

FORMING A PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURAL EDUCATION IN POST-SOVIET SPACE: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION IN KYRGYZSTAN

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Part I.

The problem of democratic development in the countries of the former Soviet Union is connected with changes in human civilization as well as the sphere of education, since it proposes the development of a “democratic culture.” This problem has deep metaphysical and philosophical grounds. Worldwide tendencies, in many respects, determine prospects for the development of a national culture and, in this case, democratic development in Kyrgyzstan.

One of the main tendencies at the end of the twentieth century is the globalization of social and cultural processes and the formation of a single civilization with a common fate and responsibility. The Russian-American sociologist Pitirim Sorokin proposed a thesis for forming a new system with worldwide social, economic, political and cultural interactions. The French thinker Reimon Aron defined the modern world as intercommutative and interdependent. “ For the first time humanity suffers one history. On the one hand the United Nations and on the other hand the Olympics symbolize world unity” (Aron 1993).

Increasing integration and socio-cultural changes are caused by the apparent necessity to solve global environmental problems and the broader problem of human survival. The development of means of mass communication, computerization, and information dissemination created favorable conditions for terminating the confrontation between the socialist and capitalist camps and for the formation of a single socio-cultural space of interaction. The spread of intellectual systems and the development of artificial intelligence entail the dominance of modern society, aiming to obtain knowledge and to revolutionize the human mind. Higher levels of technological production propose a proper level of man’s development, in terms of both intellectual and socio-cultural qualities.

In accordance with the Italian economist Peachy, the problem at a given stage is that humanity does not manage to culturally adapt itself to the very changes which it introduces. (Peachy 1985). In the case of a changeable, many-sided, polysemantic world, a complication appears in the form of a new type of thinking and behavior in the world, as in national cultural spaces. Postmodernism asserts a new paradigm of thought and behavior. Increasing attention to human and cultural factors in science, technology and economics confirms that a transition from the Modern epoch to the Postmodern epoch is taking place.

Peter Koslowski, a German scholar, defines the Modern epoch as the intellectual culture of the Enlightenment and the Postmodern epoch as contemporary humanistic culture. (Koslowski 1997). The main signs of the culture of Modernism are functionalism (differentiation of life spheres); scientism; materialism or idealistic monism as theories of reality; and naturally scientific and mechanistic economic theory.

Correspondingly, the main signs of the culture of Postmodernism are contextualism (the interaction of different life spheres); the multitude of different forms of useful and religious knowledge; spiritually corporal realism as a theory of reality; the organic theory of society; social economic theory. The culture of Modernism in science, arts and economics is distinguished by technocentrism. Models of the technical and naturally scientific world prevail. The culture of Postmodernism is distinguished by anthropocentrism. Human factors and cultural factors therefore acquire a decisive significance. Principal descriptors of Postmodern thinking include pluralism/plurality, tolerance, flexibility, and decentralization. The Postmodern proceeds from a heterogeneous and many-sided world.

The works of Rorty, Kuhn, Feierabend, Foucault, Leotard, Derrida, Deleuze, Guattari, and Baudrillard show other, deeper forms of perception of the world at the end of the twentieth century. Modern thinkers Ursula King, Stephen Batchelor, Martin Forward, and Keith Ward “claim that an understanding of Postmodernism’s importance can lead us to greater wisdom and humility which enables us to build more just human communities in a world of greater peace and wholeness” (King, ed. 1998).

In philosophy, the difference between Modernism and Postmodernism parallels the opposition between materialism and idealism. This metaphysical problem of the opposition of materialism to idealism forms the basis for the difference between western culture and the culture of the former Soviet Union. Consequently, this problem has a cultural nature first and an economic nature second. Oppositions between West and East were conditioned by ideological conflict, the roots of which are in metaphysics.

Events in the Central Asian countries shows that the rapprochement of West and East in the field of economics is occurring, but metaphysics and the philosophy of history are not affected by this process. Totalitarianism in the Soviet Union was partly a consequence of the new Marxist-Leninist paradigm of ideology, the basis of which is a materialistic theory of nature, society and man. Solving the metaphysical problem of the opposition between materialism and idealism, with a turn towards spiritually corporal realism as well as the formation of a humanist culture and the principle of peaceful co-existence, is the condition for the development of democracy in Central Asia. Religion acquires special significance as a spiritual-moral value and cultural phenomenon, unifying society. This signifies an organic development between the periphery and the center, and communication between tradition and modernity, national traditions and universal human values.

In accordance with Koslowski, culture includes all forms of development of the spirit - subjective, objective and absolute. Absolute spirit manifests itself in religion and religious philosophy. Democracy and the market economy entail the free development of political will, economic needs and cultural self-determination, as well as the development of religion as a spiritual, moral and cultural value. In western countries, religion is an organic part of social development.

Returning to religion, we can observe the emergence of Islam in Central Asian countries. The transformation of various life spheres occurs on the background of a difficult socio-economic and political situation. It is a struggle between different life values, between old and new. Communist ideology, predominant until recently, with its ideas of justice and brotherhood, oddly enough promoted a spreading of bourgeois Western values rather than democratic values.

To some extent, the misrepresentation of democratic values of freedom and independence led to inter-ethnic conflicts and increased criminality. The interest in enrichment is widespread. For some, democracy means enlightenment and humanism, and for others, it means enrichment and domination. Social defects, the problems of modern society in the Central Asian countries, in most cases are caused by the lack of a just, democratic culture and purposeful educational work towards this goal. In this connection the field of education is the basis for the development of democracy. At present, much depends on state policy in the sphere of education and on the personal qualities of the leaders of the government, as well.

Part II.

Beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century, the main stages of historical development in the Central Asian countries, including Kyrgyzstan, were the Russian invasion, the development of Islam and pan-Turkism, the Bolshevik Revolution, Marxism-Leninism, Stalinist policy, the Great Patriotic War (World War II), the Communist Party, the development of socialist culture, socio-cultural and economic crisis, Glasnost and Perestroika, ethnic nationalism, interethnic conflicts, religious revival, transition to a market economy and democratization.

Until the Russian invasion of Central Asia, the ancient Islamic cultures of Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Kokand, Tashkent, Mary (Merv), and the nomadic culture of the Kyrgyz, Kazakh, and Turkmen existed. The Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Turkmen tribes were predominantly nomadic, while the others had long histories of sedentary life in the fertile valleys.

In accordance with one of the versions of the ethnogenesis of the Central Asian people, which Dilip Hiro expounds in his book “Between Marx and Muhammad,” Central Asian people have common genetic roots. The Kyrgyzs, Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Kazakhs represent Turkic peoples. They belong to the category of Eastern Turks. The Tajiks formed as a consequence of the mixture between Mongols and Iranians, the mixing of the Turks and Mongols resulted in Kyrgyzs and Kazakhs, and the blending of Turks and Iranians resulted in Uzbeks. The languages of Turkic peoples belong to a sub-family of Ural-Altai languages.

The development of Kyrgyzstan was largely determined by its geographical position. The great difference between the lowlands and highlands led to the rise of two cultures and two economic systems: nomadic cattle breeders and settled farmers. Livestock breeding and farming are the traditional economic sectors of the Kyrgyz. Formed in the 16th century, a single Kyrgyz nation stayed under the yoke of the Kokand Khanate until the 19th century. With the Great Silk Road passing via Kyrgyzstan, people of different ethnic groups settled there.

The development of Islamic culture is an integral part of the history of the people of Central Asia. The perception of Islam by the different people of Central Asia is not the same, but rather has its peculiarities. Islam in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan has strong roots and steady traditions of the traditional Muslim community. Islam is an important part of the national self-identity of Kyrgyzs, Kazakhs, and Uzbeks. Kyrgyz and Kazakh cultural values were formed partly by the moral-ethical values of Islam. Islamic traditions and customs are an essential part of Kyrgyz culture.

At the same time, Islam in Kyrgyzstan does not occupy as firm a position as in Uzbekistan. The Kyrgyz came under the influence of Islam in the late 1830s. “As a

nomadic people, as a pagans of long standing they found it hard to adjust to the strait-jacket of monotheism” (Hiro 1994). On the other hand, the anti-Islamic and antireligious campaign of the Soviet leadership stopped the development of Islam as much as Christianity. Religion was seen as a form of superstition and national traditions were replaced by scientific atheism and scientific communism as rational forms of knowledge. The leaders created a Soviet culture devoid of any contradictions.

Moreover, under Russian influence, the development of Russian culture in Kyrgyzstan was an essential factor of the moderate/weak development of Islam. Russians prevailing in Kyrgyzstan was a consequence of the great migration in the years of the Stolypin reforms, collectivization and the evacuation of factories to Kyrgyzstan during the Second World War. With the beginning of Glasnost and Perestroika, from 1986 onwards, attention to Islamic religion as a cultural factor of national self-identity and self-determination of Central Asian peoples has increased. The collapse of the Soviet Union’s united socio-cultural system has caused a general economic, political, and cultural crisis. Internal contradictions have become acute. A great number of problems have arisen. Most dangerous among them are the problems of increasing nationalism and inter-ethnic conflict.

The beginnings of nationalism in Central Asia were caused by the dictatorial policy of the center – Moscow, which ignored the local, national cultures and interests, and also by the development of Great Russian Chauvinism. The nearest countries neighboring Central Asia - Muslim Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey - also promote the development of pro-Islamic and pan-Turkish sentiments. The essence of the Islamic theme in Central Asia is the perception of Islam as a spiritual-cultural value, as part of Central Asian culture, or as a socio-political ideology, leading to Islamic fundamentalism. “The national question in Central Asia manifested itself in different forms: a) relations between Slavs and non-Slavs; b) relations between ethnic groups with different religious background, e.g. Azerbaijan and Armenian; c) relations between ethnic groups sharing the same religious background, e.g. Uzbeks and Tajiks in Uzbekistan, Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan” (Hiro 1994).

The bloody conflict between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in the Osh province of Kyrgyzstan, which concerned the possession of land and supplies of irrigation water, showed that the basis of the national problem is also politically and socially motivated. Unemployment and homelessness among the Kyrgyz has intensified inter-ethnic strain. Developing a democratic movement became a necessity. Demonstrations demanding “objective news” about the events in the province of Osh occurred in Bishkek. Kyrgyz intelligentsia and students formed the Democratic Kyrgyzstan Movement in Bishkek in May 1990. The first conference of the Democratic Congress of Central Asia and Kazakhstan was devoted to ethnic issues. It emphasized that any reconsideration of borders could lead to inter-ethnic conflicts that would become international.

The collapse of the USSR led to the destruction of the united socio-economic system, which partly resulted in the immediate loss of central subsidies, which in turn led to economic crisis. In the Soviet period, industry began to develop in the Republic on the basis of the mineral resources: mercury, antimony, rare metals and gold. Kyrgyzstan has the potential for successful economic development. Firstly, there are deposits of different raw materials: oil, gas, brown and bituminous coal, non-ferrous, rare and precious metals,

chemicals, non-metallic minerals, basalt, wollastonite, natural stones, fresh and thermo-mineral waters and other resources.

Secondly, the economy of Kyrgyzstan has machine-building, electrical, mining, light and food industries. The Republic produces leather, tools, scientific and research equipment, agricultural machinery, electric motors, electric lamps, and hardware for computers. Hydroelectric power is quite developed here and is a key factor leading to the energy independence of the republic. Kyrgyzstan is a producer of cotton, aromatic tobacco leaves, wool and other cash crops. The Republic also has both livestock and crop farming.

Thirdly, the Republic has an intellectual potential demonstrated by the total literacy of the population, the advanced positions in certain scientific fields, and a considerable number of research and technical engineering/engineer workers. The legacy of seven decades of Soviet control is total literacy, a strong educational system, women's emancipation, extensive transport and communication networks, advanced agricultural methods and industrialization.

The international community supports the reforms, which are conducted in Kyrgyzstan. The United States, Japan, Germany, Turkey, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the IMF, the World Bank, the Asian Bank of Development, the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, the Islamic Development Bank and others have offered their financial resources. According to expert opinion, gold and power engineering can take us out of economic crisis. But Kyrgyzstan still has many obstacles connected with the problem of transition to new forms of economic, social and cultural development. This problem includes the deficit of specialists and also the problems of administrative corruption and nepotism. Lacking firm democratic traditions, current Kyrgyz culture enables a return to dictatorship. The Democratic Kyrgyz Movement, the Democratic Party of Erkin Kyrgyzstan, and the Party of National Unity warned of this danger in January 1993.

The successful development of democracy in Central Asia, particularly in Kyrgyzstan, necessitates a deeper mastering of democratic values of Western Civilization and will depend on how far as well as how deep these values root in Kyrgyz culture.

This process demands a long time and has to be realized within the education system. The problem of democratic development is related to the field of the education. Economic and political reforms without the reform of the educational system, focusing on the development of humanist culture, will fail for the reason that the most important factor will be missed - the human mind.

One of the ways out of the crisis situation of the transitional period is education, namely the field of the humanities, forming a new orientation in worldview. Thus, studying a variety of philosophical conceptions of West and East acquire a special significance since it affords an opportunity on the level of meaning to understand various values and their consequences. Philosophical education proposes a more thorough understanding of the essence of current affairs. Philosophical education has to become universal.

The advice of the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus that the reorganization of society has to begin from radical reforms of human language and thinking is as relevant as ever. Democratic reforms have to begin first of all from a reform of consciousness. Educational reforms must start with forming a conception of educational program, which

should present a philosophy of cultural education. At the root of the philosophy of cultural education is the recognition of the spiritually corporal nature of man. The philosophy of cultural education proposes a spiritual, ethical, aesthetic, artistic, philosophical education and also the humanizing of scientific, technical, social, and political knowledge.

The philosophy of cultural education is based on the ideas of Postmodernism, namely on the ideas of pluralism, tolerance, and humanism. It is directed at the supplanting the structures of power and violence. It proposes cognition of the cultural forms of existence through experience and understanding. The philosophy of cultural education is based on existential personality theory according to which each person is unique. Personality theory forms a central moment of the grasp of culture of any society. It defines an explanation of “being” in each culture and also any conception of education.

Educational systems have to promote an understanding of the contents of different cultures. Educational reforms are being carried out in Kyrgyzstan. They are directed at the preparation of skilled specialists possessing deep knowledge and a culture of democratic behavior. The important direction of the reforms is the humanizing of knowledge, which entails spiritual-cultural development and the establishment of personal status in a society. In December 1992, the Law on Education was adopted in Kyrgyzstan to create an effective system for training specialists in the conditions of a market economy, to ensure the high quality of education and to solve the problem of integration into the world educational system. Kyrgyzstan has established relations in the field of education with Turkey, China, Egypt, Morocco, with the European countries of Germany, Poland, and France, and with the United States.

In March 1992, a cooperative agreement was signed with the American Council of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature and the American Council on Cooperation in the field of education and language study concerning exchanges of students, post-graduates, specialists and teachers at higher education establishments and schools. A cooperation agreement has been signed with Liaolin University (China), Goethe University (Germany), the University of Grenada (Spain). The Kyrgyz-American Faculty of the Kyrgyz National University has close ties with Nebraska University in Lincoln (USA). The Kyrgyz Technical University maintains relations with the University of Kansas (USA). The International University of Kyrgyzstan has relations with the State University of San-Francisco.

Educational questions also occupy an important place in cooperation with such international organizations as UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank and the Islamic Development Bank. In 1992, the transition to a multi-level system of training specialists began. More than 40 special subjects have been transformed into bachelor's degree programs. Universities play a leading role in Kyrgyzstan's higher educational system. They are teaching-methodological centers of higher education and centers of research work. The Kyrgyz-Russian University is an educational, research and cultural center in Central Asia. Under the jurisdiction of both Kyrgyzstan and Russia, the University trains specialists in plasma technology and geophysics, computer modeling and hydro-meteorology, management and jurisprudence.

But Universities have both strong educational traditions and problems coping with the deficit of specialists in the latest fields of knowledge, as well as with the corruption and dictatorship of teachers. As a rule, bribery among teachers is a consequence of their

small salaries. The dictatorship of teachers is connected with some peculiarities of the national traditions of education--namely subordination to seniority or the cult of the eldest.

Educational establishments should be spiritual and cultural centers of society. The development of democracy, and the introduction of the principles of the philosophy of cultural education should be accompanied by political changes in human rights. Human rights have to be valid for all cultures. For Central Asian countries it's necessary to join the universal tradition of human rights. Joining the universal tradition of human rights with national traditions of the cultures of Central Asia represents a problem of national culture. Totalitarianism led to the rupture of ties with world culture and traditional human rights in Europe. Loss of cultural context led to crisis. The need for cultural revival has appeared through the assimilation of democratic values of the Postmodernism age. The interaction and dialogue of different cultures becomes adequate for world development. In this way, educational establishments have to be the initiators and supporters of such cultural interaction between different countries.

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