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PERSONS OF THE KALMYK INTELLIGENTSIA: TSEREN-DORZHI NOMINKHANOV (1898–1967)

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Abstract

This study is devoted to the life and work of one of the first representatives of the Kalmyk intelligentsia, an outstanding scientist, namely, an orientalist, Tseren-Dorji Nominkhanov. In the process of studying the biography and creative heritage of the researcher, it was revealed that in the system of scientific interests and priorities of the scientist, the pivotal role is given to the study of linguistics, oral poetry, historiography, and ethnography of the Mongolian and Turkic peoples, this is the peculiarity, multidimensionality, and uniqueness of his scientific heritage. The scientist is a pioneer in various branches of the humanities of Kalmykia, one of those who stood at its origins. Based on a comprehensive analysis, the author of the article reveals the diversity of the scientist's scientific interests and innovation in his work, considering the achievements of Russian and Western linguistics. An important achievement in the creative life of the scientist was the fundamental works on the linguistics of the Mongolian and Turkic peoples, developed by the scientist because of his stay for many years in Mongolia, as well as during the years of work in Tashkent, and later, during the period of deportation in 1943–1957. The relevance and novelty of the research are determined by the formulation of the problem as a holistic study of the creative heritage of Tseren-Dorji Nominkhanov in the synthesis of its scientific, personal, and socio-cultural components.

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1. Introduction

The contribution of a prominent scientist, the first Kalmyk doctor of philological sciences, Nominkhanov, to the development of Oriental science and, above all, to Mongolian studies and Turkic studies, is invaluable. His contribution is highly appreciated and generally recognized in the scientific world. At the same time, the creative and life path of the outstanding scientist has not yet become the subject of a comprehensive study and deep reflection. This determines the formulation of the problem as a holistic study of the creative heritage of Nominkhanov (1975a) in the synthesis of its scientific, personal, and socio-cultural components. Nominkhanov lived a bright life, full of world-scale events that affected the destinies of many peoples and entire states. He was born before the October Revolution in Russia and took part in the Civil War. Nominkhanov was the son of Kalmyk Cossacks and experienced the repressive policy of the Soviet state against the Cossacks. He was a Kalmyk by nationality, and together with his people he survived the tragic 13 years of humiliation and lack of rights during the years of deportation to the eastern regions of the USSR. However, the dramatic events did not break the scientist. He received an excellent education at St. Petersburg University and, despite any difficulties, did not leave research activities. He had behind him vast experience in universities and research institutions in Moscow and Tashkent, Mongolia, and Kalmykia. However, in Siberian exile, Nominkhanov (1975a), as a special settler, was not allowed working in his specialty. The study of the scientific heritage of the scientist makes it possible to identify the main stages of his creative activity and the practical results of his work, his contribution to domestic and world Mongolian studies, and Turkology.

2. Problem Statement

Research questions are the reconstruction of the scientific biography of Nominkhanov (1975a) assesses his contribution to the development of Mongolian studies and Turkic studies, identifying the main stages and analyzing the results of his scientific and practical activities. In modern humanities, great importance is attached to the study of the life, activities, and scientific heritage of research scientists, their creative path, a fairly wide range of issues in the history of science is being developed that require rethinking, taking into account the lessons of the past. Historical science needs a biography as a source for analysis and evaluation of historical events and processes because the subject of history is the activity of people. Even the most massive cataclysms, such as social cataclysms, cannot be deeply investigated without taking into account personal biographical material relating to the activities of specific people. Various aspects of this problem are considered in the works of Russian scientists Kornilova (2011), Vandalkovskaya (2002), Reshetov (2004; 2005), Ochirova and Sukhebaatar (2021), Ochirova et al. (2020). In this series of works, a monographic study devoted to the life and creative path of the domestic Mongolian folklorist Kondratiev is prepared for publication by Kulganek and Zhukov (2006). The topic studied by the author was reflected in the works of foreign researchers Kara (1962), Kegalmi (1953), and Collingwood (2005), Janhunen (2005).

3. Research Questions

The subject of this study is the life path, scientific views, and creative fate of Tseren-Dorji Nominkhanov, one of the first representatives of the Kalmyk intelligentsia, a prominent orientalist and organizer of domestic science. Tseren-Dorji Nominkhanov (1975b) made a significant contribution to domestic and world Mongolian and Turkic studies, to the development of higher education in Russia. The subject field of this study within the framework of "personal history" is a comprehensive analysis of the individual activities of one scientist-linguist, ethnographer, folklorist, whose personality is considered in interaction with other personalities, their social environment, with the whole world around them in its most diverse manifestations. Illumination of the main milestones in the life of a scientist is one of the objectives of this work. The life path of Nominkhanova (1975b) reveals himself as an outstanding personality, a purposeful scientist, and an active organizer of science. Undoubtedly, his formation was influenced by the period of his studies at St. Petersburg University, as well as during his studies and work at the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow, next to the outstanding masters of Russian science and university education.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is a comprehensive, comprehensive study of life and work, the scientific heritage of Nominkhanov (1975b) was a scientist who made a significant contribution to Russian Mongolian and Turkic studies.

5. Research Methods

A comparative historical analysis of scientific and biographical materials was used; method of retrospective reconstruction of the personality of a scientist and scientific creativity; historical-system method, general scientific methods of analysis, generalization, and systematization, as well as the principle of objectivity.

6. Findings

Patriarch of Kalmyk science, an orientalist, one of the first representatives of the Kalmyk intelligentsia, a participant in the Civil War, Tseren-Dorji Nominkhanov was born on September 8, 1898, on the estate of horse breeder Popov on the Pandya farm of the village of Grabbevskaia in the Salsk district of the Don Cossack region in the family of a Kalmyk-Cossack. Childhood years were spent at the estate of Popov, a collector of Kalmyk folklore, who often visited experts in Kalmyk oral folk art. Kalmyks spend long evenings telling fairy tales, legends, and traditions, performing the Kalmyk heroic epic "Dzhangar". This time left a deep impression on the soul of an inquisitive teenager, which captivated him and subsequently became one of the directions in the scientist's activity. A talented young man, thanks to the support of Prince Tundutov, he graduated in 1909 from the Pandinsky parish school. Then he studied to be a folk teacher in the village of the Great Princely Region of the Don Cossacks. Nominkhanov took part in the Mongolian people's revolution and was one of the founders of the Committee of Science, now the Academy of Sciences of Mongolia (Zlatkina & Oglaev, 1970). During the Mongolian period of his life,

Buur (Boris) Yunzukov received the name "Nominkhan" (literal translation – "lord of science"). Returning from Mongolia, in 1923 he began to study at the Leningrad Oriental Institute. After graduating from the institute, he worked from 1930 to 1931 at the Pedagogical College in Astrakhan.

In 1931 Nominkhanov entered the graduate school of the Research Institute of Linguistics with a degree in linguistics. In 1932, he was transferred and continued his studies at the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies in the Mongolian department, where he was simultaneously engaged in teaching activities. After completing his studies in 1935, Nominkhanov taught Mongolian at the Communist University of the Working People of the East (Moscow), at the Moscow Institute of Economics, and then at the Central Asian State University in Tashkent. At this time, he continued his scientific work, compiling textbooks of the Mongolian language for students. Since 1940, he worked as a scientific secretary in the Uzbekistan branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences. In the spring of 1943, Nominkhanov (1975a) defended his dissertation on the degree of candidate of philological sciences on the topic "Mongolian administrative-political and military terms of the 13-15th century, preserved in the Uzbek language." In May 1943, he was sent to work in the city of Elista at the disposal of the Kalmyk Regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks. In 1941, Nominkhanov as scientific secretary of the Kalmyk Scientific Research Institute of Language, Literature, and History.

In December 1943, together with the entire Kalmyk people, Nominkhanov shared a tragic fate with his people and was deported to the Krasnoyarsk Territory. In deportation Nominkhanov worked as a teacher at the Uzhur state farm in the Krasnoyarsk Territory. In connection with the opening of the Khakass RIYALI, the leadership of the region invited Nominkhanov to work as a scientific secretary at the institute. In the period from 1944 to 1949, the researcher worked at the Khakass RIYALI as a scientific secretary, then head sector of the Khakass language, at the same time he was engaged in teaching activities at the Abakan Pedagogical Institute. The scientist was interested in questions of Turkic-Mongolian language parallels, he worked on compiling dictionaries, and actively conducted field expeditionary work to collect samples of oral folk art. According to Tuguzhekova, unpublished manuscripts of dictionaries were prepared in collaboration with Patachakova: "Khakassian-Russian dictionary (for elementary schools)"; "Russian-Khakas dictionary (for elementary schools)"; "Russian-Khakas dictionary (part 1)". Nominkhanov prepared for publication such works as "Phonetics of the Khakass language", "Khakass toponymy as a source on the history of the Khakass people", "Vocabulary of the Beltyr dialect of the Khakass language", which for various reasons have not yet been published (Tuguzhekova, 2008). In 1949 Nominkhanov, indiscriminately accused of "cosmopolitanism", oppressed by the leadership of the institute, was forced to quit his job and leave with his family for Kazakhstan. There, from 1949 until returning to Kalmykia, he taught the ancient Turkic language at the Kazakh State University and worked at the Institute of Linguistics of the Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR.

After the restoration of the Kalmyk ASSR from 1960 to 1967, the scientist worked in the linguistics sector of the Kalmyk Research Institute of Literature. Among the scientific priorities of Nominkhanov, a special place was occupied by the problem of the ethnogenetic relationship of the peoples of the Altaic language family: Turkic, Mongolian, Tungus-Manchu. In addition to purely scientific interests, fate decreed that many languages of the Turkic and Mongolian groups were mastered by him in a lively practical colloquial speech in the early 1920s. At this time Nominkhanov participated in the defeat of the army of

Baron Ungern in Mongolia and was the military commandant of the city of Urga, where he worked with the Mongolian and Buryat brethren. From 1924 to 1926 and from 1928 to 1929, the scientist went on long scientific missions to Mongolia, where he simultaneously worked in the Scientific Committee of the MPR. On one of the expeditions, he was with Academician Vladimirtsov, having collected extensive folklore material. Nominkhanov learned Uzbek while working at the Central Asian University in Tashkent. Working in the Khakass Niyali contributed to his brilliant mastery of the Khakas language, which allowed him creating many textbooks and dictionaries of the Khakas language. Being in Kazakhstan and teaching students, he perfectly mastered the Kazakh language. Nominkhanov officially knew 11 Eastern and European languages, and also knew the ancient Turkic, Old Kalmyk, and Old Mongolian written languages.

Knowledge of languages allowed Nominkhanov brilliantly manages the audience and teaches the course "Language of Ancient Turkic Monuments", which deeply explores the problems of a comparative study of written and spoken languages, as well as the language of written monuments and business correspondence of the Kalmyk Khans. The vast majority of the work of Nominkhanov is devoted to the phonetics of the Turkic and Mongolian languages. Based on numerous materials on the Turkic-Mongolian languages, the scientist investigates phonetic changes in languages and reveals the phonetic patterns of these changes.

The materials of the comparative typological study of the languages of the Turkic and Mongolian groups of the Altaic language family received a logical conclusion in the fundamental monograph of the scientist "Materials for the Study of the History of the Kalmyk Language". In this monograph Nominkhanov presented studies of Arabic, Persian, Tibetan, Sanskrit, Chinese and Russian borrowings; etymological roots of some Kalmyk and Turkic words and patterns; an extensive dictionary of nominal correspondences in the Mongolian and Turkic languages is given in sections: anthropology, material, and spiritual culture, nomadic economy, nature, space and time (Nominkhanov, 1975a). The continuation of this work was another monograph by Nominkhanov "Essay on the history of Kalmyk writing" (Nominkhanov, 1975b). In this paper, the author explores the historical changes in the old Kalmyk writing "todo bichig", writing based on the Russian alphabet (1924–1930) and based on the Latin alphabet (1930–1934). The materials of the monograph cover the most important decisions on the reforms of spelling and writing of the Kalmyks in the Soviet era. This work is of great value in the light of the actual problems of orthography and orthoepy of the Kalmyk language, which have been constantly discussed in recent years.

The works of Nominkhanov on the ethnogenetic connections of languages were logically continued in studies on ethnology. The depth and breadth of scientific research in this area allowed the scientist to highlight the issues of ethnography of both the Kalmyks themselves and the western and eastern Mongols of Mongolia, the Oirats of Xinjiang, and Uzbeks, Khakasses, and Kazakhs. The scientist studied the ethnic composition and ethnogenesis of Don Kalmyks (his research in this area is of undoubted interest even now). As a linguist and ethnologist Nominkhanov was extremely concerned about the problems of etymology and ethnic terms, which are still actively discussed in Mongolian studies. The versatility of talent and deep knowledge of languages allowed him successfully exploring also oral folk art, collecting samples to which he devoted many years. Records of the scientist's field expeditions are kept in the Academy of Sciences of Mongolia, the Archive of Orientalists of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and the Scientific Archive of the Kalmyk Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Targeted collection of Nominkhanov of folklore works in various areas of compact residence of Kalmyks and Oirats was a necessary basis for a comparative typological study of oral folk art of ethnic groups of Oirats. Nominkhanov was one of the first Kalmyk organizers of science, who stood at the origins of the formation of academic science in the Republic of Kalmykia. He did a lot to train scientific personnel, strengthen the scientific and technical base of the Kalmyk Institute for Humanitarian Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and made an invaluable contribution to the formation and development of domestic oriental studies. The defense of the first doctoral dissertation in philology by the scientist in 1966 marked the beginning of the formation of a whole galaxy of linguists-doctors of science in the republic. The creative heritage of Tseren-Dorji Nominkhanov will serve science for a long time, stimulate the development of research thought, and be an example of studying the most complex problems of the culture and language of the peoples of Eurasia, faithful service to science.

7. Conclusion

Study of the scientific heritage, life, and work of Nominkhanov made it possible to evaluate the contribution of the scientist and the place in the history of domestic Mongolian studies and Turkic studies. He was not only a great scientist but also an excellent teacher, organizer of science, a true patriot, and a courageous person who worthily endured all the hardships of fate that fell to his lot: the Civil War, decossackization, the tragic years of deportation to Siberia along with his people. He was distinguished by endless devotion to the profession, absolute decency, and intelligence, which attracted everyone who knew him. As a leader, he was able to create in the team a special climate of trust, mutual assistance, and support in difficult situations. However, Nominkhanov was demanding of himself and those around him had a high degree of responsibility for the assigned work and was distinguished by outstanding abilities, which was also expressed in his knowledge of many Eastern and European languages. The life of a researcher until recent years was filled with active work, new ideas, and plans related to the solution of scientific problems. Rich scientific heritage of Nominkhanov requires a deep and comprehensive study, his archives are in the archives of Moscow, Mongolia and Uzbekistan, Kalmykia and Khakassia, and other cities. The study of scientific works Nominkhanov and his creative heritage are still relevant.

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