

11 2007  
3693k

*An Insider's Critique of*

**THE KAZAKH**

**PEOPLE AND NATION**

Reflections on the Writings of Abai Kunanbai-uhli

Garifolla Yesim





*An Insider's Critique of*  
**THE KAZAKH**  
**PEOPLE AND NATION**

Reflections on the Writings of Abai Kunanbai-uhli

**Garifolla Yesim**

(Translated and edited, with a Preface,  
by R. Charles Weller, assisted by Tatyana Galkina)

*Garifolla Yesim*  
*Weller*

**Asia Research Associates**

**Los Angeles**

**2007**

.512.122 ASA N.06 = 111  
English Edition © 2006 – R. Charles Weller  
Original Kazakh and Russian Editions © 1994 – Garifolla Yesim

All Rights Reserved. Apart from limited quotations,  
this work should not be reproduced, in whole or in part, in any form,  
without the express written consent of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

First Edition

First Print Release (Inhouse), April 2007

## **Asia Research Associates**

2909 Oregon Court, C-11  
Torrance, California 90503 USA

*Telephone:* (310) 987-2146

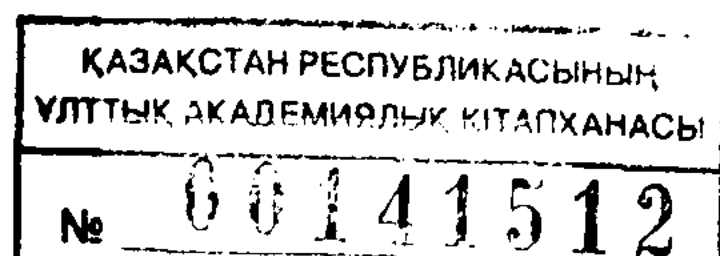
*Email:* 2ARA@ara-cahrcr.com

*Website:* www.ara-cahrcr.com

**For order and other information, please visit:**  
[www.ara-cahrcr.com/CA-Nationhood](http://www.ara-cahrcr.com/CA-Nationhood)

ISBN: 978-0-9794957-0-0

Library of Congress Control Number: 2007925400



*To the spirit of Abai*



**Portrait of Abai Kunanbai-uhli, 1845-1904.**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

About the Book .....	7
About the Author .....	9
About the English Version.....	11
Preface: Abai and His Times .....	15
Introduction .....	31
<i>Word One: Thoughts That Came to Me</i> .....	37
<i>Word Two: Knowing Yourself Through the Eyes of Others</i> .....	40
<i>Word Three: "If There are Two Judges, There Will Be Four Disputes"</i> .....	41
<i>Word Four: "People are Born Crying, and Die in Sorrow"</i> .....	44
<i>Word Five: "Is This the Nation We Were Seeking?"</i> .....	46
<i>Word Six: The Unity of Wisdom</i> .....	47
<i>Word Seven: Concerning the Desires of Flesh and Spirit</i> .....	50
<i>Word Eight: Who Needs Wisdom and Instruction?</i> .....	51
<i>Word Nine: "This is Who I Am, I am a Kazakh"</i> .....	53
<i>Word Ten: On Parents and Children</i> .....	54
<i>Word Eleven: No Way Out?!</i> .....	57
<i>Word Twelve: On Faith and Devotion</i> .....	58
<i>Word Thirteen: What is True Faith?</i> .....	60
<i>Word Fourteen: "If the Tongue Obeys the Heart..."</i> .....	62
<i>Word Fifteen: Take Account of Yourself</i> .....	63
<i>Word Sixteen: Submission to God</i> .....	64
<i>Word Seventeen: "I Shall Give Preference to My Heart"</i> .....	65
<i>Word Eighteen: On Beauty and Vanity</i> .....	67
<i>Word Nineteen: Being Attentive</i> .....	68
<i>Word Twenty: Growing Weary</i> .....	69
<i>Word Twenty-One: Maturity and Pride</i> .....	71
<i>Word Twenty-Two: The Poor Rich Ones</i> .....	73
<i>Word Twenty-Three: "Given Over to Evil, Can There Be Any Good?"</i> .....	75
<i>Word Twenty-Four: Kazakh-ness</i> .....	77
<i>Word Twenty-Five: "The Path I Spoke of was not the Path of Sparing Your Wealth"</i> .....	78

<i>Word Twenty-Six: "The Kazakhs Have No Other Enemies Besides the Kazakhs"</i> .....	80
<i>Word Twenty-Seven: Great Boundless Wisdom</i> .....	81
<i>Word Twenty-Eight: "Are Poverty and Sickness Really 'the Will of God'?"</i> .....	86
<i>Word Twenty-Nine: Words Spoken in Ignorance</i> .....	88
<i>Word Thirty: "Tireless Cheeks Contribute to a Shameless Face"</i> ...	89
<i>Word Thirty-One: Hinderances of Thought</i> .....	89
<i>Word Thirty-Two: The Requisites of Learning</i> .....	91
<i>Word Thirty-Three: Behavior that Hinders the Kazakhs</i> .....	93
<i>Word Thirty-Four: Matters of Life and Death</i> .....	95
<i>Word Thirty-Five: To Call to Account</i> .....	97
<i>Word Thirty-Six: "What Exactly Is Shame?"</i> .....	99
<i>Word Thirty-Seven: The Fidelity of a Loving Heart</i> .....	102
<i>Word Thirty-Eight: Life Itself is Truth</i> .....	105
<i>Word Thirty-Nine: Two Merits of Our Forefathers</i> .....	115
<i>Word Forty: Questions</i> .....	118
<i>Word Forty-One: Power and Wealth</i> .....	120
<i>Word Forty-Two: Laziness and the Lack of Work</i> .....	121
<i>Word Forty-Three: On Soul and Body</i> .....	123
<i>Word Forty-Four: Berikeldi! On Admiration and Approval</i> .....	125
<i>Word Forty-Five: A Sense of Justice and Love</i> .....	127
<i>Bibliography</i> .....	139
<i>Select List of Publications by/about Abai Kunanbaiuhli</i> .....	143
<i>Select List of Publications by Garifolla Yesim</i> .....	147
<b>INDEX</b> .....	149



## About the Book

Making an entirely new contribution to the study of Eastern philosophy and history, *An Insider's Critique of the Kazakh People and Nation* offers "a window on the Kazakh world" through one of the most prominent and treasured national philosopher-reformers to have appeared in their history: Abai Kunanbai-uhli, the great Kazakh poet-philosopher-prophet who lived and wrote in Kazakhstan from the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a pioneering and central figure in the Kazakh-Turkic Muslim-Jadid renaissance movement. His writings have received international recognition, with translations into Russian, French, German, Chinese, English and other world languages. They are herein complimented with and conveyed through the commentary of a top national post-Soviet Kazakh scholar. The entire range of Kazakh religious, cultural, social and political lifeways and institutions is covered against the backdrop of late Tsarist Russian imperial rule in Central Asia.

## About the Author



Garifolla Yesim is a post-doctoral graduate and professor of philosophy who currently serves, since 2001, as Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Political Science at Kazakh National (i.e. State) University in Almaty, Kazakhstan. He is a seasoned scholar of top national honors who contributes regularly to national television and radio programs as well as

newspaper, magazine and journal publications. He has published numerous books and articles in both Kazakh and Russian, including *The Elite Scholar Abai* (1994), *The Essence of Mind: Reflections on Politics and Culture* (1995-2007, 10 vols), *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (2000 and 2004), *Humanity* (2001), *Kazakh Philosophy* (2005) and *Kazakh Renaissance* (2006). He is a Muslim Kazakh scholar of the post-Soviet era who advocates peace and tolerance as well as freedom of thought and expression in the course of open, academic inquiry and interreligious-intercultural world dialogue.

**Forthcoming by the same author from Asia Research Associates:**

G. Yesim, *The Reawakening of Kazakh Ethnonational Consciousness in the Post-Soviet Era* (with a contribution from N. Baitenova).

G. Yesim, *Inside the Kazakh Heart and Mind: Reflections on the Songs and Poems of Abai Kunanbai-uhli*.



## About the English Version

The core of this book represents an English translation of the third and final section "*Сөздер туралы сөздер*" ("Words About Words") in Ғарифолла Есім, 1994, *Хакім Абай* (Garifolla Yesim, 1994, *The Elite Scholar Abai*, Алматы: Атамұра).<sup>1</sup> The author himself also produced a Russian version of the same work under the same title. The Russian version is not a mere 'rote translation' of the Kazakh, it is a 'free rendering' of its essential message which the author himself slightly condensed and modified for a Russian-speaking audience.

Making use of both the original Kazakh and the modified Russian versions, our approach to translating and producing the present English version has been 'ecclectic'. First, using her highly developed English skills together with her own personal commitment to precision and excellence, Ms. Tatyana Galkina of Kazakhstan translated sections two and three of the Russian version into English. She worked quite tediously, checking the Russian against the Kazakh at points and consulting with myself as well as other Kazakh and Russian scholars, to ascertain as precisely as possible the intended meaning and sense of the Russian.

I then took her translation and did three things: *One*: I chose to edit and publish sections two and three as two separate volumes. The current volume, again, represents section three of the original work(s), comprising commentary on Abai's 'Words', with the hope expressed that section two, comprising commentary on Abai's poems and songs, will 'see the light of day' in the next year or two. As the Kazakhs say, *Az-azdan* ('little by little')! *Two*: I edited Ms. Galkina's English translation to achieve native-level accuracy and style, clarifying

whatever was necessary by way of the original Kazakh version, Ms. Galkina and the author. Thanks to her excellent English abilities, she left me with little to do, i.e. she made this part of my task rather easy. *Three*: using her English translation as a base, I (re)translated entire select 'Words' and significant portions of others from the original Kazakh, those I deemed to be of special importance, especially those treating matters of religion, culture and politics more explicitly.

One thing worth making special note of in connection with this latter point: I have taken care to translate *all* quotes of Abai's 'Words' directly from the original Kazakh.<sup>2</sup> Together with the several quotes directly translated in my own previous work on *Rethinking Kazakh and Central Asian Nationhood* (see bibliography), this marks the second small step in a long-term effort being undertaken by Asia Research Associates to produce a fresh, new translation of Abai's 'Words' in English working directly from the original Kazakh in consultation with Dr. Yesim and other Kazakh scholars in the religion and culture departments at Kazakh National University. 'Kudai kalasa' ('Lord willing'), that work will 'see the light of day', perhaps section by section, over the next several years.

A good deal of Kazakh literature has fortunately yet unfortunately come to us via the medium of Russian translation, including the current English version(s) of *Abai's Book of Words*, Mukhtar Auezov's classic novel *Abai zholi* (*The Way of Abai*, translated into English as *Abai: a novel*), Ilias Yesenberlin's classic novel *Koshpendiler*, i.e. *The Nomads* (which became the basis for the 2005 Hollywood movie by the same title) and others. All of these compositions and a number of others which have been translated into English via Russian were originally composed in Kazakh, not Russian, and then translated by a separate, independent party into the latter



language. This has definitely 'colored' the English-speaking world's perception and understanding of the Kazakh world, delivering it to us via a Russian filter which most assuredly has eclipsed and even at times distorted that world in significant ways.<sup>3</sup> Needless to say, all such translations, *while retaining a great deal of value*, need to be 'taken with a grain of salt'.

The present case should be clearly distinguished from such occasions, however, since the Russian version employed herein is again *not* a translation, but a version of the author's original work which has been produced afresh by the author himself and intentionally condensed as well as adapted by him for a Russian-speaking audience.<sup>4</sup> Our translation, therefore, whether based upon the Russian or Kazakh version, comprises a direct translation representing the author's own original message. In the end, the reader holds in their hands an eclectic, but highly reliable 'dynamic translation' of the original *message* of the Kazakh author which comes with the full knowledge, confidence and approval of the author himself.

A few final points here, then, which should be born in mind by the reader regarding the present English version. First, I have not always followed the same paragraph formatting as occurs in the originals. Second, I have intentionally chosen to break English grammatical rules by using plural referents for singular subjects in certain cases, as was just encountered in the previous paragraph when I said "the reader holds in their hands..." My reason for this is that I am entirely sympathetic to the issue of inclusive language, i.e. addressing both male and female readers, but am entirely unsympathetic to the cumbersome manner in which English works have become burdened with multiple variations of 'he/she', 'he or she', '(s)he', etc, in their attempts to 'tackle' this problem. Third, I have translated the term 'Allah' as 'God',

since, although it is used frequently in Kazakh, it is more properly an Arabic term and this is its normal, natural meaning in English.<sup>5</sup> Fourth and finally, I have taken liberty to supply in the main text, *without the use of distracting brackets, etc*, important cultural and/or historical information which is implicit in the original work, things the average Kazakh or even Russian reader would know and understand, but which may be in need of clarification for the English reader. I have, likewise, taken liberty to produce a translation which remains as faithful to the original as possible, yet which departs from 'wooden literalism' when necessary in order to fully and faithfully communicate the intended sense of the original in a vocabulary and style natural to English (cf. Dankoff 1983, Beisenbai 2004). Beyond that, nothing comes to mind of an essential nature and I herein commend this work to the reader with the "Preface" that follows.



— PREFACE —

## Abai and His Times

Abai. The name alone, if mentioned in the Kazakh-Turkic world, immediately calls to mind the great Kazakh poet-philosopher-prophet who lived and wrote in northeastern Kazakhstan, in the regions of Semei, in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century — 1845-1904 to be exact. This means he lived and wrote near the end of a long and rather important chapter in Kazakh history, namely the latter side of nearly 200 years of Russian Tsarist imperial rule dominated by the Romanov dynasty and 'complimented' by Russian Orthodox Christian missions.

Thus Abai's times would have commenced late in the reign of Tsar Nicholas I (1825-55), with Abai coming into the world right on the tail end of the Kazakh national liberation movement (1837-47) taking place on the Kazakh Steppe



*Portrait of Kenesari Kasimuhli, courtesy of The A. Kasteev State Museum of Arts, Almaty, KZ.*

during the first few years of his life. It was led by the great Kazakh national hero Kenesari Kasimuhli who "set before himself the clear intention of restoring the territorial solidarity and independence... of the Kazakh nation."<sup>6</sup> The prime of Abai's youth and adulthood would have witnessed 'The Great Reforms' carried out under Tsar Alexander II (1855-1881).<sup>7</sup> These 'reforms' included the abolishment of

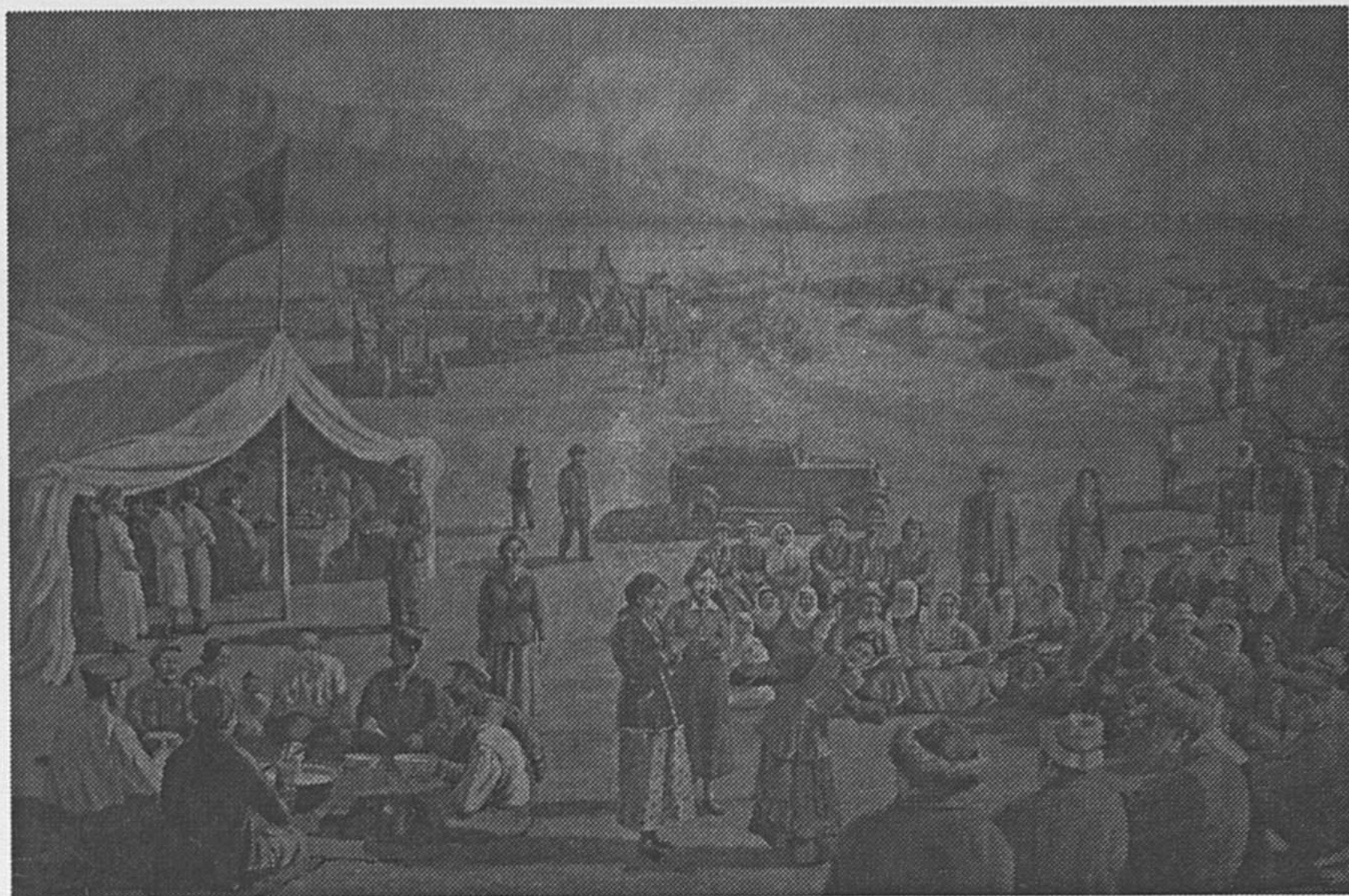
serfdom in the Russian homeland in 1861, an act that sent waves of Russian peasants into the Kazakh homeland to lay claim to thousands of square miles of so-called 'unused' Kazakh lands. It was the same year that the U.S. Civil War started, creating a cotton-shortage in Russia that caused them to turn their attentions toward the 'fertile lands' in Central Asia for production of their cotton needs. It was a tradition the Soviets would later continue, resulting in the great Aral Sea tragedy, which still ranks among Kazakhstan's most severe ecological catastrophes to this day. 1861 was also the year – and not by coincidence – that building of the TransCaspian Railway across the Central Asian heartland was begun.

By no means distant from all these significant historical events and still lingering in their background was the fact that Russia had been halted in its advance (south)westward against the Turkish Ottoman Empire through defeat in the Crimean War (1853-1856). This appears to have been a clear underlying factor in the Russian conquest of Central Asia.<sup>8</sup> 'The Great Game', i.e. the 19<sup>th</sup> century struggle between the British and Russian Empires for control of the borderlands lying between northern India as well as northwest China and Central Asia should also be noted.

Regardless, this 'chapter' of *Russian Tsarist Orthodox* imperial rule in Kazakh history was of course, not long after Abai's time, 'destined' (with considerable uncertainty between 1917 and the early 1920s) to be replaced by 70 *more* years of *Russian Communist Atheist* imperial rule, with both forms of imperial rule leaving their respective marks indelibly upon the lands and peoples of *Turkic Muslim Central Asia*, not to mention lands and peoples far beyond in every direction.

As I. Yerofeeveva notes in an article on "Kazakhstan Under the Power of the Russian Empire," the beginnings of this





*Portrait of Kazakh Celebration taking place against the background of the Soviet Presence in Kazakhstan, Courtesy of The A. Kasteev State Musuem of Arts, Almaty, KZ.*

important chapter in Kazakh history can traced back to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, for:

The Russian Tsar's plans of penetration to the Middle East and from there to the fabulous wealth of India were influenced by new knowledge acquired about Central Asia which had been received in Russia. ...With the aim of establishing direct means of communication via waterways between Russia, India and other eastern countries, reconnaissance expeditions were sent by Peter the First. The first one headed by Prince A. Bekovich-Cherkassky was dispatched to the Caspian Sea and Khiva (1715-1717) and the second and third ones under the supervision of I.D. Bukhgoltz (1717-1718) and I.M. Likharev (1719-1720) were sent up the Irtysh River. During the two last expeditions the foundations for the building of the line of Russian military fortifications on the north-eastern border lines of the Kazakh nomadic camps were laid. ...In 1722, during his stay in

Astrakhan on the way from Persia to St. Petersburg, Peter the First, as it was admitted by the competent eyewitness A.I. Tevkeley, "was informed through many people" about the Kazakh lands and defined their significance for the geopolitical and trade-economic interests of Russia in Central Asia as the sought after "Key and Gate." ...The Period of the formation of the Eastern Doctrine of Peter the First chronologically coincided with the epoch of an arising crisis in the internal-political situation of Kazakh nomadic society and the deterioration of the status of Kazakhstan in the world arena.<sup>9</sup>

In further elucidating this historical context, a brief sketch of the entire Russian advance can be drawn here at length from my 2006 work, *Rethinking Kazakh and Central Asian Nationhood* (pp 108-9), wherein it is noted that:

...apart from the limited military outposts along the far northern borders, no significant Russian presence was sent into Kazakhstan, i.e. 'the land of the Kazakhs', until the early or middle 1800s. On this score, it should be observed that G. Yesim, in the foreword to this book [i.e. the one now being quoted], says: "The Kazakh people who had been associated with the Kazakh State established in 1466 were cut off from their nationhood through the official resolution of the Russian Empire in 1822." ...In similar manner, though placing the emphasis on slightly later events and actions instead of on the "official resolution" itself, the Kazakh historian A. Abdakimuhli (1997:113) says that it was especially between 1867-68 in Zhetisu, Sirdaria, Orinbor and Western Siberia that "legal rights were given like smoke into the hands of the Russians who were carrying out – with respect to government, military, economy, and religion – the entire matter of oppressive lordship over the traditional [Kazakh] system of oversight." In fact, these actions immediately followed strong intensification



of Russian military action and occupation of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in the 1860s which reached to Tashkent by 1865.

All this accords with Shildebai's (2002, ch 1) division of Russian Tsarist occupation into three major periods or phases: 1731-1822, 1822-1867 and 1867-1891. The first period (1731-1822) is considered somewhat insignificant with respect to the actual carrying out of colonial-imperial policy in Central Asia. Thus, it is in the second period or phase that the brunt of colonial force came in, actually 'transforming' Kazakhstan from an 'independent nation' into a 'colonial nation'.<sup>10</sup>

This historical context, i.e. late Russian Tsarist Orthodox imperial rule in Kazakhstan, surfaces at various points throughout 'the Words' of Abai and, therefore, throughout the commentary offered upon his writings by the nationally-acclaimed scholar of 'Abai Studies' in modern post-Soviet Kazakhstan, Garifolla 'Gary' Yesim. Indeed, Dr. Yesim speaks in section one of the original Kazakh work of "the lamentful 19<sup>th</sup> century for the Kazakh people" when...

...in this century, the Kazakh khanates went off into oblivion via a decree of the Russian Empire. The people were stripped of their right to rule themselves. The people turned into prisoners of oppressive political policies. In place of the traditional Kazakh khans and judges, Russian administrative officials ruled the nation. Breaking apart the people, who were integrally united, they split them up into several large regions (lit. 'Governerates-General') and made them directly subject to the tsar (1994:30, *Hakim Abai*).

Against this historic background, he reflects upon Abai's Third Word, noting how "the Kazakh people, who had lost their former freedom, had begun to sink into decline," referring to "the loss of independence" when "the Kazakh land

had become a Russian colony." Then again, in commenting upon Word Five, he draws out Abai's nearness of heart with the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Kazakh socio-political reformers of the *Alash* movement and their battle-cry 'Awake, Kazakh' when he interprets Abai to say: "The people must awake and realize that different times were upon them. The time of Abai was the time of domination by Russian officials. Kazakhs stopped being one nation united by their own leaders."

We find in this latter assessment a hint at the fact that Dr. Yesim places clear, *though limited*, blame for certain ills of Kazakh society which Abai addresses squarely upon the shoulders of the Russian imperial rulers and their presence in Kazakhstan. For example, in reflecting upon Word Six, "The Wisdom of Unity," he expounds on the above thought by asking: "What kind of unity can there be among a people who have fallen into subjection to another power and who, as a nation, no longer rule themselves?" In commenting upon Word Eleven, Dr. Yesim goes on to suggest that:

The colonial policy of Tsarism brought stealing, pillage and plunder to the Kazakh Steppe. This does not mean that these things were unknown before. As long as humans have existed, theft and plunder have accompanied them throughout the entire span of their lives. But in Abai's time these vices became an incurable disease of the society and, as a result, the ordinary people suffered most of all. ...Before, the thieves and robbers were afraid of the respected figures of the clan. Since Russian officials became the authority, however, the rich were also infected with this disease.

The "disease" here in view is that of taking "bribes from both the thief who was trying to avoid punishment and the plaintiff who hoped to win a case."

In balance, however, both Abai and his post-Tsarist-Soviet interpreter have plenty of praise for the Russians and the positive contributions which they brought with them to the Kazakh steppe. In reflecting upon Word Two, 'Knowing Yourself Through the Eyes of Others', Dr. Yesim, in willing agreement, notes how "Abai readily confesses" that the Kazakh people of his time could "not even hold a candle to [Russian] servants." This thought is further elucidated in Word Twenty-Five, where "[l]earning the Russian language and culture are keys to a world heritage." Indeed, in that Word, Abai goes so far as to urge that the Kazakhs:

...should study Russian; wisdom and cattle [raising] and scholarship – the Russians have them all. In order to avoid their harm[ful ways, yet] partake of their profits, one must know their language, studies and scholarship. For that they [themselves] knew the world's languages, this is how it was [achieved]. If you study their language, your inner-eyes will be enlightened. The person who knows the language and skills of someone [else] will with that enter into equal standing with them; he will not have to plead [for help] and be debased [with] exceeding shame. [Such] knowledge, it is even beneficial for religion. ...Russian learning and culture are the keys to the world; for the one who knows this, the world will be brought down to him with much less expense.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, far more than criticism or blame of the Russian colonial powers and their impact within and upon the Kazakh world, Abai and his late 20<sup>th</sup> century Kazakh interpreter each respectively offer us a genuine *Insider's Critique of the Kazakh People and Nation*. In this, they both take up a Turkic-Jadid view and approach which found room not only to praise and emulate Russian-European ways, but to criticize its own



Central Asian religious-cultural and socio-political traditions in favor of the 'new method' of modern 'enlightened' European education and reform. "Abai thus proclaims in his Thirty-Eighth 'Word':

The mullahs of this (present) time are enemies to the name of (Muslim) scholarship. ...The learning of scholarship these days is in the tradition of the old medreses (or Muslim religious schools), they have no profit for the present time. ...Choosing to remain uninformed of this world's scientific knowledge is great [and] harmful (darkened) ignorance, it is reproved in the Qur'an.<sup>12</sup>"

Such a view and approach was informed by a man who himself had been trained up during his childhood, between the ages of 8-13, in the very Muslim medreses he found himself now, in his much later years, critiquing. This included, together with two of study in the Yeskitam Medrese which his father had built, three years of study in the Ahmet Riza Medrese in the city of Semei. Later in life, from 1875-1878, i.e. from ages 30-34, he had also served as an administrative official for the Kongirkwoksheh region in Semei, helping govern the political affairs of his community and nation. He was considered an exceptional leader upright in his ways and dealings.<sup>13</sup> He was, indeed, one intimately acquainted from the inside with the very Kazakh lifeways and institutions he would later critique in his 'Words'.

Of course, Dr. Yesim, an insider himself from the Soviet and now post-Soviet generation, notes how "[t]he places in Abai's writings where he criticizes Kazakh lifeways and scorns the dogmatic mullahs as well as the cases in which he censures the inconsistencies in Kazakh society – these were well-liked by the exacting and restrictive ideology of the Soviets." The

Tsarists, no doubt, would have enjoyed them as well, as would a good many Westerners eager to extol their own Western 'civilized' virtues and achievements above what they often (want to) perceive and portray as the 'uncivilized, backward and divisive' ways of the Kazakhs. Such views and approaches are found, for example, among those seeking to move the Kazakhs from 'tribalism' to 'modern democratic nationhood' or perhaps in some other more 'modern, civilized' direction.<sup>14</sup>

A word of caution is, therefore, in order for 'outsiders' who find themselves 'attracted' to these places of critique and feel they might find in them material they can 'exploit' in the cause of accomplishing whatever religious-cultural and/or social-political aims they may have in view. While Edward W. Said's critique of Western *Orientalism* is not without its problems,<sup>15</sup> I would be in essential agreement with him (2003:xix) when he notes:

There has been so massive and calculatedly aggressive an attack on the contemporary societies of the [Central Asian] and Muslim for their backwardness, lack of democracy, and abrogation of women's rights that we simply forget that such notions as modernity, enlightenment, and democracy are by no means simple and agreed-upon concepts that one either does or does not find, like Easter eggs in the living room. ...there is a profound difference between the will to understand for purposes of coexistence and humanistic enlargement of horizons, and the will to dominate for the purposes of control and external dominion.

But while the Tsarists, Soviets and others were and perhaps still are drawn to these places of critique in Abai's writings, "...the idea that Altinsarin or Abai (and even Shokan Ualihanov, 1830-65) were agents of the Russians, mere

propaganda tools whose 'national hero' status was created and used by especially the Soviets to promote their agenda of 'the superior Soviet person'...does not hold. Abai and company were Jadidists, not Russian cultural-political agents, even though the Russians used them to accomplish their own aims. Abai critiqued his people in true Turkic-Jadid heart and style, admiring and emulating Russian cultural-political achievement but applying it to and safeguarding their own national Kazakh-Turkic heart and heritage" (Weller 2006:200). As Rollan Seisenbaev, another well-known scholar of 'Abai Studies' in modern Kazakhstan, puts it:

All his powers were dedicated to the enlightenment of his people... Like no one else, Abai achieved the renewal of ideas in Kazakh society. This could only be achieved by awakening the old national feelings and resurrecting the genuine folk traditions. ...but the people only appreciated the enchanting melodies of his songs, and did not comprehend the deep essence of his thoughts, [they] did not follow his wise advice.<sup>16</sup>

If I may offer just one, final example of the historical context which lies behind these *Reflections* here, we find, in Word Sixteen, on the topic of "Submission to God," reference to the fact that "[t]he mosques responsible for cleanness and depth of faith are located mostly in the cities and Tatars manage there." Of course, as was well known to Abai and his late 19<sup>th</sup> century audience, the reason that "Tatars manage[d]" in the Kazakh city mosques in Abai's day was due to the 'happy fact' that Catherine II (1762-1796) had "sent Tatar missionaries to the Kazakh Steppe in an effort to help 'civilize' and bring the illiterate nomadic Kazakhs under Russian imperial control" through the auspices of Islamic religion (Weller 2006:116). Indeed, this is precisely the same



historical context in which another great figure from roughly the same era of Kazakh history, the great Kazakh Jadid educational reformer Ibirai Altinsarin (1841-1889), could bemoan the fact that "the school teachers, when teaching the Kazakh children, are forced to use the Tatar language in place of the Kazakh language" because much of the available literature on the Kazakh steppe at that time had been produced by the Tatar missionaries and their descendents which Catherine had sent.<sup>17</sup>

Whatever the historical context though, Islam has surely found a *significant* place among the Kazakhs dating back not merely to the time of Catherine II, but all the way to the beginnings of Kazakh nationhood in the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries and even beyond in the roots of Islam among their Turkic Central Asian ancestors reaching back to the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>18</sup> Three main strands of Islamic tradition have developed among them, namely the more traditional mosque-based type, the modernist-oriented Turkic-Jadid reformist school and the Sufi tradition grounded in saint veneration and shrine pilgrimage with a much greater emphasis upon mystical experience of the Divine and the attainment of 'the likeness of God' through love. All three of these forms surface in Abai's writings. It would be this latter form which most deeply influences and underlies Abai and his Muslim worldview.

But whatever the form, Abai is clearly an avid proponent of Muslim devotion among the Kazakhs as a base for healthy cultural, social and even political practices and he therefore deals at length in addressing authentic Muslim devotion among his people. Dr. Yesim follows suit. What is refreshing about this in an age when, at least in the West, a more radical message of Islamic devotion seems to dominate the media as well as our attention is that both Abai and Dr. Yesim insist on

following the Turkic-Jadid reformist school undergirded with a strong dose of the Sufi pursuit of individual godly character grounded in simple, genuine and *non-violent* love for God and others. They insist that

...what we mean by faith (*iman*), that is, what we mean by serving or, in common Islamic language, being 'a slave' of God, is to pay one's debt of love. ...People are brothers. ...A Muslim, according to Abai, is one able to think freely, unconstrained by religious orthodoxy, a person who recognizes other religions and considers that the main principle of Islam is the brotherly love of people.<sup>19</sup>

Elsewhere – indeed at the very pinnacle and climax of the book – Abai's great word, "Love all humanity, calling them your brothers and sisters," is cited.

But, for Abai as for his Kazakh interpreter, Islam is not primarily about 'other-worldly' pursuits. "If there is no thought of living in this world, the people and nation would have been cut off from their nationhood and become an easy prey for unbelievers, the world would have fallen into complete desolation."<sup>20</sup>

Closely connected with this life of faith and action, Abai and his interpreter seek to tackle the question of "What Exactly is Shame?" (Word Thirty-Six):

The essential meaning of shame is not to cover the face and get uptight over something which should not be done, it is to find one's own place in the world, living a productive and active life, saying the things you intend to say without being intimidated, leaving behind a trail of deeds which neither you nor your descendents will regret. Actions and behavior such as laziness, reluctance, cowardice, unbridled behavior and irresponsibility are the things which shame born from ignorance is made of.