaders" (in case of nomadic nations of Central Asia) and the other is focusing on the legacy of the Soviet higher education. This represents the oscillation between two fixed poles in international scholars' attempts to come to terms with educational cultures in the former Soviet Union, and Central Asia in particular. The one pole is positioned a fusion of Eastern / Islamic / Asian / traditional practices within which Central Asian education and research is assumed to operate, a tradition seamlessly re-sutured over the Soviet

¹¹ Chad D. Thompson 2008, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Nippising University, North Bay, Central Eurasian Studies Review, Vol. 7, No.2, Fall 2008 [the author is the former regional coordinator of AKHP]



interregnum. In the other pole lies the assumption – emphasized within the Soviet era – that only the Soviet educational models have left a mark and that education must be positioned in a strictly utilitarian context, wherein the purpose of education is to provide “courses that should prove useful to the regional economies”.¹²

One can agree with experts and think that the two mentioned poles of the culture of education in Central Asia actually are fixed. But in reality they are more and they were not in severe mutual confrontation, although there was always a particular competition between both. Moreover the elements of the culture of pluralism or multiculturalism existed in Central Asia for the centuries even if it was in latent form. Though it was active during Islamic golden ages, it was distorted and reshaped during the Soviet time in result of forceful cultivation of atheism, but even at that time it went through Soviet modernization toward ‘internationalization’ (namely so called ‘Westernization’ and ‘Russification’) and now has some perspectives because of Western culture and educational standards are flourishing in the region through the joining Central Asian universities to the Bologna system. So, since the region was always in crossroad of history, Central Asian cultures were not static but heterogeneous by nature and presenting one symbiotic Turko-Persian culture based on Islam and Soviet heritage. The problem is that today not all people engaging in Central Asian issues want to see that diversity of Central Asia and always try to bring this diversity into confrontation, to superficial “unity” on behalf of all negotiating different cultural and political subjects, but the unity based on just one of its component and replacing others.

3.1 Educational Episteme, Components, and Segments

So, it is important to note that in reality both mentioned poles of the cultural and educational components in different composition were negotiating in this region for centuries. The evidence for middle ages (10th-15th century) is the prospering science in Central Asia, the works of the famous scholars and scientist, like Beruni, Al Khwarezmi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and so on. It seems strange that natural sciences were not studied at official schools such as mad-rasas but they studies in different learning and academic centers (the Ma’mun Academy in Khwarezm, the Academy of al-Ma’mun in Bagdad, the University and Dar-ul-Ilm in Egypt during the time of Fatimids, the schools of Nizamiya in Iraq and Iran), also were successfully taught at private schools, in families – like the education, which got Avicenna at home, through invitation of the best scholars and teachers provided and sponsored by his Ismaili father. It is important to mention the fact that in classical period the sciences, arts (painting), the music in so-called Islamic countries were never excluded from so called “the public

¹² Chad D. Thompson, *ibid.*



sphere” (Habermas¹³), though it was the time of domination of religious ideology. Something in opposite happened in the Soviet times: the fact is that during the Soviet times and domination of atheism religious education was diminished but the Soviets were not successful in destroying the system completely. Religious education went to private houses and survived (the example, of Hindustani, who got education in India and back to Central Asia, organizing hidden private, home schools). Otherwise the religious and scientific education and cultures were changing their positions from time to time in Central Asia: if in Islamic times so called “religious sciences”(ulumi naqli) were in position of a dominating disciplines within the main official educational institutions of that time – the madrasas –, the natural sciences “rationalistic”(“ulumi aqli”) were taught out of the official educational system (madrasas) at private homes or in academies (special learning centers- Dar-ul-ilm). Special place or niche had at that time esoteric knowledge cultivating by scholars with mystical orientation, like Sufies etc. at special learning centers, like “khanaqas”and zawiyas or in artisanal guilds. Esoteric dimension of Islamic knowledge will be discussed further in the following.

But the first attempt to bring together different types of knowledge and to organize their public debate and negotiation belonged to the Muslim modernists – Jadids (innovators) – operating in different Muslim countries, including former Central Asian emirates and khanats at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. They initiated to establish new schools with mixed religious and secular disciplines integrating new technology of teaching to the learning process including printing books, newspapers, theatres etc. Later on after the Bolsheviks came to the power all of them were involved into the revolution process to establish new system, and after that they were purged in the 1930’s as “bourgeois elements”. During the Soviet time, as it is mentioned above, religious knowledge and practice were officially transformed into nearly the museum relicts (according to the atheism religion as rudiment of the primitive past) but unofficially it went to underground, again to the clandestine or private houses, where it was taught but not much noticed. Good or bad but interesting to note is that Humanities and Social disciplines at that time were included into the state ruling ideology as an instrument for controlling the minds; Social and Humanities studies were part of a “messianic, fundamentalist, and apologetic ideology”¹⁴. The main goal was to create citizenry that identified itself as part of a modern polity” and it would assist in “creation of politically quiescent population throughout the Union that feel stronger allegiance to the central government

¹³ Habermas J. 1992, Further Reflections on the Public Sphere/Habermas and the Public Sphere. Ed. C.Calhoun. Camberidge, Mass.1992.

¹⁴ Andreas Umland 2005, St. Antony College Oxford, Teaching Social Sciences at a post-soviet university: a survey of challenges for visiting lecturers in the former USSR. European Consortium for Political Research. P.219-229



and would more readily accept governmental control”¹⁵. For the emerging Soviet educational system after the civil war the political concerns were more important than the “economic strategy”, it was important ‘to save the people from bourgeois ideas’.

3.2 Disintegration of Humanities Disciplines

The most dramatic change, which happened at this time, was the disintegration of human disciplines from the real social and cultural roots and the separation of knowledge production from the ways of its dissemination. Scientific “truths” were creating somewhere in the top level within the offices of CPSU responsible for the ideology¹⁶ and were sent for their “approbation and justification” down to the universities. There was an extreme form of division of labor when the technical and natural sciences were ordered to serve mainly the socio-economical needs, but Humanities and Social Sciences were obliged to shape the “new individual” and the “harmonically advanced person” according to the mentioned “messianic” ideology. Thus, Soviet epistemology and pedagogical technologies based on this division of labor separated producing new knowledge (first within top political institutes then within Academy of Sciences) from the transmission of knowledge (through the universities)¹⁷, and it fact it was the isolation of teaching from research. That is the explanation why universities were presenting the reproduction of knowledge, which reflected on the whole process of learning: teaching, studying, and researching. Even recently, during a conversation one student noted the case from her class when her classmate started his presentation from words: “I think...” he was immediately stopped by the Professor: “We don’t have so much interest on your opinion; just tell us what is written in your course book”!¹⁸ This statement was not an exception but in opposite it was a common case during the past, especially in humanities classes. Of course, the Soviet controlling system never succeeded to fulfill the imagined ideal, there were many other original studies on Humanities produced by numbers of scholars in spite of the very strict rules created by the system. Like the works of Leo Vigotsky (on Psychology of Arts), Mikhail Bakhtin (Cultural Studies), Losev (the History of Philosophy and Esthetics) in Russia and many other good works based on original research in regional cities and capitals of Soviet republics – including Central Asian: For exam-

¹⁵ Norma Jo Baker and Chad D. Thompson 2010, Ideologies of civic participation in Central Asia: liberal arts in the post-Soviet democratic ethos. *Ecsj –Education, Citizenship and Social Justice* 5 (1) 57-71.

¹⁶ Institute Marxisma I Leninizma under the CPSU (the Institute of Marxism and Leninism in Moscow), the academic entity responsible for current class ideology (responsible for researches).

¹⁷ Dahrendorf, R. 2000, *Universities after Communism*. Hamburg: Koerber Stiftung. p. 13; Norma Jo Baker and Thompson: Ideologies of civic participation in Central Asia;

¹⁸ From the interview with Gulru, student from Medical Institute in Dushanbe).



ple in Tajikistan one can mention works of ethnologists or in Soviet notion- the ethnographs – like Andreev, Pisarchik, ethnomusicologist Nizom Nurjonov, historians like B.Iskandarov, B.Gafurov, some others on Folklore, or philosophers, like M. Dinorshoev, Kh. Dodikhudoev, etc. The classical music and ballet, theatres, literature etc. succeeded some level of progress – of course with considering some necessary ideological norms and passing through state censorship¹⁹. The case of Soviet technical progress in the 1960's and 1970's (including the "Russian phenomenon" of launching of the first "sputnik") also demonstrates some successes. But nevertheless the way for free exploration, or expressing scholarship on Humanities and Social disciplines was not so easy.²⁰ The foundation for repressing of social sciences was the decree in 1936 issued by Stalin identifying 'Dialectical materialism' as an official philosophy for all communist states in the world. Humanities and social sciences were tested for the "(...) strict accordance with a crude misrepresentation of 'historical materialism'" (the part of Marxism-Leninism philosophy describing social phenomenon with dialectical method). These tests served as a cover for political suppression and to terrorize scientists, who engaged in research labeled as "idealistic" or "bourgeois"²¹. The sociology of knowledge and the interconnection between knowledge and power in history and during the Soviet past studies well and current debates on politics of social sciences in Central Asia can be understood within this context²².

4 LIVING ISLAM: EXISTING ESOTERIC TRADITIONS OF ISLAM IN CENTRAL ASIA: AN ALTERNATIVE FORM OF INTERPRETING ISLAM

Sufism is a form of teaching in Islam as inner esoteric experiences and knowledge. Such as demonstration of mystical dimension of Islam and as an instrument for human moral development is traditionally very popular in all contemporary Central Asian countries i.e. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, and also in Pakistan and India. It should be mention that Sufism after violent invasion of this region by Arabs

¹⁹ Masha Gassen, My Grandmother: The Censor." Granta 64. URL: www.granta.com/extracts/655. This article also included into the AKHP course "Introduction to Humanities", Dushanbe, 2004. pp. 35-38.

²⁰ Sunatullo Jonboboev (2010):[50] Humanities in Transition: Liberation of Knowledge in Central Asia and the Potential Role of the European Union: www.uni-giessen.de/cms/fbz/zentren/zeu/Forsch/Publi/publi2

²¹ See more in: Loren R. Graham 2004, Science in Russia and the Soviet Union. A Short History. Series: Cambridge Studies in the History of Science. Cambridge University Press.

²² Sarah Amsler, The Politics of Knowledge in Central Asia. Science between Marx and market, London – New York. Pp. 13.



played an important role even in spreading Islamic religion more peacefully into the modern former Soviet Central Asia and in Eastern part of China. Some scholars think that originally Sufism has been heavily influenced by the Greek Neoplatonic school and by Christianity; some think it has its roots in Hinduism and Buddhism. The most famous Sufis in Central Asia and neighboring regions are Bayazid Bastami, Sanai, Attar, Jalaladdin Rumi, Jami, Haji Bek-tash Veli, Junaidi Baghdadi, Mahmud Yasavi etc.; they have maintained Sufism to be purely based on the tenets of Islam and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. Some scholar believes that Sufism as phenomena is totally unique to Islam. Nevertheless, Sufism is based on a multilevel of understanding of religion and sacred book: first the sharia (formal religious law and rituals), second the tariqa (individual way of spiritual journey), third the ma'rifa (episteme, gained knowledge) and fourth the haqiqa (truth as result of all spiritual journeys). Official Islam mainly operates within the 'sharia' and does not accept the three other levels. So, the Sufi teaching mainly based on spiritual, moral and psychological life of individual rather than the sacred books. It is more anthropocentric, with the purpose to provide moral support for the person during hard time of life.²³

Here one has to provide more detail and practical information on the living esoteric Islam with few real names and places, which can be potential soft power to confront fundamentalism of Wahhabis types and to some extent to moderate religious-political discourse and debate in society. In Tajikistan and all over Central Asia still are active the esoteric schools of Sufi brotherhood,²⁴ there are actively practicing Sufi Pirs of Qadiriya²⁵ and the Sufis "Naqshbandi"²⁶ after the severe atheistic regimes during the Soviet time and the civil war in Tajikistan. These schools of esoteric Islam are the heritage of the previous time, the Emirate of Bukhara, Khoqand, and Khiva with Bucharas as a main political capital city in Central Asia was also main scientific and cultural center of the region. It is very sad to mention that together with traditional Islam and official Islam the teaching of Sufi brotherhood or the active forms of "living Islam" have been ignored during the Soviet time because of atheistic ideology and in the time of independence of ex-Soviet republics of Central Asia. In contrary, the world

²³ Information on the existing Sufi tariqa in Tajikistan provided here is a joint contribution of researchers during the field work, especially it contains great contribution of Dr. Muboraksho Shamsov, who did his PhD on Sufism at the Institute of Philosophy, Political Sciences and Law of AS RT, and during many years of devotion have had gained level of Khalifa in this sacred place.

²⁴ See: Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (1975); Тримингэм Дж. С. Суфийские ордены в исламе. М., 1989

²⁵ Qadiriya, one of the branch of Sufism, who perform load form of devotion (zikri ja'ri), differ from the branch of Naqshbandis where devotees perform zikr with voiceless devotion.

²⁶ Naqshbani, one of leading branch of Sufim, founded by Baha ud-Din Naqshband from Buskara (1318-1389), spread in Central Asia, Caucuses, Balkan, India, Egypt, China etc, teach integrated spiritual and secular lives. See: J. Spencer. "The Chief Tariqa Lines."; Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*,. Oxford: Clarendon, 1971.



power U.S. and its allies during the Cold war supported jihadi schools of Islam (mujahidin, Taliban, Al-Qaiyda etc.) just in order to fight Communism. Nobody was thinking about other schools of thought and, about consequences of such shortsightedness. And now one is picking the harvest of this blinkered policy.

4.1 Bukhara Tradition Or Chain (sylsilya) of Naqshbandiyya

In previous time all Sufis, the seekers of esoteric knowledge from the valleys and mountainous areas of Central Asia including the current Tajikistan came to Bukhara to attend the religious schools together with learning and acquiring knowledge from Sufi leaders, the Pirs (spiritual leaders). After the graduation some of them choose the path of self-perfection coming to the places of sheikhs (Sufi leaders), like monastery, staying there for many years, received spiritual enlightenment or just more perfection. The murids (disciples, students, and followers) were from all segments of the population and coming from different countries, they were the rulers, rich men, scientists, simple farmers, and artisans. It should be mentioned that in the last centuries among the Naqshbandi sheikhs especially popular was “dargoh” (spiritual worshipping place) and that was the dargoh of Hazrat Mavlono Khudoiberdi, better known as Shah Bukhari Yakhsi, and also the “dargoh” Hazrat Mavlono Valikhon known as Shah Urguti Samarkandi. Especially the “dargoh” Hazrat Shah Yahsi brought together many murids from the territory of present Tajikistan and even the last emir of Bukhara, Amir Olimhon, who migrated to Afghanistan after the fall of Bukhara also considered himself murid this guide.

Murids from the territory of present Tajikistan raised in a “dargoh” Shah Yahsi were many but as an example one can give a summary of the three of them. It was Hazrat Eshon Muhammadsaid Khatloni (born 1842), Hazrat Eshon Davlathodzha Romiti (born 1860), and Hazrat Eshon Abdurrahim Faizobodi (1881-1947). Hazrat Eshon Muhammadsaid Khatloni and Hazrat Eshon Davlathodzha Romiti, when many mullahs and ishans in 1930 of the 20th century were under the slogan of “enemy of the people” and ideological repression either killed or evicted into in Russia and Kazakhstan and did not return home after their imprisonment.

Eshon Abdurrahim was rescued from such a persecution and died in 1947 in the village Elok Faizabad district, where one can visit his grave to this day. Many of his descendants and followers talk about his miraculous disappearance during the search of his house by the investigators i.e. the representatives of Soviet power. Unable to catch him in the end, the authorities left him alone. It is said also that during World War II, in 1941-1945, special plenipotentiary representatives came from Moscow to Hazrat Elok, whom he notified them of the consequences of war. People were amazed when next day he gave them an answer that the victory in this war would be for the Soviets and as they were delighted, then happily returned to Moscow. It is worth to be mentioned that Eshon Abdurrahim is the author of more than 12



works on Suffism (Tasawwuf), the esoteric teaching in Islam. Nowadays one can observe in the village Elok Faizabad district his grave, “dargoh” – the place of worshipping and his “chillahona” (quadragesimal, the Sufi ritual of forty days of praying for spiritual perfection). His younger son, Eshon Zubaidullo is the vicar of his father and has many supporters and followers. Eshon Abdurrahim had many deputies (they are called as “Caliphs”). One of his closest followers was Hazrat Ibn Eshoni Abdurrahmondzhon Porsokhodzha (1920-1991). Since 1947 Eshoni Abdurrahmondzhon went to the village Kandak, the former Obi Garm region and until 1968 did not come out of this village. Only because of the passing of Hazrat Buzurgvor i.e, Hazrat Eshoni Abdussattori Sorvoi Eshon Abdurrahmondzhon came from the village of Kandak and came to the funeral prayer (“janaza”) of this Great Pir (Hazrat Buzurgvor). Hazrat Eshon Abdurrahmondzhon just had a lot of governors as followers. To the end of his days (1991) he served the people in the education and instruction of travelers of the Naqshbandi Path of Sufi Tariqa (path). At this time in the village of Kalai Nav Nurabad district contain his grave “dargoh” and “chillahona.” His son Eshoni Abdulvohid is currently the vicar of his father and receives visitors and pilgrims.

The next great sheikh of Naqshbandi path of Sufism is Hazrat Eshon Muhammadsaid Khatloni, better known as Khalifa Saidi Khatloni and Eshoni Alaaspa. He was born around 1842 in the village situated on the territory Parronak Khovaling Khatlon region. Time and place of his death are unknown. It has to be noted that Eshoni Said arrived in Bukhara in 1859 to study and later became a devotee of Shah Bukhari Yakhsi. After 40 years of spiritual training and esoteric education as “a perfect and purified man” with “permission to educate young devotees” from Shah Yahsi, he returned to his native village. Yahsi Shah gave him a horse, with whom he came into his village and therefore it was called Hazrat Eshoni Alaaspa. As noted Eshon Alaaspa first lived in Parronak village, and then moved to the village Karimberdi in Khovaling district of Kulob, where he trained many followers. In 1933 the Soviet authorities arrested him and thrown him into prison in Kulyab city. During his stay in prison of Kulyab, people tell stories like that he received Divine Power. For example, according to these stories, he was not allowed in prison to do ablution (tahorat) by the instruction from the soldiers and of course the door was closed. So he could not come out. But suddenly after some time, people have had seen as his cell door had been opened and he was in the prison yard doing the washing for praying and performing the zikr/dhikr (special Sufi ritual, silently remembering the name of God many times). Then one tried to shoot him several times but each time the rifle was given a cutoff. Despite this, he was sent to prison in the city of Karaganda, which is now in Kazakhstan. In prison Hazrat Eshon experienced many difficulties – especially hunger. The official rule was they specifically did not feed him in order for force him to die of hunger but his spiritual trainings gave him even in that case spiritual strength to survive. According to one story, once, during a strong hunger miraculously appeared a bed of pumpkins and harvest yielded and Hazrat used these pumpkins. People noted that even in such difficult conditions Hazrat Eshon secretly taught esoteric



knowledge to convicted and local Kazakh kids. He always read “Duo” (sermon) and healed them. Once during a secret lesson, they were approached by the military and the boys ran away, and Hazrat Eshon as guilty with downy head stood on the site. This military person said hello and began to ask Hazrat in several languages, but Hazrat did not reply. Then the person said, “Don’t You recognize Hazrat (respectful form to address person) your disciples, I am Amin from Kulyab.” Hazrat Eshon looked up and recognized his pupil, who at that time was on duty and transferred to the camp. Amin said: “Hazrat throw the work and come to have a rest, tomorrow you should go to the house of the chief of the camp. The chief’s only daughter is mentally ill. She was treated with by all doctors and priests, but it did not help. If you heal it then you will be free from these torments forever.” Hazrat Eshoni Alaaspa read for three days “Duo” and the girl recovered and day after day flourished in his eyes. The camp commander, after returning from a business trip, did not believe his eyes. His daughter was playing with her friends, without any signs of illness. Then the head of the prison made a feast in his house in honor of Hazrat Eshoni and then added his name to the list of the dead convicts and let him go. But Hazrat Eshon did not want to return home. Asked him dates boat, so he swam in Lake Balkhash. So, he was given a boat, carried out, but no one knew where they swam, and his fate remains unknown. Hazrat Eshoni Alaaspa left children, grandchildren and other relatives but unfortunately the “dargoh” Hazrat in Kulyab is currently not functioning.

The next great Naqshbandi Sheikh in Tajikistan was Hazrat Eshon Davlatkhodzha Romiti, who was really one of the closest people of Shah Bukhari Yakhsi. Hazrat Eshoni Davlathodzha was born around 1860 in the village Pchev, in former Romit area, now Wahdan district of Tajikistan. In 1976 he arrived in Bukhara and studied different sciences. After graduation and a mandatory minimum mastery of the various sciences he came to Shah Bukhari Yakhsi to walk on the path of spiritual perfection. After about seven years of service in the “dargoh” Hazrat Shah Yahsi gave him permission to training (the letter of “khati irshod”) and he have been blessed by his teacher giving “Duo” to return to their village. Eshon Davlathodzha returned home in his village to undertake the education of murids. Soon the village area became crowded with people and after the arrival of Hazrat he was invited to Dushanbe for the post imam- Khatib one of the largest mosques. In the 1930’s he trained many students and especially taught the path of Sufism. His followers told of many miracle-works of this Hazrat. For example, in the early 1930’s he told his Sufis that authorities will soon come for him to arrest him. His murids asked him to leave Tajikistan and suggested to secretly move to Afghanistan; for this they had created all conditions. But Hazrat Eshon refused and stayed in his village. When the Soviet authorities came to his village to arrest him, he himself with his hands behind his back walked out of the “chillakhona” and went towards the city and the military went after him. As it is said by the people, who knew him, that during the loading of people in trains to be sent to penal servitude one of the policemen kicked Hazrat Eshoni Davlathodzha and Hazrat at that moment was saying nothing



but just turned and looked at him. On the same night at this policeman was a terrible pain in his leg and in the morning he died. Hazrat Eshon did not return from prison and his fate is unknown. But that case reveals that some spiritual power exist – given by the esoteric way of teaching, which are effective till now, but the mechanism of them are unknown to us.

Thus the divine authority and the knowledge went through master-disciple chains and through such master-disciple chains the spiritual power and blessings, according to the Sufis, were transmitted to general and special devotees in this region.

4.2 The Sufi School Of Hazrat Eshoni Pir Sorvoi

Now let one provide more specific data on the sacred place of Pir Sorvoi, the form of master-disciple chain and knowledge transmission in this esoteric circle. As noted, one of the closest followers of Hazrat Eshon Davlathodzha was Hazrat Buzurgvor Eshoni Abdussatori Sorvoi. He, the Hazrat Buzurgvor (Great Teacher) after the eviction of Hazrat Eshoni Davlathodzha first moved to the village Toshbuloq, now in Hissar district and then to the village Pashmi Kukhna Regar district of Tajikistan. Pashmi Kuhna is located on the high mountains. It is worth to mention that even now the village Pashmi Khuhna does not have a road for cars and the path leading there were and are very dangerous. One way to Pashmi Kukhna was along the river Sherkent with a length of approximately 25 km, on which could only well-prepared mountain people go. All livestock and goods needed were brought to the village on two other roads with a length of about 40 km and with a very steep climb. In the old days there lived about 30 families of Sufis. Hazrat Buzurgvor Sorvoi had a special devotion, the “dhikr”.²⁷ A circle of Sufi rituals is located in the mosque of the that village, which says a lot about Hazrat miracles of this great person. Hazrat raised his murids both ways: by “dzhazba” and “suluk” (to forms of involvement into esoteric world: attraction and procession). During Hazrat Buzurgvor lived in this village, people say that this area prospered from the blessings of Hazrat, but when they went down to the valley and stopped near Kofarnihon, the village Pashmi Kukhna day after day began to become empty. Other villagers started to go down the same in the valley. In 2006, when one author of part (Shamsov Muboraksho) for the first time visited Pashmi Kuhna village to visit his “feast” of Hazrat Eshoni Piri Sorvoi, in this village lived only three families. Hazrat Buzurgvor just had a lot of followers. Among his sons Hazrat Eshon Sorvoi Peary became his deputy, and continues to teach and educate visitors of sacred place.

Hazrat Eshon Piri Sorvoi was born September 19, 1949, in the village of Toshbuloq and was brought up by his father. After the death of Hazrat Buzurgvor, Hazrat Eshon studied sha-

²⁷ Dhikr or Zirk, the form of devotion, associated chiefly with Sufism, in which the worshiper is absorbed in the rhythmic repetition of the name of God or his attributes.



ria law and for many ulema (religious scholars) did services as a student. He was given a “duo” more than 50 ulema where and under their supervising he studied and brought up in the Holy Bukhara. During the Civil War 1992-1997 years Hazrat Eshon moved to the village Pashmi Kuhna and lived there until 1998 – since one faction of this war was anti-Islamic, just killing people for belonging to Islam. It can be worth to mention that from 1992 to 1998 in “chillahona” of the village Pashmi Kukhna Hazrat Eshon had have spent 40 Chilla.²⁸ Once a year for one hour in the spring they went out with the face covered on the feast given in his honor some adherents, honey agarics, and then went into seclusion for a year. In 1998 Hazrati Eshoni Sarvoi descended into the valley and stopped in the village of Boloi Sangmelai Shahrinav district. Hazrat Eshon has hundreds of followers and thousands of supporters. Many of his closest followers have their “circle of followers”, which started from dozens and reached hundreds of people. Hazrat Eshon received visitors and pilgrims either in the morning after the prayer “Ishraq” (one of the five praying, after sunrise) or in the afternoon after the prayer “Peshin” (Zuhr). The sick and needy, too, were awarded by the grace of “grace” of Hazrat Eshoni Sorvoi.

4.3 Ritual And Rules Of Reception Of Pilgrims

The power of spiritual authority and knowledge goes through special reception at this place, which is generally traditional for Sufis rituals and rules. For example, adherents, who want to reach a degree of perfection, must often appear in “conversations” and Hazrat Eshoni – through “concentration” – gave them grace. Austerities and devotion as well as passion and purification of the heart is a necessary way of this. Hazrat Eshon educates travelers through the method attraction, the “dzhazba” and “suluk”, which depends on the natural endowments of each traveler. It is safe to say that anyone who sincerely wants to achieve the degree of perfection (“irshod”), the “dargoh” Hazrat Eshoni Sorvoi always open for him, and they will be happy to accept sincerely wish to achieve perfection.

Currently there are 6 “dargoh”-s (visiting sacred places) of Hazrat Eshoni Sorvoi and they are actively functioning. In each of these “dargoh” there is a mosque, a reception room guests, rooms, and students behind them in a hidden place, where in addition to serving substitute (Khalifas) no one is allowed to enter into the “chillahona.” Hazrat Eshon does not eat from those dishes that bring people to him. He just let try dishes brought a gift of the his assistants, in which he believe to follow all the rules of Sufi manufacturing food. And in most cases, one should take his dry cake with boiled water. The conditions under which employees are preparing food for Hazrat Eshoni are very strict – for example they cannot even talk during cooking. Specific features “dargoh” Hazrat Eshoni a lot, but it is impossible to list all.

²⁸ Chilla (40 days of staying in Suffi monastic cell, without food, but self-strengthening spiritually through praying, dhikr and devotion.